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THAT JESUS WAS CHRIST

“... Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:5)

The title “Jesus Christ” occurs more than 250 times in the Bible. Such prevalence might lead to the conclusion that there is no significance in the separate parts of the title, and that the only purpose is to give Jesus of Nazareth His full name. However, as implied by Acts 18:5, that is not the case, and a realisation of the significance of each part of the title adds greatly to the status to be ascribed to Jesus during His earthly life and also since His resurrection.

Jesus

The first occurrence of the complete title of “Jesus Christ” is in Matthew 1:1: “*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*”, and the first occurrence of the title “Jesus” standing alone is in Matthew 1:16: “*And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*”. However neither of those verses gives any indication of the significance of the two parts of His title, other than that Matthew 1:16 shows He was known as either Jesus or Christ.

Strong’s Concordance defines “Jesus” as: “*Of Hebrew origin... Jesus (that is, Jehoshua), the name of our Lord and two (three) other Israelites*”. W. E. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines the meaning of Jesus as: “*a transliteration of the Hebrew ‘Joshua’ meaning ‘Jehovah is salvation’... a common name amongst the Jews*”. The idea that “Jesus” is related to “Joshua” which in turn is related to Jehovah and salvation, is consistent with Joshua of the Old Testament who led the Israelites into the promised land—“*And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I sware unto them: and I will be with thee*” (Deut. 31:23).

Hence the definition of “Jesus” as a transliteration of Joshua is an example of the significance of names in the Scriptures; Jesus also is associated with salvation.

Christ

Strong’s Concordance defines “Christ” as: “*anointed, that is, the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus*”. An “epithet” is an adjective to express an attribute, and that added meaning is significant because Jesus’ anointing was the crux of Paul’s argument to the Jews at Corinth—he tried to persuade them that Jesus was Christ; “the anointed”.

Anointing

The Israelites were familiar with anointing because the priests of the tabernacle were anointed: “*And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water. And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod: And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre. Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him*” (Exod. 29:4-7). The priests of the typical tabernacle were anointed with literal oil; Jesus was not anointed with literal oil but with the Holy Spirit when He was baptized in the River Jordan: “*Now*

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when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost (Spirit: Greek 'pneuma'—a current of air; breath) descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22). "... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost (Spirit) and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Jesus was aware of the power that attended His anointing: *"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And 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 Esaias. 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 heal the brokenhearted, 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"* (Luke 4:14-21). Jesus knew He was the One prophesied by Isaiah and the powers God had given Him. It is significant that this event occurred after His baptism; His anointing.

Jesus' power

Matthew records Jesus' power was evidenced by the miracles He performed: *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan"* (Matt. 4:23-25).

However, while great multitudes followed Him and He became famous—"... there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all" (Luke 4:14-15)—they did not realise who He was: *"When Jesus*

came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:13-17). The critical point in that lesson was that it was God alone who enabled His disciples to realise He was Christ, God's anointed.

Elijah

From a human standpoint, the Jew's failure to realise who Jesus was may also be excused to some extent because of the promise that, before Messiah came, Elijah would come and restore all things: *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"* (Mal. 4:5-6).

However Jesus explained that Elias had come already in the person of John the Baptist: *"And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist"* (Matt. 17:10-13).

Nevertheless the miracles He performed amongst them convinced some that He was the Messiah: *"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did"* (John 2:23). Nevertheless not everyone who witnessed His marvelous works were persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah: *"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him"* (John 12:37).

Crucifixion

Jesus' crucifixion on the cross at Calvary caused despair amongst some of His followers: *"And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus... 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... 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). They had trusted Jesus would have redeemed Israel, but now He was dead and their hopes were vanquished.

The Jews scattered

Jesus did not travel beyond the borders of Israel, however the Jews were scattered amongst other countries, and secular history accords that in the first century A.D., the Jews were scattered throughout southern Europe. Consequently the Apostles travelled throughout southern Europe and Asia Minor to tell the Jews living in those regions that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus: *"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord"* (Acts 11:19-21).

Thessalonica

And so it was that Paul came to Thessalonica where the number of Jews was sufficient for them to have established a synagogue there: *"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few"* (Acts 17:1-4).

Those living in Thessalonica had not seen Jesus in the flesh and so they had not heard Him speak nor seen the miracles He performed. Consequently the only basis available to Paul to convince them that Jesus, their Messiah, had come, was "the Scriptures"—the "Old Testament".

The challenge confronting Paul might be better realised if it is remembered that John the Baptist, who

had heard of Jesus' miracles, sought confirmation of Jesus' authority: *"And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached"* (Luke 7:19-22). Jesus told John the miracles He performed were testimony that He was the One "who should come".

Another factor which made the challenge facing Paul greater was the Thessalonians did not have any concept of the Holy Spirit, as did those who witnessed the events on the day of Pentecost, when Peter explained that the Holy Spirit was evidence that Jesus was Christ: *"This Jesus hath God raised up... he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:32-36).

Christians today

Likewise the Holy Spirit is testimony to Christians today, not because of any miracles that are done, but because of the spiritual insight each one enjoys: *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit... For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God"* (1 Cor. 2:9-12). The fact that Christians can understand some of the "mysteries" of God's word bear testimony that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ.

Faith (conviction) that Jesus is the Christ is necessary today to overcome the world: *"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth... He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself..."* (1 John 5:1-6, 10). Praise God that Jesus is Christ!■

JESUS AND GARDENS

Hebrews 1:1-2 states that Jesus was the One by whom God 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"*.

Jesus is also referred to as the Word: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God... All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1:1-3). The title "Word" may be understood in the same sense as it is used in some senses today; that is, unless someone "gives the word" nothing gets done. Jesus was God's agent in the work of creation.

The Apostle John declares that *"the Word"* came to earth in the person of Jesus: *"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

Garden of Eden

One of the works of creation was the creation of a garden in Eden: *"And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed"* (Gen. 2:8). Thus Jesus was associated with the very first earthly garden.

God placed the man in the garden in Eden and so Man's first abode was in a garden. A garden brings a feeling of solitude and many who seek respite from intense mental or emotional stress today seek solitude in a garden. Specifically, those involved in religious pursuits often resort to a garden to enhance their feeling of closeness to God; thus it may be said that the nearest place to God is in a garden.

The wilderness

In that vein it might be significant that, when the time came for Jesus to be tested regarding His loyalty to God, He was led into the wilderness: *"He was then led of the spirit into the wilderness and ate nothing for forty days and was tempted of the devil"* (Matt. 4:1). If a garden is the environment where Man feels closest to God, the wilderness could be where he feels most distant (that surmise does not deny the desire of the Israelites to go into the wilderness to worship God—Exodus 5:1; to them that environment promised separation from the Egyptian regime and hence enhanced worship). If that surmise is correct, the temptations which Satan put to Jesus were as severe as they could have been—He was isolated from His Father, He was hungry and He was alone.

Gethsemane

After He ate the passover with His disciples for the last time Jesus *"... went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples"* (John 18:1-2). Jesus often resorted to the garden—the garden of Gethsemane—maybe because it provided refuge from the pressures of life. Such a recourse would have been consistent with Him being a man who experienced the same emotions as all mankind: *"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb. 4:15).

It was in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus prayed fervently to His Father prior to His trial: *"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt"* (Matt. 26:36-39). As He prepared to endure the dreadful treason, torture and humiliation that was to afflict Him during the next several hours, Jesus went to a garden to pray.

His burial

After Jesus died, *"... Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus... besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus... and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand"* (John 19:38-42).

Thus Jesus was present when the garden was prepared in Eden, He often resorted to a garden during His earthly sojourn, and after His death His earthly body was laid to rest in a garden.

Surely there is some significance in Jesus' association with gardens.■

CHRISTIANITY COMPARED

Is Christianity just another religion? There is now a meeting of cultures, nations, races and religions on a scale unprecedented in history. Interaction with people from other countries and cultures presents the challenge whether Christianity is the only faith that has the correct understanding of the Higher Power.

To that challenge may be added the question whether what one believes is critical, or whether it does not matter what one believes provided they are sincere. In other words it may be assumed that all religions are basically the same, making the same claims, and essentially teaching the same things, with the same objective of the adherent attaining eternal life in some place. However sincerity does not make anything true or false: facts are facts, regardless of people's attitudes towards them—the basic question in religious matters is always: is it the truth?

Similarities

The scene is made more complex by the fact that there are some similarities shared by the major religions. The basic element of all religions is that there is a superior power, whether that be an entity in material or spiritual form or whether the power is resident in everyone, in which case the only difference between religious and irreligious people is the extent to which each individual has accessed that power.

Another similarity between some religions is the golden rule: “do unto others as you would have them do to you”. It may be contended that is the only requirement to attain eternal life. However that principle is clouded by the assertion of some religions that it is the duty of every believer to convert everyone else to their creed, and that conviction may quickly lead to enforcement action which in turn requires the use of force—persecution—which is contrary to the desires of the victim.

Buddhism

The ultimate goal in Buddhism is Nirvana; the extinction of desire. One branch of Buddhism does not hold any hope of eternal life. It is asserted that all pain and suffering come from desire. If desire can be overcome by following the path to enlightenment, one can achieve Nirvana—perfect peace within oneself in the present life. Adherents live a life of self denial.

Hinduism

Hindus believe there are many gods, but the ultimate goal is Nirvana—the ultimate reunion with the impersonal Brahm, the all-pervading force of the Universe. This faith is similar to Buddhism except it does not necessarily mean one will be totally extinct;

the law of Karma provides for a continuous cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. One reaps in the next life what one sows in the present life.

Islam

The god of Islam (Allah) is an invention of Mohammed. Allah is totally removed from people and is responsible for bringing about evil as well as good. The ultimate goal of Islam is Paradise, which is a realm of sensual pleasure. Paradise is obtained by abstaining from sensual pleasures in this life. The devotee of Islam must follow the five pillars of Islam: repeating the creed, making a pilgrimage to Mecca, giving alms to the poor, praying five times daily and keeping the fast of the month of Ramadan.

Christianity

There are least three principal doctrines of the Christian religion which make it different from the religions summarised above: who God is, the nature of salvation and how salvation is obtained.

Firstly God is understood to be the One who created all things—the great “I AM”: “*And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*” (Exod. 3:14). That tenet was the basis of the Apostle Paul's ministry: “*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ*” (Eph. 3:8-9).

Intrinsic in Paul's statement is the belief that there are two Supreme Beings: God and Jesus Christ, the latter being the Son of the former and the One by whom God created all things. The duopoly is confirmed by another writer of the “Sacred Word”, the Holy Bible: “*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; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Heb. 1:1-3).

However there is a hierarchy between the two, God being Supreme: “*... But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God*” (1 Cor. 11:3). Some strands of Christianity introduce a

third deity—the Holy Spirit—so that there is a trinity: “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. While that concept is prevalent in many organizations which profess to be Christian, others believe the concept of the Holy Spirit being a separate entity is not supported by the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Spirit being the power the Creator gives to each subordinate creature which enables them to comprehend His majesty.

Salvation

Within “Christianity” there are at least two different concepts of salvation. The first is dependent on the concept of death—that death simply means the expiration of life. However death is not the end of all existence because everyone will be brought back to life in a concept known as the resurrection: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself... 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 judgment”* (John 5:25-29). Resurrection may be considered to constitute salvation, salvation being saved from death and raised to life, that is, eternal life, with no further thought of extinction. However that resurrection (salvation) will not guarantee eternal life for all because some will be resurrected to face “judgment”.

The mechanism of salvation

The concept of a resurrection for all, regardless of what they have done in their present life (with one exception, those who “sin against the Holy Spirit”—Matt. 12:31), is unique, and is based on the sacrifice of One man, the man Christ Jesus, *“who gave Himself a ransom for all”* (1 Tim. 2:6). This doctrine alone makes Christianity unique because it means, at least in the first instance, that salvation is not dependent on the person performing “good works” in the present life, but that, in the ultimate sense, salvation is a free gift. The concept was reiterated by the Apostle Paul when he was before Governor Felix: *“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 24:15).

Entwined in the concept of a ransom is the concept that all mankind are captive together, and hence one price—a ransom price—can result in the release of everyone from that captivity. The Apostle Paul explained the situation in his letter to the Romans: *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men....”* (Rom. 5:12-19). All mankind received the same condemnation to death due to the act of the

one man Adam. The Apostle continues: *“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead... even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”*. The concept of one man being the ransom price for all mankind is the single doctrine that makes Christianity unique.

However the fact that Jesus Christ has paid the ransom price for everyone and thereby gained for them a resurrection from death does not mean they are assured of eternal life—that is, living for ever. There is yet a time when all will need to prove their allegiance to God and His righteous ways before they will be assured of eternal life: *“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; (that One is Jesus) him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days”* (Acts 3:22-24). “Hearing”, that is, obedience, to Jesus’ regime will be required in order for anyone to live forever; those who do not “hear” will be destroyed from among the people.

The Christian’s challenge

While on the one hand the concept of Jesus paying the price which affords everyone being freed from death is very attractive, it places great responsibility on the Christian to assure themselves that they have adequate justification for their belief. The Apostle Peter was well aware of the challenge and sought to assure his readers that the basis of their faith was sound: *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power... of our Lord Jesus Christ... We have also a more sure word of prophecy... Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Pet. 1:16-21). In other words the Christian’s belief is not a blind belief but is substantiated by the fulfilment of the prophecies contained in the Bible.

Recognising which prophecies have been fulfilled, when they were fulfilled, which are being fulfilled at this time, and having faith that those yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled, is one of the challenges that face the Christian: *“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward”* (Heb. 10:35).■

SHALL HE FIND FAITH ON THE EARTH?

One of the trials of the Christian's walk is persistence; the determination to maintain one's faith until their course is complete.

There is much exhortation in the Scriptures for Christians to maintain their zeal. One passage is Hebrews 10:32-36: *"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise"*.

In those verses the writer (Paul?) refers to two methods which help Christians maintain their zeal: calling to mind the zeal they had when they first realised the privilege of their calling, and secondly realising their journey along the narrow way is long and therefore they need patience.

It is common to be enthusiastic when one is introduced to any project, religious or otherwise, and such enthusiasm enables one to suffer adversity and go to considerable lengths to achieve the envisioned outcome. The same motivation applied to the Hebrew Christians: in the early stages of their Christian walk they suffered adversity, directly, and indirectly through their association with others who were being oppressed.

Jesus' exhortation

Jesus was aware that, as time goes on, human beings tend to lose their enthusiasm for any "project", and that such a loss had the potential to beset His followers. Consequently He told them a story—a parable—the essence of which was to negate discouragement. The parable is recorded in Luke 18: 2-5: *"... There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me"*.

More than one lesson may be drawn from the parable, however Luke states that Jesus' purpose in relating

the parable was to exhort persistence in prayer: *"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1); *"to this end"* defines the purpose of the parable.

The meaning of "faint" in Luke 18:1 is symbolic—it does not refer to physical fainting but to giving up hope; "losing heart", that is, discouragement. The Apostle Paul used the same expression in his letter to the Corinthians: *"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day"* (2 Cor. 4:16). They did not faint, even though their outward man "perished".

The crux of the parable in Luke 18 is that the judge granted the widow's request because she persisted with her petition and he considered it likely she would continue to pester him. Jesus points out that if such a human judge—one who did not fear God and who was deemed unjust—would reward a widow because of her persistence, it should be obvious that the Lord would do the same for *"His own elect"*; those whom He has chosen to be His own. Thus the lesson for the disciples was that they should not cease to continue to bring their petitions to God, trusting He will hear their prayers, and to wait on Him for His answers: they were to be *"... patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer"* (Rom. 12:12).

Faith on the earth

Nevertheless Jesus declared that when He came again there would be little faith on the earth, that is, amongst mankind. The writer to the Hebrews gives some insight into why such a dearth of faith might develop: *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6). Faith that God will answer anyone's prayers is dependent upon them believing God exists; if one does not believe there is a God it is impossible to believe He will answer their prayers.

One indication that there has been a significant decrease of belief in God in recent times in the Western World is the proportion of the population that attends a religious service. At the time of going to press the latest statistics available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.abs.gov.au>) was Document 4102.0—Australian Social Trends, which was issued in December 2012. The document indicates that while 69.1% of the Australian population state they have a "religious affiliation", only 16% attend a religious service at least once per week. Similar figures for USA indicate 44% attend a religious service at least once

per week while the proportion in UK is 27%. The National Church Life Survey, which claims its data is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data, reports that overall church attendance is continuing to decline even though some congregations are growing.

Doctrine

Church attendance does not, in itself, indicate if the attendee has faith that God answers prayers, and observation suggests that in recent times some religious services are moving to emphasise social affiliation rather than Biblical doctrine.

A reduction in the emphasis given to doctrine should not surprise the Christian—it was Jesus' concluding statement in Luke 18:1-8: "... Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Also the Apostle Peter wrote: "*This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that 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 that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*" (2 Pet. 3:1-6). Peter encouraged them to call to mind that they had previously learnt that the prophets foretold there would be much scoffing at the thought that Jesus (in any form) would return to earth.

"Faith" or "the faith"?

However in order to understand precisely Jesus' prophecy regarding the conditions which would prevail upon the earth, it is necessary to ascertain whether Jesus was referring to faith in general or to a specific doctrine.

Various translations render Luke 18:8 differently, the principal variation being the insertion or omission of the adjective "the" in relation to "faith"—that is, did Jesus say "... shall he find faith on the earth?" or did He say "*shall he find **the** faith on the earth?*"

The inclusion of the adjective "the" implies that Jesus was referring to a particular "faith" (doctrine), whereas its omission allows Jesus' words to be interpreted as meaning He was referring to faith in general—faith relating either to God answering prayer or faith in an even more general sense, even faith in matters not connected with religion. Resolution of the question requires examination of

the original text to ascertain whether the adjective "the" is included. If it is included, the further question arises: which particular doctrine did Jesus have in mind?

Evidence for the inclusion of "the"

The *Concordant Literal Translation* is the only translation to hand that includes the adjective "the". The translation reads: "... *at the coming of the Son of Mankind, will He be finding the faith on the earth*". However the translation does not provide any manuscript evidence. The charter of the *Concordant Publishing Concern* states: "... *the Concordant Publishing Concern... is a denominationally independent nonprofit association for Scripture research... The Concern is not a church, but a translating and teaching ministry*". The introduction to their translation of the New Testament reads: "...The concordant method of translation clearly recognizes the importance of the vocabulary of Scripture keeping distinct the well-chosen words used by God in His revelation of truth. Though absolute consistency cannot be achieved in the making of a readable English translation, the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, by being "harmonious" with the Original, keeps to a minimum the confusion resulting from translating different Greek words with the same English word". It is difficult to criticise the objectives of the *Concordant Publishing Concern*.

The *Emphatic Diaglott* does not include the word "the" in the smooth English column, using the word "this" instead: "... *will He find this belief on the land*". However "the" is included in the interlinear column. The wording in both columns indicates Jesus referred to the faith that God would continue to answer their prayers:

Strong's Concordance comments on the Greek word which the *Diaglott* translates as "the": (#3588): "... the definite article; *the* (sometimes to be supplied, at others omitted, in English idiom)". In the King James Version the word is variously translated "the", "this", "that", "one", "he", "she", "it", etc.

The comment in Strong's Concordance that the word "the" should sometimes be supplied and at others omitted in English idiom strengthens the statement in the introduction of the *Concordant* translation that "absolute consistency cannot be achieved in the making of a readable English translation...", and it may be the reason why the adjective "the" in relation to faith in Luke 18:8 is omitted in the following translations: KJV, NKJV ("*will He really find faith on the earth?*"), RV (however there is a note in the margin: "*or the faith*"), RSV, Scofield (also with a marginal comment: "*lit. The faith*") and NIV. On the other hand, if "the" is inserted, the question arises: to

which particular faith (doctrine) did Jesus refer? From verse 1 the context seems to refer to persistency in prayer and any other interpretation is lacking contextual support.

Other occurrences of “the faith”

There are instances where the inclusion of the adjective “the” in relation to faith is more clearly appropriate. A few examples are:

- Acts 6:7: “...And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to **the** faith”. The subject is the gospel and the verse refers to the conversion of some priests;
- Acts 13:8: “But Elymas the sorcerer... withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from **the** faith”; the faith from which Elymas tried to distract them was the gospel;
- Romans 14:1: “Him that is weak in **the** faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations”. However the NIV reads: “Accept him whose faith is

weak...”. Nevertheless the following verses imply the reference is to a correct understanding of the gospel;

- Colossians 2:7: “Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in **the** faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving”;

In these four examples the faith is the faith to which the early Christians were to adhere, which faith was significantly different from the practices that were required under the Law Covenant: “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:13-14).

Thus Jesus’ prophecy was that, at the time of His return, there will be little faith amongst the population—little faith in God and little faith in Him answering anyone’s prayers.■

BRUSSELS CHRISTMAS TREE

It has been reported that more than 25,000 people in Belgium have signed a petition denouncing a decision to remove the traditional Christmas tree in the central square in Brussels, Belgium and replace it with a politically correct structure of abstract minimalist art.

Critics accuse the Socialist mayor of declaring war on Christmas by installing the “multicultural” structure of lights to placate the city’s Muslim population.

Historically, a 20 meter [65 foot] fir tree taken from the forests of the Ardennes has adorned the city’s main square, the Grand-Place. This year, however, it has been replaced with a 25 meter [82] foot new-age-like structure of lighted boxes. Moreover, the traditional Christmas Market in downtown Brussels is no longer being referred to as a “Christmas Market” but as “Winter Pleasures 2012”. The aim was to “blend the modern and the traditional”. More than half the city’s councillors are Muslim and the justification of the change included the statement: “The Christmas tree is not a religious symbol and lots of Muslims have a Christmas tree at home”. However critics say the non-tree was installed to avoid offending Muslims.

The conflict over the traditional Christmas tree comes as two Muslim politicians, who won municipal elections in Brussels on October 14, 2012 have vowed to implement Islamic Sharia law in Belgium. During a post-election press conference in Brussels on October 25, the two councilors said they regard

their election as key to the assertion of the Muslim community in Belgium.

The rise of the Islam Party comes amid a rapidly growing Muslim population in the Belgian capital. Muslims now make up one-quarter of the population of Brussels, according to a book recently published by the Catholic University of Leuven, the top Dutch-language university in Belgium.

In real terms, the number of Muslims in Brussels—where half of the number of Muslims in Belgium currently live—has reached 300,000, which means that the self-styled “Capital of Europe” is now the most Islamic city in Europe.

Meanwhile, critics of the “electronic winter tree” have called on Muslims in Belgium to sign a petition to show that they do not have anything against the traditional Christmas tree.

The petition reads: “The removal of the Christmas tree on the Grand-Place in Brussels aroused strong controversy about the role of Muslims in this decision. I hereby would like to see Muslims sign this petition to show that they are not against this tree. I would like to gather as many signatures as possible to show that Muslims comply with Belgian traditions and do not want to remove this joy at home”.

Fewer than 80 of Belgium’s 600,000 Muslims have signed the petition.

—GatestoneInstitute.org■

LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN

Moderation is a broad concept, as evidenced by the differences in its meaning given by various translators. Dr. Strong defines it (#1933) as “appropriate, that is, by implication gentle”, whereas Young’s Concordance defines the same Greek (*epieikes*) as “yield, pliability”, and Vine’s Dictionary defines it as “forbearance”.

All of those definitions are consistent in one sense or other depending on the scenario in which they are to be applied. Gentleness can mean in certain circumstances one must yield to the convictions of another as exhorted by Romans 12:18: *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”*. A harsh and abrupt response is more likely to provoke antagonism than a gentle approach.

However standing firm is also a form of moderation in that it means one is not prepared to bend to any lengths to accommodate another, and the Christian must be prepared to stand apart on some issues regardless of the circumstances, as Paul exhorted the Philippians: *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Phil. 4:4-6). The Christian must not be ashamed of the stand they take, and be prepared for their stand to be made known to all, regardless of any ridicule they may attract.

The privilege of the light

The basis of such a stand is that they are privileged to be walking in the light: *“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light... Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them... See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Eph. 5:8-16). The Christian must firstly prove what is acceptable to the Lord and must cast off the works of darkness, those not acceptable to the Lord.

The most discreet form of standing apart is refraining from association as Paul exhorted the Corinthians: *“... what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”* (2 Cor. 6:16-17). Coming out from among them implies separation but does not imply any outward objection.

Avoidance

Coming out from among people might not always mean physical separation, as Paul advised Titus: *“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain”* (Titus 3:9). Simply refusing to enter into debate about matters that are obviously proposed for the sake of argument is one form of standing apart which makes one’s moderation known.

A helping hand

A further challenge arises because standing apart is not always the correct path for the Christian: *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh”* (Jude 21-23). The Christian is to be sympathetic to those who are in darkness, to show them compassion if that will make a difference, and to be available to help them if God so chooses.

Such considerations might involve associating with them in an environment in which the Christian would prefer not to be, and accommodating such a situation might be challenged as inconsistency. One example was when Peter withdrew himself from associating with the Gentiles and was openly corrected by Paul: *“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision”* (Gal. 2:11-12). Paul did not shrink from letting his moderation be known, and that publicly, because to not do so would have led to uncertainty that the Gentiles had been grafted into the fellowship of believers.

Great wisdom required

However that situation was somewhat unique and Paul adopted a different approach in his dealings with the Corinthians: *“Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds); Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every*

thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Cor. 10:1-6).

Paul declared he was gentle when he was with them—that is, he avoided confrontation face to face—but he was bold towards them in his letter, that is, he wrote forthrightly, trusting they would take notice of what he wrote and would correct their ways before he confronted them face to face. If Paul had not corrected them by letter but had waited until he visited them, it might have appeared to some that he was just as confronting as anyone else, which might have given the impression he used the same “*weapons of warfare*” as those who were not enlightened. Consequently he was careful to ensure he did not give the impression his warfare was “*after the flesh*”; that is, confrontation and strife. Nevertheless he did not retract from his stand and claimed the weapons of his warfare were powerful and triumphed over “*every high thing that exalted*”.

However such a strategy is not always possible as Paul wrote to Timothy: “*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ... Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Timothy was to rebuke and exhort as required to fulfil his ministry.

Fervent in spirit

Tolerance, or forbearance, has the potential to make one lax regarding one’s conviction. It is not possible at this time to harmonize all earthly things, even amongst the enlightened, as Paul wrote: “*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God*” (2 Cor. 4:1-2). Such an example constitutes letting our moderation be known unto all men.■

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED NATIONS

The following report was issued by the Jewish Press on December 19th, 2012.

The UN General Assembly on Tuesday adopted nine resolutions on Palestinian rights and the Golan, sharply criticizing Israel, yet making no mention of Sunday’s massacre of Palestinians by Syrian warplanes firing missiles into a mosque in a Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus. Nor did the texts mention the tens of thousands of Palestinians who continue to flee the camp, UN Watch reported.

By the end of this week, the current 2012 UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) session will have adopted 22 country-specific resolutions on Israel—and only four on the rest of the world combined—one each for Syria, Iran, North Korea and Burma, noted UN Watch.

Tuesday’s resolutions criticized Israel for “the continuing systematic violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people,” and focused on “the extremely difficult socioeconomic conditions being faced by the Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.”

One resolution condemned Israel for holding on to the Golan Heights, demanding Israel hand the land and its people to Syria...

“It’s astonishing,” said Hillel Neuer, executive director of UN Watch. “At a time when the Syrian regime is massacring its own people, how can the UN

call for more people to be subject to Assad’s rule? The timing of today’s text is morally galling and logically absurd.”

“What is also outrageous is that these resolutions claim to care about Palestinians, yet the UN proves itself completely oblivious to the actual suffering on the ground, happening right now: Palestinians slaughtered, maimed and expelled by Assad’s forces.”

“Today’s farce at the General Assembly underscores a simple fact: the UN’s automatic majority has no interest in truly helping Palestinians, nor in protecting anyone’s human rights; the goal of these ritual, one-sided condemnations remains the scapegoating of Israel,” said Neuer.

“The UN’s disproportionate assault against the Jewish state undermines the credibility of what is supposed to be an impartial and respected international body, and exposes the sores of politicisation and selectivity that eat away at its founding mission, eroding the UN Charter promise of equal treatment to all nations large and small...”

While the nations are touched by humanitarian ideals, they are ignorant regarding God’s hand in the affairs of men, and particularly regarding His people Israel and their right to the land: “*And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children’s children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever*” (Ezek. 37:25).■

IF THERE BE ANY VIRTUE

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

Compliance with Paul’s exhortation to think on things that have virtue requires the Christian to decide which things have virtue and which do not.

In order to make such decisions it is necessary to have a clear idea regarding the meaning of virtue. Some secular dictionaries define virtue as “moral excellence or goodness”, and some Bible concordances define it as “*manliness, that is, excellence*” (Strong’s Concordance #703).

The concept of “manliness” is appropriate in the sense that a virtuous man is morally upright, as exemplified in the **man** Christ Jesus. After interrogating Him, Pilate declared: “... *I find in him no fault*” (John 18:38). Later he further declared: “... *That ye may know that I find no fault in Him*” (John 19:4). Nevertheless his declaration fell on deaf ears, and so, in his last appeal to the priests and officers Pilate exclaimed “*Behold the man!*” (John 19:5). Jesus was a man who exemplified virtue!

Animate and inanimate

However Paul’s exhortation applies to a wider spectrum than human beings; it embraces inanimate (non-living) things, which in turn can be classified as material things and non-material things (such as thoughts, words and deeds).

For material things, deciding if an inanimate thing is virtuous is more difficult than deciding whether a living being is virtuous because the assessment has to be made on the effect of the object’s appearance (or, for some things, the noise it makes).

For example some works of “art” provoke a desire for material prosperity, sexual immorality or violence. Other inanimate objects can stimulate thoughts of worshipping heathen gods. Whatever the consequence, if it is amoral (without moral virtue) the Christian should not ponder them.

Words

One example of an inanimate and also non-material thing which can injure the Christian’s spiritual mind are words. Peter alerted his readers to the dangers of “*great swelling words of vanity*” that can “*allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness...*” (2 Pet. 2:18). Words can be very persuasive, and so the Christian needs to be selective regarding the words upon which they meditate. For that reason Paul chose his words carefully: “*And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing*

words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Jesus was noted for His gracious words.

Paul warned Timothy about the power of words: “*Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some*” (2 Tim. 2:14-18). That such influences can overthrow the faith of some indicates the danger of meddling with them.

Gradual influence

It is not the words themselves that are injurious, but the thoughts they express. Their influence is particularly powerful because their effect might be gradual—Paul likened it to a canker, that is, an ulcer (or in modern day terms cancer). It is of the slow and subtle influence that the Christian must be aware.

Activities

Participating in activities that are not virtuous also has the potential to injure the new creature, and particularly flamboyant activities. Jesus said: “... *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). The Christian must withdraw from such displays of pride, as Paul also wrote: “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*” (2 Cor. 6:17).

The Christian must avoid thinking on things that are not virtuous because they have the potential to ultimately affect how they think, and “... *as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*” (Prov. 23:7).■

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