



Volume 91 No. 1

AUSTRALIA

January-March 2008

## NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

It is traditional at this time of the year to make what are commonly called New Year Resolutions. Many people are not completely happy with themselves, they want to improve, and the beginning of a New Year seems to be a good time to initiate changes.

In the secular world, the main focus of self-improvement courses is "goal setting". The long term goal is reached by breaking the goal down into stages. An example from the business world is that of a salesman who might have been set a goal of \$1M in sales within 10 years. The goal might seem an impossible task but when broken down to a 5 year, 1 year, 1 month and weekly goals, it requires only \$2,000 a week. The goal now appears quite attainable.

Every consecrated Christian must, by virtue of their consecration, have goals. They have presented their bodies as a living sacrifice. They have a goal to daily put down the old flesh, to grow spiritually, to look for and do God's will, to keep the narrow way and to make their calling and election sure. Making their calling and election sure can at first seem to be an impossible goal. However it is a step-by-step process; as Isaiah 28:10 states it is "*precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little there a little*".

There is an old saying that 'New Year resolutions are made to be broken', which might be acceptable as far as the world is concerned. However for the Christian, resolutions are very serious matters. Their resolutions are binding until their death, and are the foundation for building their Christian character. Without resolutions they are like a ship drifting aimlessly on the sea without an engine, without a sail, and without a rudder. The ship will never get to its destination because it has none. The Christian has a destination; they must set the sail, control the rudder, and keep the engine in good repair. This can only be done by acting in accordance with their resolutions every day.

Psalm 116:12-18 reads: "*What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all*

*his people ... I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people*". The sentiments of this psalm must be recalled daily by every Christian; to make resolutions at the beginning of a New Year means nothing unless they are practised daily.

The first thought in Psalm 116:12 is one of complete consecration – a consecration that is born of gratitude for the goodness of God: "*What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? .... I will pay my vows to the Lord*". Recalling this vow of consecration at the beginning of every day engenders holiness; the Christian's vow must be a daily task, not just something that they did one year ago, or 20 years ago. It must be remembered every day! They carry the fallen flesh with them every day and so the antidote must go with them every day also.

The next resolution that must be a daily objective is sincerity and simplicity of character – "*I will strive to be simple and sincere toward all*". Saying it and doing it are different things. Simplicity and sincerity are not qualities that may be worn on the outside like an ornament. They are qualities that must come from within. A mere show of sincerity is more distasteful than none at all. Jesus severely rebuked the Pharisees for such hypocrisy: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so, ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*" (Matt. 23:27-28).

### In This Issue

New Year Resolutions	1
Buy The Truth and Sell It Not	3
The Apostle Paul	6
Seven Times	9
Love Vaunteth Not Itself	12

Jesus' statement is in stark contrast with the description of the bride in Psalm 45 – *"The king's daughter is all glorious within"*. It is the heart condition that the Lord is observing. Simplicity and sincerity are truly jewels, but they must shine from within. There is such a thing as "insincere sincerity", just as there is pride in one's humility. Both qualities are untenable in the Christian.

Another resolution that must be remembered daily is *"I will not please and honour self, but the Lord"*. An inherent quality in fallen human nature is pride. The glorifying of self - the worshipping of self – is a characteristic of the fallen nature. Christians may fool themselves into thinking that they have put "self down" because they do not share the world's desires to be prominent in the community. But let every Christian look further - how do they act in their relationships with their brethren? *"I will not please and honour self, but the Lord"* must be a resolution that is consciously addressed every day.

A further resolution that requires daily attention is *"I will be careful to honour the Lord with my lips, that my words may be acceptable to all"*. It is so easy to gossip, or to speak in an evil way. Such words do not bring honour to the Lord nor do they bring a blessing to others.

Christians must also be careful to honour the Lord with their lips when defending the doctrines of truth. A noble defence for truth is completely destroyed when harshness or vindictiveness is used. The truths being upheld might be pure, but the methods by which they are being proclaimed or upheld might not be honouring to the Lord nor a blessing to the hearer.

Guarding one's words completely is impossible, and such a goal can lead to discouragement. The Apostle James declares: *"For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body ... But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God"* (James 3:2, 8-9). James equates the ability to control the tongue with perfection and while that is not achievable in the current fleshly life, it must be the Christian's goal.

The next resolution is also a daily one – *"I will be faithful to the Lord, the Truth, the brethren and all with whom I have to do, not only in great matters but also in the little things of life"*. The Christian can be faithful to the Lord by trying to live up to all of His principles and precepts, not just those that appeal to the flesh, not just those that others see, not just those that will bring personal gain – but all of them! Being

faithful to the Lord involves not being ashamed of one's relationship with Him: *"If we deny Him, He will deny us"* (2 Tim. 2:12).

How can a Christian be faithful to the Truth? One essential criterion is to know truth from error! Having identified truth and separated it from error, it is necessary to stand up for it and apply its standards and precepts in one's daily life. Such a stand will not make for popularity, but the Christian life is not a popularity contest; it is a lonely way, *"a narrow way that leadeth unto life"* (Matt. 7:14).

What is involved in being *"faithful to the brethren"*? Christians do not choose their brethren – the Lord does that (1 Cor. 12:18). Just as in real life one can choose their friends but not their relatives, so also in the church. God does the calling, God does the drawing, God does the accepting, and God does the begetting. Consequently Christians are not at liberty to exclude anyone. However the warning is that there would be false Christians – *"wolves in sheep's clothing"* - whom the Father has never accepted nor begotten. Such will be manifested by a lack of fruitage (Matt. 7:20). Where the fruits of the spirit are totally lacking and the spirit of the world is obvious, Christians are exhorted to *"come out from among them and be ye separate ..."* (2 Cor. 6:17).

Christians are to be faithful in the little things of life. The Christian life is built of little everyday experiences that in themselves might seem to be insignificant. However it is the seemingly little things that make the Christian life a daily and hourly endeavour. If effort is not made in the little things, character will be sadly lacking when some big experience comes along. It is in the little things that Christians are to be faithful to the Lord, to the Truth, and the brethren.

The final resolution is to trust the Lord completely. A resolution to develop a faith that will place one's life completely in God's care, and which will always wait on Him (Psa. 27:14), is a resolution that every Christian can earnestly make at the beginning of every year. Such a faith is necessary to put all things in His hand, to surrender all to His divine care, and to truly believe that He will providentially overrule all matters for the eternal good of the believer (Rom. 8:28). Such a faith will result in purity of heart, will repel all anxiety, all discontent and all discouragement. Indeed it, and only it, will enable the Christian to *"rejoice in the Lord always, to be careful for nothing, (and) in all things by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let their requests be made known unto God"* (Phil. 4:4-6). *"I will neither murmur nor repine at what the Lord's providence may permit because my faith firmly trusts him"*.

## BUY THE TRUTH AND SELL IT NOT

It was the wise man, Solomon, who said "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). Those words indicate that the truth has value. It is of such value that those who desire to possess it must be prepared to pay for it.

Three questions arise: how does one buy the truth, is it possible to sell the truth, and what is the truth?

The word 'truth' in Proverbs 23:23 is the Hebrew '*emeth*' which has many meanings - "*trust, certainty, worthiness, establishment*" and "*to be sure*". Thus Proverbs 23:23 may be read as "*Buy that which is sure and certain*".

After Jesus had said to Pilate "*Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice*", Pilate asked Jesus "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38). Although Jesus didn't answer Pilate's question directly, John 17:17 records Jesus as saying "*Thy word is truth.*" God's word is truth. It is that which is in harmony with all righteousness and peace. God's word in Jesus' day consisted only of the Old Testament scriptures but was expanded by Jesus' words and the teaching, writings and sermons of the apostles. Finally the sacred record of the truth was concluded when John received and recorded his vision that God gave him on the Isle of Patmos, which is known as the Book of Revelation.

Much in the Bible is historical and much is prophetic. Also a considerable portion may be regarded as "devotional truths". They provide instruction regarding the development of Christian character. There are also doctrinal truths that reveal God's great Plan of the Ages, and that tell of the redemption and restoration of all mankind.

### Creation

The fundamental truth upon which all other truth is dependent is the creation of Adam and Eve and their placement in the Garden of Eden, in human form and in the image of Almighty God (Gen. 1:27). His design was and is for mankind to multiply and fill the earth. The Earth is Man's home and they are to dwell there forever (Eccl. 1:4). The Lord confirmed this later when through the prophet Isaiah He said that He had established the Earth and that "*He had not created it in vain; He formed it to be inhabited*" (Isa. 45:18). However Man's continued existence on the Earth depended on his obedience to God's law. The great Adversary beguiled Mother Eve and Adam wilfully transgressed the divine command when he ate the forbidden fruit. The consequence was the death penalty, and it is God's plan that the death penalty be inherited by all of Adam's progeny even though they

personally have not transgressed before they are born (Rom. 5:12-15).

A precious element of God's plan - a part of the truth - is that, prior to Adam's transgression, God had planned Man's redemption and Satan's destruction: "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*" (Gen. 3:15). However God also planned that several centuries would pass before He would enact His promise. The delay adds greatly to the significance of the angel's words "*I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:10).

### The Law and the Ransom

Prior to Jesus coming to Earth, God made a covenant with the natural seed of Abraham, the Jewish nation. The covenant was based on the law given by the hand of Moses on Mt. Sinai. This law offered life to those who would comply with its requirements, however no-one was capable of doing so due to "*the weakness of the flesh*" (Rom. 7:9, 10). Nevertheless the law accomplished God's purpose in that it proved to mankind that no man could gain life through his own righteousness.

The hope of life for all mankind relies totally on God's provision of a ransom for them. He promised such a ransom through the prophet Hosea: "*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes*" (Hos. 13:14). The Apostle Paul confirmed God's plan when he wrote: "*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour who will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, for there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*" (I Tim. 2:3-6). The truth that Jesus is the ransom for all mankind is the hub of Man's hope of life after death.

### Resurrection

Another fundamental feature of God's plan is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Apostle Paul declares that Jesus "*was delivered to death for our offences and raised again for our justification*" (Rom. 4:25). Jesus' resurrection is a critical part - a vital truth element - of God's plan and Man's hope for a future life. Quoting again from the Apostle Paul: "*Now if Christ be preached that he rose*

from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and ... ye are yet in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:12-17). In his sermon to the Athenians also, Paul declared that Jesus' resurrection is a vital element in God's plan: "whereby God hath given assurance unto all men by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

### The church

Another element of truth that gives great comfort is that the preaching of the gospel throughout the world since Jesus' life on Earth has not been for the purpose of converting the world. Initially the gospel was preached only to the nation of Israel: "*These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not*" (Matt. 10:5). However God had planned that Israel, on a national scale, would not accept Jesus as their Messiah and that the Gentiles would be grafted into the church as the Apostle Paul explained to the Christians at Ephesus: "*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*" (Eph. 3:5-6).

The call to the Christian is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. As such the call is not to popularity in, or compliance with, the world in general, but is a call to holiness: "*Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you*" (1 Pet. 4:1-4).

The call to holiness of the Christian life is one of sacrifice, even unto death as many martyrs have testified. The Apostle Paul ensured that Timothy, his "son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), fully understood this aspect of the Christian walk: "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us*" (2 Tim. 2:11-12). However as the verses declare the promise is that there is a reward for bearing such ignominy and scorn; in the resurrection they "*will live with Him and reign with Him*". 1 John 3:2 says that "*we will be like Him and see Him as He is*".

### Restitution

When the church is complete the outpouring of the promised blessings of health and life to all the families of the Earth will begin. This will be the time that Peter spoke of when he said there would be "*times of restitution of all things*" (Acts. 3:21). The times of restitution will bring the end of sickness and death and all evil that has been afflicting mankind since the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Such is an outline of the truth. However the question is how does one buy the truth?

### Buying the truth

Truth is like a jewel that is for sale and is on display. The jewel can be viewed and admired by all who are privileged to pass by the display case. However each individual will have their own appreciation of its beauty; to many the jewel might not hold any wonder at all. Jesus explained why individuals' appreciation of the beauties of the truth vary: "*He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given ... Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand ... But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear*" (Matt. 13:11, 13, 16). God has empowered some to appreciate the truth and some He has not empowered. Jesus explains the difference as being due to God's calling: "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ...*" (John 6:44).

It is one thing to appreciate the beauties of the truth but it is quite another to own it. For those who wish to own it there is a price to pay. Just as a jewel has a drawing power to those who are able to appreciate its beauty, so the Bible's message has a drawing power to those who are privileged to appreciate the beauty of the truth that it contains. The Apostle Paul wrote: "*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (1 Cor. 2:10). The drawing power of God's spirit is such that those who are privileged to have received it are motivated to buy the truth, that is to own it for themselves, to have a full conviction about its message and what it means for the world of mankind.

However buying the truth is not a momentary transaction. When a Christian decides to own the truth for themselves they must enter into an agreement that will bind them for the rest of their earthly life. It involves laying down their life in the divine service day by day, year by year, until they have been faithful unto death. That is the cost of the truth.

The ongoing contract means that the truth must

continue to transform their life, and this can only be done in the same way that the Apostle Paul advised Timothy: *"Study (or be diligent) to show thyself approved unto God, a workman needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim. 2:15). The glorious plan of God is revealed throughout the Bible and His will for His dedicated children is also found there. One of the greatest tests of the sincerity of the Christian's consecration is the maintenance of their loyalty to the Lord's instructions.

Individuals appreciate different qualities of a jewel; some may find particular beauty in its colour, or its form, or its clarity. While the beauty of the jewel includes all of those aspects, the fullness of its beauty will not be appreciated if only one of the attributes is recognised. And so it is with the truth - one aspect of the truth does not reveal its full beauty. It is easy to give undue emphasis to one or two doctrines (aspects or beauties of the truth) or activities that particularly appeal to the individual and to ignore other aspects. Prayer is an essential part of the Lord's will for all of His people, but it must not occupy so much time that attention is not given to other vital aspects. For example the Lord wants us to love one another, and Paul wrote an entire chapter about the quality of love (1 Cor.13). Likewise love should not displace other fruits (graces) of the spirit and Christian activities. Jesus, quoting Moses, said *"man should not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God"* (Matt.4:4).

Basically, the price that the Christian must pay for the truth is that of service. The Apostle Paul referred to his service as *"the ministry of reconciliation"* (2 Cor. 5:18). If the Christian today owns the truth to the extent that they consider themselves to be a member of the church as did Paul, they must also be prepared to be part of this ministry. They must be guided by the word of God with respect to the message that they should give to all people. At the same time they must adhere to the standards of righteousness which the Lord has determined for His church: *"giving no offence in anything that the ministry be not blamed, but in all things proving ourselves as ministers of God - in patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonment, in tumults, in labours, in watching and fasting, by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, and by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God through the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, through honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers yet true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold we live, as chastened yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things"* (2 Cor. 6:3-10).

Those verses are a comprehensive summary of the Christian life and devotion to God, and what it means to be faithful to the terms of the Christian's covenant with God. It demands patience, purity and the proper use of the word of God. There must be an emptying of self and a filling with the Holy Spirit. It calls for sacrifice of self that others might be encouraged in the things of God. The task requires the Christian to *"put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Eph. 6:11). All of the above is included in buying the truth.

### **Sell it not**

The second part of the admonition in Proverbs 23:23 is to *"sell it not"*. When one sells something they cease to own it. It is possible to sell the truth, to exchange it for something else. Demas was one who sold the truth, *"having loved this present world"* (2 Tim. 4:10). Consequently the exhortation to the Hebrews should be in the forefront of every Christian's mind: *"We ought to give heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip"* (Heb. 2:1). The thought behind *"slip"* is *"flow by, carelessly pass"*. Things are *"let slip"* or *"flow by"* when one does not recognise their value, or does not seize the opportunity to take possession of them. It is in this vein that Christians should not, indeed must not, *"forsake the assembling of themselves together ... But exhorting one another ... And so much the more as they see the day approaching"* (Heb. 10:25).

Earlier in the book of Hebrews the example of Israel during their exodus from Egypt is mentioned to show how the subtle temptations of the world or the temporal needs of the flesh can divert one's zeal from the Lord's purpose for them. The writer sums up the argument thus: *"Let us therefore fear that a promise left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it"* (Heb.4:1). If the Israelites could be distracted from the benefits of their deliverance after spending more than 400 years in slavery, how careful must the Christian be to ensure that they do not deviate from their consecration. Hebrews 6:4-6 contains a solemn warning: *"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame"*. However, on the contrary, the Christian has the assurance that if they are faithful in doing His will even unto death, they will indeed receive the crown of life.

How momentous is the exhortation to ***"buy the truth and sell it not!"***

## THE APOSTLE PAUL

The life of the Apostle Paul was indeed an amazing one. It demonstrates the power of God in His dealings with His human creation and reflection on it should strengthen the faith of every Christian.

### Heritage

As he testified, Paul was *"a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women"* (Acts 22:3-4).

### Conversion

Paul's zeal in persecuting Christians before he was converted demonstrates the power of God's calling - *"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel"* (Act 9:15 NKJV). Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is one of the best known narratives in the Bible. While our conversion might not be as dramatic as his, it is nevertheless just as real. The fact that he did not learn from others but received his understanding by revelation contributed to the strength he needed for his future mission: *"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie. Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy'. And they glorified God in me"* (Gal. 1:11-24).

It is significant that Peter was the first apostle Paul saw after his time in Arabia. Notwithstanding Peter's seniority in the apostleship, Paul's conviction was so

firm that he challenged Peter when Peter had acted improperly: *"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. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, 'If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?'"* (Gal. 2:11-14).

### Ministry

Paul was given a specific mission - to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the "heathen", as recorded in Acts 9:13-16: *"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."*

His ministry involved not only taking the gospel to the Gentiles, but also the rebuke of the Israelites, his countrymen. *"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth'"* (Acts 13:46-49).

Paul was conscious of the responsibility of his ministry: *"...Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches"* (2 Cor. 11:28). Nevertheless, in spite of the trials and responsibility that comprised his ministry, the Apostle was determined to labour faithfully to the very last as shown by 2 Timothy 4:9-13. At the time of writing to Timothy, his death was imminent, some of his previous good fellow workers had deserted him, but he would labour on. *"Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica, Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at*



*Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments*". Soon he must pass from the scene. Maybe his treasured books would not be esteemed of great value by anyone else when he had finished his course, but they were precious to him until the day came when he could no longer work and declare the truth and his love for his Lord. He knew that in the future he might be deemed a disturber of the peace and a deceiver of the people, but since his conversion he had taken hold of the faith to which he was called. Paul was convinced of His Master whom he had been called to serve, and *"for the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12).

### **Trials**

During his ministry Paul suffered persecution and faced death many times - *"From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness"* (2 Cor. 11:24-27 NKJV). Nevertheless he had been delivered repeatedly by divine intervention - *"And out of them all the Lord delivered me"* (2 Tim. 3:11 NKJV).

### **Service completed**

However now he knew that he was not going to be delivered any more. Not that the very moment of death had come when he wrote his second letter to Timothy, but it was growing nearer, *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand"* (2 Tim. 4:6). *"The time of my departure is at hand"* shows that the Apostle knew that his life would no longer be preserved for future service. The present services were the last he would be privileged to minister in the flesh. One translation renders 2 Timothy 4:6 *"I am now **being offered**"*; and another *"the **last drops** of my life blood are being poured out"*. He had fought a good fight, and what a fight it had been. He had met opposition from many, one such was Alexander the coppersmith: *"Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words"* (2 Tim. 4:14-15). The great arch-enemy of course was the Devil himself and his minions of darkness. He met the apostle at every turn with the ferocity of a roaring lion. But the apostle never flinched, he submitted himself to God fully, and resisted the Devil until he cowered from the scene.

One aspect of the true faith that would be lost was the necessity and privilege of suffering with Christ before reigning with Him - *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us"* (2 Tim. 2:12). *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tim. 3:12 NKJV). The tendency to forsake the truth and align oneself with the world would become a powerful temptation, but it would not overcome Paul. Though he would be buffeted and set at nought during his walk as a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, he would wait with assurance for his vindication and reward.

### **Reward**

Paul was not resisting the end of his life; rather he knew that to *"be with Christ ... is far better"*. He would bind his sacrifice to the altar to the very last for the God who had showed him the light - *"God is the LORD, And He has given us light; Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You"* (Psa. 118:27-28 NKJV). Now his course of training was complete and he could look forward to his reward: *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Tim. 4:8).

The phrase *"at that day"* in 2 Timothy 4:8 is very significant and reflects the words of the prophet: *"Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey"* (Zeph. 3:8). It was the calmness of soul which such Scriptures inspired in Paul that enabled him to bear all things patiently and to judge nothing before the time, as he wrote - *"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God"* (1 Cor. 4:5). When the time comes for God to bring every work with every secret thing to judgment the apostle knew he would be vindicated: *"For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil ..."* (Eccl. 12:14). *"In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel"* (Rom. 2:16). As the Psalmist knew, there must be a limit to wickedness - *"Lord how long shall the wicked triumph?"* (Psa. 94:3). Ultimately, Abraham's words in Genesis 18:25 must be verified - *"shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"*

Christ had been his strength and might, and thus he could testify that he could *"do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (Phil 4:13). He had finished his course, nothing had moved him away from the ministry he had received from the Lord Jesus; bonds and affliction had been largely his lot, but he saw them as only momentary and he was

finishing his course with joy: *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24 NKJV). Such was the Apostle's faith and conviction that he was able to write *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (2 Cor. 4:17 NKJV).

### Faithfully waiting

Another very important facet of the one faith that Paul taught diligently was to avoid attempting to rule before the time. He had no thought of converting the world in the present time, but ministered to find the jewels who would be associated with the Saviour at the Second Advent. Like Peter, Paul knew that the heavens and earth of Noah's day were destroyed, and that the present heavens and earth were also doomed to destruction: *"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men"* (2 Pet. 3:7). However Paul did not take the authority to himself but He was waiting for the Son from Heaven: *"For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, ... to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"* (1 Thess. 1:9-10). *"Wait on the Lord"* was truly Paul's attitude of heart (Psa. 27:14).

### Assurance

Paul was convinced that his reward was assured: *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness"* (2 Tim. 4:8). It was not his yet, but it was laid up for him. He had, from the day when he met Jesus face to face on the Damascus road, enjoyed an **imputed** righteousness; it had been his covering robe, shielding him against all the inherited weaknesses of his fallen flesh. What a boon it had been to him; with it no condemnation could be levelled against him - *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"* (Rom. 8:1 NKJV). But the crown of righteousness **reserved for him** in heaven was one of **actual righteousness**, and his new resurrection body would be capable of sustaining it evermore.

The closing words of 2 Timothy 4:8 should be inspiring to all Christians - *"and not me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"*. The promise is held out not only to Paul, but to all; *"to all them that love his appearing"*. And it is more than a hope; it is an assurance of a crown of righteousness.

The phrase *"love his appearing"* in 2 Timothy 4:8 is worthy of some emphasis. If it referred only to the

Second Advent, Paul would not see it until he is resurrected, nor could any Christians to this time. The word translated *"appearing"* is *"epiphaneia"* which is variously translated in the Scriptures. It means a bright shining, a shining forth, an unveiling. Strong's Concordance defines it as *"manifestation; specifically the advent of Christ (past or future)"*. If the historical (past) aspect is considered, it may refer to the manifestation of Christ to each individual at any time, all who have loved Him and all that He has meant to them - all to whom He has been manifested. Indeed, all to whom the true God has been revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time (to the natural eye he is invisible), but His Son has revealed him, declared him, made Him known - *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (John 14:9). All who have loved what they have seen of Jesus, and have desired to see a reflection of Jesus in themselves, to be changed little by little into the same image, the same likeness, may also rest in the assurance of their reward - *"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world"* (John 17:22, 24). *"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (2 Cor. 3:18). Hence to the Christian there is an ever-growing revelation to this day. If we are in the day of our Lord's second presence his manifestation is richer now than it has ever been, but the Second Advent is not the criterion by which Paul is telling us any shall be judged worthy of the *"crown of righteousness"* which all true Christians will receive. He is referring to every faithful Christian who has followed Christ in the light that has shined from Pentecost to this day, a light shining more and more unto the perfect day for all the just.

Paul's example should enable us not to doubt our calling. Further, the fact that he was able to forget *"those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead"*, should also encourage us not to let our earlier lives hinder us in our striving to gain the prize for which we also have been *"apprehended"* (Phil. 3:13).

May we all cultivate and show forth the same courage, diligence and earnest desire to serve our Lord to the end of our days on this earth, as did the Apostle Paul. May we trust in the hope in which Paul also trusted - *"And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you"* (John 16:22).

*"... when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see him as He is"* (1 John 3:2).



## SEVEN TIMES

Our last issue contained an article about King Nebuchadnezzar in which some comments were made regarding certain aspects of Nebuchadnezzar's life. However space did not allow the statement in Daniel 4:25 - that his "*dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field ...and seven times shall pass over thee*" - to be addressed. This article examines whether there is any significance in the period of "*seven times*" for which Nebuchadnezzar was to "*be with the beasts of the field*".

### Seven

The Hebrew word translated "*seven*" in relation to Nebuchadnezzar's relegation to be like the beasts of the field occurs only six times in the Old Testament - Ezra 7:14 and Daniel 3:19; 4:16, 23, 25, and 32. However the fact that it occurs only six times is of no significance; Strong's Concordance defines it (#7655) as "*corresponding to #7651 - seven (times)*". #7651 occurs 395 times and there are only three occurrences of the word "*seven*" in the Old Testament where it is not translated from either #7651 or #7655. Dr. Strong defines #7651 as "*sheba - seven - a primary cardinal number:- seven*". Consequently it is concluded that the meaning of "*seven*" in relation to the events in Nebuchadnezzar's life is the common number 7.

### Time

The word translated "*time*" in relation to Nebuchadnezzar's relegation occurs only 13 times in the Old Testament, all of them in the book of Daniel. Dr. Strong's definition is "*#5732 - iddan - from a root corresponding to that of #5708; a set time: technically a year*". Young's Concordance defines "*iddan*" as "*an appointed time or season,*" with no mention of it meaning "*a year*". Both Concordances agree that "*iddan*" is always rendered "*time*" (or "*times*") in the King James Version of the Bible.

The issue regarding "*iddan*" in relation to Nebuchadnezzar is whether the technical meaning of "*a year*" as suggested by Dr. Strong is applicable, and therefore whether any symbolism can be justifiably attached to it. In order to come to a reasoned conclusion about this point it is necessary to review each of the occurrences of "*iddan*" in the book of Daniel.

The first two occurrences are in Daniel 2:8, 9. The context is Nebuchadnezzar's response to his counsellors who were unable to interpret his dream. The record reads: "*The king answered and said, 'I know of certainty that ye would gain the **time (iddan)**, because ye see the thing is gone from me'*". It is unlikely that "*iddan*" in this verse means a year, because it seems unlikely that the counsellors would

have sought a year in which to interpret the dream. It seems more likely that the counsellors were seeking merely a delay, that is, more time, possibly an indeterminate period of time, in which to interpret the dream. Thus it would seem that these two occurrences indicate that "*iddan*" does **not always** mean a year.

The next occurrence is in Daniel 2:21: "*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*". "*Times*" is from the Hebrew "*iddan*" and "*seasons*" is from the Hebrew #2166. Dr. Strong defines #2166 ("*zeman*") as "*an appointed occasion*". It is possible to logically interpret this verse as saying that God changes the years ("*iddan*") and the seasons within the years. However while that interpretation might be correct, it is not necessarily correct - an alternative meaning is that Daniel was declaring that God is omnipotent and has control over the times and seasons which He has decreed for the Earth; simply "*the times He has appointed*" (Acts 17:26).

The next two occurrences are in Chapter 3, verses 5 and 15. The context of these verses is the declaration of Nebuchadnezzar's decree that "*at what **time***" the people heard "*the sound of ...all kinds of musick*" they were to fall down and worship the image. The meaning of "*iddan*" in these verses is clearly **not** a year but the instant, the moment, at which the sound of the "*musick*" was heard.

The next four occurrences are in chapter 4 (verses 16, 23, 25 and 32) and are in relation to Nebuchadnezzar's relegation to be as the beasts of the field. In view of the occurrences discussed above, it cannot be declared unequivocally that the time period referred to in these verses as "*seven times*" is seven years, although there is no evidence that makes that interpretation invalid.

An alternative interpretation of the expression "*seven times*" in relation to this incident is **completeness**, as indicated by verse 25: "*they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, ... and seven times shall pass over thee, **till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men** ...*". God's purpose in relegating Nebuchadnezzar to live as a beast of the field was to humble him so that he would acknowledge that God is the supreme ruler; before he was humbled Nebuchadnezzar took the honour for building Babylon to himself (Dan. 4:30). The period of time required (or allocated) to humble Nebuchadnezzar was "*seven times*". Regardless of what meaning is attached to the "*seven times*", there is no doubt that God's purpose was achieved completely: "*And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up*

mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and **I blessed the most High**, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation" (Dan. 4:34). Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and acknowledged God as the supreme being and ruler of the universe.

In terms of outcomes, it is evident that God's dealing with Nebuchadnezzar pictures or reflects God's dealings with the whole human race. As explained by Solomon, the human race has been subjected to "sore travail" to be "exercised (profited) thereby" (Eccl. 1:13). The Apostle Paul also declared "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by **reason** of him who hath subjected the same in hope" (Rom. 8:20). God's relegation of the human race to a position of relative deprivation (compared to the conditions in the garden of Eden into which Adam and Eve were placed) will completely achieve God's purpose. Just as Nebuchadnezzar was humbled for the purpose of causing him to acknowledge that God is supreme, and just as he "**blessed the most High**" when he was restored to his former status, so also the whole world of mankind will glorify God when their period of relegation is complete. "And many people shall go and say, 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3). In this context it is plausible to conclude that the relegation of Nebuchadnezzar for a period of "seven times" (seven "iddan") as recorded in Daniel 4 is a picture of God's dealings with Mankind; during which both learn the lesson that God is supreme. At the end of their "seven times", both will voluntarily and willingly acknowledge that God is the supreme being, and both will have learnt the consequences of disobedience. Both of those times have and will accomplish their purpose completely, but the exact duration of those times might not be included in the picture of the seven times of Nebuchadnezzar's relegation to be like the beasts of the field.

### Some symbolism required

The remaining occurrences of "iddan" are in Daniel 7 verses 12 and 25. Verse 12 reads: "As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season ("zeman" - an appointed occasion) and time ("iddan" - a set time)". The dominions of the empires to which these verses relate were not limited to one literal year, and so the meaning of "iddan" in these verses means a period other than a literal year, and the technical meaning given in Dr. Strong's Concordance does not apply. Indeed no two empires existed for the same length of time, and so the terms "zeman" and "iddan"

does not seem to mean a fixed period of any duration and it is even less likely that "iddan" means a literal year.

However it is suggested that the concept of them existing for **their appointed season** and **until their appointed time** is valid. It is God who "... *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*" (Dan. 2:21). All rulers have only held sway for as long as they have been in accord (indeed accomplishing) God's purposes: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). One example given in the Scriptures is Pharaoh: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him ... for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Exod. 9:13-16). Some other examples quoted in the Scriptures of some who were raised up to achieve God's purposes were Nebuchadnezzar himself (Jer. 27:4-6) and Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:23; Isa. 44:28).

The last three occurrences of "iddan" are in Daniel 7:25: "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times (zeman) and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time (iddan) and times (iddan) and the dividing (a half - Strong #6387) of time (iddan)."

### Hebrew or Aramaic

A factor that determines how the occurrences of "iddan" in Daniel 7:25 may be properly interpreted is the language of the Old Testament. Smith's Bible Dictionary, page 238, says that "the books of the Old Testament are written almost entirely in the Hebrew language". However some other scholars contend that the language was Aramaic. The interpretation of the repetition of "iddan" in Daniel 7:25 depends on whether the language was Hebrew or Aramaic. The most common interpretation is the Hebrew, where the second occurrence implies twice the first, so that the wording "time, and times and the dividing of time" totals  $3\frac{1}{2}$  "times" ( $1 + 2 + \frac{1}{2}$ ).

If Dr Strong's technical definition is employed ("iddan" meaning a year),  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times equals  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years. The Hebrew year consisted of 360 counted days, so that  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years is 1260 days. If a further extension is made, that is, the time scale of "a day for a year" from Ezekiel 4:6 (where it was given in relation to the iniquity of Israel) is applied, the period of a "time ("iddan") and times ("iddan") and the dividing of time ("iddan") equals 1260 years. If the fourth beast

introduced in Daniel 7:7 (and explained a little in verse 23) was the Roman empire (and there is little doubt that history testifies that it was), the prophecy gives great insight into the prophetic chronology of the Bible. However it is necessary, when “*giving a reason for the hope that is in you*” (1 Pet. 3:15) to recognise the components of the argument that lead to any conclusion, including this one.

While the deduction in the previous paragraph might seem to be somewhat extensive, when it is combined with the time periods of 42 months and 1260 days in Revelation 11:2-3 (both of which equal 3½ years), the interpretation of “*iddan*” in Daniel 7:25 as “*a year*” (360 days) yields a time period that is consistent with the periods specified in Revelation. However it should be acknowledged that the interpretation of “*iddan*” as meaning 360 years is not derived from a simplistic understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew word “*iddan*” as it occurs in the Scriptures. However that does not mean that it is invalid.

#### Other “years”

Other Hebrew words that are translated “year” in the King James Version are “*shanah*” and “*shenah*” and between them they constitute almost all occurrences of the word “year” in the King James Version. The difference between them is that one is masculine and the other is feminine. Their meaning is given by such verses as Genesis 1:14: “*And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years*” (Gen. 1:14). The question may be asked why, if Nebuchadnezzar was to be relegated for seven literal years, “*shanah*” or “*shenah*” was not used? One possible answer to that question is that, while God knew how long His arrangement would take to completely accomplish His purpose, He did not disclose it because that foreknowledge would have diminished the impact of the lesson regarding His omnipotence. It would be in similar vein to the present era where He has not disclosed a date nor a defined period of time for the setting up of the kingdom - “*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only*” (Matt. 24:36).

Additionally there are numerous instances where the words “*shenah*” and “*shanah*” are associated with “month” (for example Ezek. 1:1: “*in the thirtieth year - shanah- ... in the fifth month*”), and so there is little doubt that the words “*shenah*” and “*shanah*” relate to a literal year; the time taken for the planet Earth to make one revolution around the sun. The fact that neither “*shenah*” nor “*shanah*” is used in the texts in Daniel indicates that the references in Daniel are not literal years, and therefore some symbolic meaning is meant. This view is also supported by the fact that

there are several other terms that are used to refer to different periods of time, for example “hour”, “day”, “week”, and “month”. There are more than 4800 instances where one or more of the terms relating to a period of time occurs in the King James Version. An analysis of all the terms is beyond the scope of this article.

#### A time and a season

However this article would be deficient if some mention were not made of the verses in Ecclesiastes 3, even though the verses do not necessarily affect the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s relegation. The verses read: “*To every thing there is a season (zeman), and a time (“eth”) to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace*” (Eccl. 3:1-8).

Every occurrence of the word “time” in these verses is the Hebrew “*eth*” which Dr. Strong defines as “#6256 - *’eth* - time, especially (adverbially with preposition) now, when”. It is translated by several different English words; the concept is the time at which a specific event occurs. The concept is summarised by the verses that follow: “*What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it*” (Eccl. 3:9-10). The travail that has been given to mankind includes all of the events listed in the verses - birth, death, planting, harvesting, joy, sorrow, etc. All of these experiences are for the exercise (brow-beating, depressing - Strong #6031) of mankind, that they will come to realize that all of their efforts eventually come to naught, and in that sense, “*all is vanity and vexation of spirit*” (Eccl. 1:14). Mankind will acknowledge that God is overall.

#### Summary

Whether one wishes to assert that Nebuchadnezzar was relegated for a period of 7 calendar years, and whether one wishes to believe that the period of “seven times” (“seven *iddan*”) for which he was relegated to be like a beast of the field merely represents the fact that the period of his demise would fulfill God’s purposes completely, or whether one believes that the picture accurately portrays the duration of Mankind’s “*sore travail*”, is the province of each individual.

# LOVE VAUNTETH NOT ITSELF

In the Authorised Version of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:4 reads "love vaunteth not itself". This instance is the only occurrence of "vaunt" in the Authorised Version; the NIV translates 1 Corinthians 13:4 as "it does not boast". Strong's Concordance indicates that "vaunt" and "boast" are synonyms: "vaunt" (#4068) is defined as "to boast" and "boast" (#2744) is defined as "to vaunt". The Concise Oxford Dictionary also defines "vaunt" as "boast", and defines "boasting" as "to speak exaggeratedly and objectionably, especially about oneself; to speak with pride; to be proud in the possession of". Hence boasting and pride are closely related.

## Boasting can be destructive

Boasting can be destructive to the Lord's people. Psalm 94:3-4 reads "How long shall all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage." It was the workers of iniquity who were boasting, and they were breaking the Lord's people. Boasting is incompatible with love because love does not break down but builds up (edifies) (1 Cor. 8:1).

## Boastful speech

Speech is the most common form of boasting. The Apostle Peter refers to words that are "great swelling words of vanity", which "allure (deceive) through the lusts of the flesh". He declares that these have "forsaken the right way" (2 Pet. 2:15-18). These are similar to those referred to by the Psalmist - they had forsaken the right way and become workers of iniquity.

Boastful words can damage the church by causing divisions. This is explained by the Apostle Paul: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17-18). The Apostle's words should be a warning to all Christians to be wary of those who boast by oratory.

Such a one was Theudus, who "boasted himself to be somebody" (Acts 5:36). The vanity of his boasting is clearly evident because when he "was slain ... all ... as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought". Such also are those to whom Jude referred: "these are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's person in admiration because of advantage" (Jude 16).

In contrast the Apostle Paul was careful not to boast

by oratory - he "came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom ... not with enticing words ... that (their) faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

## Boastful actions

While speech is the most common form of boasting, actions can have the same effect. The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of such boasting: "Then spake Jesus ... saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat ... do not ye after their works ... all their works they do for to be seen of men, they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues ... and to be called of men Rabbi Rabbi ... but be not ye called Rabbi" (Matt. 23:1-8). Seeking prominence is a form of boasting because it reflects an attitude of superiority.

## Showing preference

Likewise showing preference for those of greater affluence is a form of boasting. The Apostle James exhorts "as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say Here's a good seat for you, but say to the poor man You stand there, or Sit on the floor by my feet, have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ... You have insulted the poor ... if you show favouritism you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (James 2:1-9 NIV). The attitude of heart that causes one to show favouritism to the one in fine clothes may be a form of boasting, in that they are deeming themselves to be superior to him that is of lesser estate.

## Boasting by knowledge

A display of knowledge can be a form of boasting. If "thy brother be grieved with thy meat now walkest thou not charitably (lovingly). Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15).

Christians are not to boast in any form - not by speech, actions, showing preference or displaying knowledge.

## 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  
www.proclaimingchristskingdom.org.au

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