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THE LAST SEVEN DAYS

At this season of the year, as the Lord's people commemorate Jesus' life and death, they feel a depth of spirituality and closeness to their Lord that is unmatched in any of their other experiences throughout the year. One feeling is of deep gratitude to God for sending His only begotten Son to die such an ignominious death, so that mankind might have life, and a second feeling is determination to run their race because of the examples of Christian character He gave during the last seven days of His ministry.

Mark 10:32-34 provides a summary of those days: *"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day He shall rise again".*

The seventh last day

Jesus walked before them—out in front—determined to do the things He must do, and suffer the things He must suffer: mocking, scourging, condemnation, and death. He did not dawdle along the way or delay his journey. He travelled purposefully, willingly, and unhesitatingly. All Christians should be filled with admiration at this example of His courage; they should have no thought of turning back, but be intent on accomplishing their Father's will for them, whatever that might be, along the narrow way.

In verses 35-40 (of Mark 10), James and John request one sit on Jesus' right hand and the other on his left in the kingdom. Matthew 20:20-22 also records the request but gives a slightly different account in that Matthew states that their mother made the request. The difference has been seized upon by some to ridicule the Bible as not being an accurate record of Jesus' life, however, whichever record is correct, the point is that Jesus answers the request with a

question: *"Are ye able (that is, are you willing) to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?... And they said unto him, we are able".*

When the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. How could they be so bold? And why did the master seemingly look favorably upon their request? Jesus used their request to teach them the importance of humility and service to one another: *"But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all"* (Mark 10:42-44).

No lesson must be so carefully learned as this lesson of humility. It applies to the very humblest of the flock, as well as those who are teachers and elders. The temptation multiplies in proportion to the position and attainments of the individual. Pride and ambition may also afflict those who have no official position in the Church, often asserted in fault-finding and criticism which, to the hearers, is intended to imply superior wisdom or ability on the part of the critic—that his wisdom and ability only wait for opportunity to manifest his greatness above his fellows. It is not to be so among the Lord's people.

In This Issue

The Last Seven Days	1
Abiding In The Lord	4
Edify Another	6
The Tabernacle	9
Who Needeth Not Daily	11
Unto Us A Son Is Given	12

On this seventh day before His crucifixion Jesus healed Bartimeus: *“And they came to Jericho: and as He went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when He heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, He began to cry out, and say, ‘Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me’. And many charged him that He should hold his peace: but He cried the more a great deal, ‘Thou Son of David, have mercy on me’. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they called the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately He received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way”* (Mark 10:46-52).

There are several lessons that may be learned from this incident. Every individual is spiritually blind until they are privileged to hear God’s call—*“he calleth thee”*—to which they must respond in faith, casting away their garment upon which they have previously depended for their livelihood (the garment having been Bartimaeus’ licence to beg).

Such inherent blindness is not a result of any fault of those who have not heard the call, as Jesus taught His disciples: *“And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that He was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him”* (John 9:1-3).

The restoration of Bartimaeus’ sight was a *“work of God”*; so also is the sight He gives to those who are privileged to hear His voice: *“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor. 4:5-6). Thus there are no grounds for pride among the Lord’s people, but humble gratitude for having received their spiritual sight at this time.

So may reflection on the events of the seventh day before Passover stimulate those who are privileged to hear the Name of Jesus, and who have received spiritual sight at this time, to not strive for mastery over their fellows but simply desire to be joint-heirs in His kingdom: *“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father,*

inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

The sixth last day

Both Matthew and John recorded one event that occurred on the sixth day before Jesus’ death: *“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as He sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her”* (Matt. 26: 6-13).

John 12:1-8 records the same event but mentions Martha, Mary and Judas by name. There is a lesson to be learned from the actions of each of the three.

- Martha served (Greek: *“waited upon”*);
- Mary anointed Jesus’ feet;
- Judas deemed the anointing a waste of money.

Luke 10:38-40 records Martha, on another occasion, *“complaining”* that Mary was not helping to serve, and there is a lesson (a different lesson) for all to learn from that incident. However John 11:5 states that *“Jesus loved Martha”* and in John 11:20 it is recorded that Martha was the more eager of the two to greet Jesus. Hence it is evident that each had their own special way of serving their Lord, and the brethren do well to remember the same diversity of gifts exists today—one sees one need and another sees a different need, and each responds accordingly.

Perhaps the main lesson to learn from Judas’ attitude is that nothing must be kept from the service of the Lord. In the words of the hymn: *“take my silver and my gold, nothing Lord would I withhold”*. It is a challenge to keep those words in the forefront of one’s mind.

The fifth last day

Five days before Passover Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem: *“And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem... then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me... All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion,*

Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and the colt... and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee” (Matt. 21:1-11).

One lesson to be learned from this event is the surety of every detail of prophecy: *“all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet”* (Zech. 9:9).

The fourth last day

“... and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves... And He taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mark 11:15-17).

This cleansing of the literal temple in Jerusalem has application to all followers of their Master: *“... for ye are the temple of the living God, as God has said, “I will dwell in them and walk in them... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing...”* (2 Cor. 6:16-17). At this season of the year it behooves all members of the spiritual temple to cleanse themselves of everything that is, or might become, tainted with any influence that will defile or bring disrepute upon the Lord’s temple.

The third last day

Three days before Passover was Jesus’ last day of teaching in the temple. The Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trick Him by demanding He show them *“a sign from heaven”* (Matt. 16:12). Jesus regarded their request as “leaven” and taught His disciples to be aware of the leaven of the Pharisees—false doctrine—and questions designed to trick and ridicule.

Jesus used parables to teach them. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus taught the importance of purity, faithfulness, and readiness. In the parable of the talents He taught the value of full devotion to God’s service. And in the parable of the man taking a journey and returning at an unknown time He taught that no one knows when they will reach the end of their personal walk, as well as when the Lord will

terminate the present dispensation with the Lord of heaven assuming control of all Man’s affairs and set up His kingdom of righteousness.

The second last day

There is no record of Jesus’ activities two days before Passover. Possibly He reflected on the three and a half years He had spent doing the Father’s will, recalling the many times He had been led and guided by the Holy Spirit. The joys, the sorrows, the friendships, the hardships, might have all passed before his mind during a time of silent reflection. There is great benefit in the Christian also taking time to ponder the way the Lord has led them in this life.

The last hours

The final events of Jesus’ life on earth began when He told his disciples to go and prepare the Passover in the upper room. Several significant incidents occurred during the feast, two being Jesus’ washing His disciples feet and foretelling who would betray Him.

Jesus girded his garments about him and washed the feet of the disciples. This action impressed yet again that *“he that would be chief among you, let him be your servant”*. All were shamed to silence except Peter who expressed his reluctance to have the master humble Himself on Peter’s behalf. Jesus’ gentle reply, that if He did not wash Peter He would not have any part with Jesus, provoked Peter’s response: *“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!”* The Master’s reply was powerful—He that is washed needeth not to wash his feet but is clean every whit, the point being that the feet are the part of the body that come in contact with the earth. Those who are washed—the righteousness of justification by faith—need to keep themselves clean from the defilements of the world by continually washing their feet as they walk along the narrow way.

Finally Jesus’ ministry to His disciples ended: *“as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? And He answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish”* (Mark 14:18-20). *“He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon... that thou doest, do quickly”* (John 13:26-27). Jesus’ ministry was complete; He had led them to the end. Then followed the Passover Supper.

May the remembrance of the last days of Jesus’ life keep each one’s heart and mind stayed on Him throughout the year as they grow in grace and knowledge.■

ABIDING IN THE LORD

The Christian has set their mind on heavenly things and heavenly fellowship. Their chief objective is to be at “*the general assembly of the first born*”, whose names are enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12:23), and then to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

Jesus said that, in order to achieve that goal, the Christian must remain faithful to Him—to abide in the Lord: “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me*” (John 15:4). However the question arises: how can the Christian abide in Jesus Christ?

Jesus continued: “*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*” (John 15:7). Jesus’ words will abide in each only if they continually eat of the Holy Word. One example of His followers abiding in Him was the Christians at Berea: “*And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea... These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:10-11). The nobility of the Bereans was attributed to them searching the Scriptures daily; not just annually, nor monthly, nor weekly, but daily. Just as the physical life is sustained by the circulation of blood, and a branch lives because of the continuous circulation of sap, so the Christian’s spiritual life survives only if it is constantly nourished by the word of Christ.

Manna

The need for Christians to constantly ingest the Word was pictured by the requirements that applied to Israel gathering manna in the wilderness: “*This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning... And they gathered it every morning...*” (Exod. 16:16-19, 21).

Manna was like bread; they collected it daily, except on a Sabbath. The same applies to the Christian gathering Bible truths every day, their bread of life—the truth that sustains them. And they must gather it every one according to their eating, such that “*he that*

gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack”. Some have a greater appetite than others, and it is necessary to realize that the Lord will provide just the amount each one needs.

When the manna first appeared, its taste was described as like “*wafers made with honey*” (Exod. 16:31). However the Israelites became dissatisfied: “*And the multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes*” (Num. 11:4-6). The Christian must not become dissatisfied with what the Lord provides; over time it might seem to become tasteless, but it is the bread of life—“*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*” (Heb. 13:8).

Quails

God answered the Israelites’ murmuring by sending them quails: “*And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: He that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. And He called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted*” (Num. 11:31-34). What they sought was not to their ultimate benefit—God smote those who complained—and likewise the Christian must not complain that the Lord is not providing them with a varied diet. He knows what the Christian needs each step along the way: milk for the babe, meat for the strong. But both have to be ingested and so the Christian must ensure they use their Bible wisely and not just listen to discourses or read articles, but search the scriptures and prove for themselves “*whether those things are so*”.

Translating the experiences of the Israelites into the twenty first century, reveals that no truth is more basic to the scriptural theme than that Christ died for mankind’s sins, “*the just for the unjust*” (1 Pet. 3:18). No promise is sweeter than that made to father

Abraham: “in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 28:14). Salvation for all is the central theme of the Bible. To the Christian it initially tastes as the manna did to the Israelites—“wafers mixed with honey”. One must not tire of this most basic but wonderful food.

However, on the other hand, it must be remembered that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Christian must not fail to realize that the purpose of any food is not only to sustain them, but (in children) also to promote growth. Hebrews 5:12-14 reads: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for He is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil”. The next chapter describes the milk of God's Word: “Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” (Heb.6:1-2).

There is no need to seek “solid food” from the theories of Man; God has provided meat for His people at each stage of their progress. The books of Ezekiel and Revelation plumb into the depths of God's plan with romantic symbolisms of chariots of fire, intertwining wheels within wheels, beasts, dragons and a city whose streets are paved with gold. Thus care must be taken not to exclude some scriptures because it is assumed they are not applicable to one's growth. The Christian's problem lies not with desiring to probe the limitless depths of God's Holy Word, but with viewing the precious basics as routine, simple or mundane.

The commandments

John 15:9-11 reads: “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full”. Jesus stated that abiding in His love required keeping His commandments. There are three words that may be taken as the keynotes of those verses, namely love, obedience and joy.

Firstly, there is the assurance of divine love—of God's love for His people—in which it is the

Christians' duty and privilege to abide: “Just as the Father hath loved Me, I have loved you, abide ye in My love”. The depths of that love may be appreciated to some extent by pondering God's love for Jesus: “As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you”. How deep, how pure, how fully, how eternally was God's love for Jesus, and it is with that same guarantee that God will love the Christian.

Secondly, and on the other hand, there is the need for the Christian to keep the commandment of love: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). Jesus claimed an absolute and unbroken conformity with the will of God, and consequently He enjoyed an uninterrupted communion with the Father. No more wonderful words were ever spoken than these quiet ones in which Jesus declares that never in all His life had there been the slightest deflection or want of complete conformity between the Father's will and His desires and actions. Thus He teaches Christians that the secret of abiding in His love is obedience: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Jesus taught His disciples by referring to His own obedience, and applying the picture of the Vine and the branches illustrates the union to be one of sublime reality.

The keeping of His commandments is more than mere outward conformity—outward action. It is the inward heart-harmony of one's will, the surrender of the whole being to the will of God. This obedience—of the hands, the feet, the tongue, the life—is because the heart is conformed to His will. It does so because it loves and this is the condition to be met for continuing in the love of Jesus.

Fullness of joy

John 15:11 reads: “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full”. The Christians' joy is to be full even though they are required to suffer “many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The joy to which Jesus referred (Greek: *chara*: “calm delight”) is the same joy as that which He experienced during His ministry on earth, the joy that comes through an absolute surrender and submission in love to the expressed and revealed will of a loving Heavenly Father. That was His joy in spite of sorrows such as none but He could know: the baptism with which He was baptized; the burden and the weight of the chastisement He bore. Yet this joy remained with Him, and made Him the most joyful of the children of God: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of

God” (Heb. 12:2). This is the joy that results from perfect obedience, a joy coming from a surrender of self at the bidding of love. There is no joy that can be compared to that which a Christian experiences than the joy that springs from a surrender of everything under the impulse of love.

The Christian must have Jesus’ joy reigning in their hearts in order that their joy also may be full. Their joy will remain—it will be permanent, it will be abiding—if, and only if, His joy is theirs. Some glad day they too, if faithful to their present privileges, will hear the wonderful words of welcome and commendation, “*Well done, enter into the joy of your master*” (Matt. 25:23).

The Christian’s joy will be equal to the measure of their capacity, in ever trying to advance towards a greater possession of His joy. There is no deeper calmness of spirit and settled confidence than that which comes from entering into the joy of their Lord.

There is only one joy that is worthy, and that is the joy that comes from union with Jesus, the Vine. Love, obedience, and joy are all available in the measure Jesus has set forth, but only if the Christian abides in Him. The blessedness and sweetness of victory over all one’s inherent unloveliness, can only

be obtained by keeping close to Jesus Christ—the Christians’ Vine.

Christian fellowship

One picture that illustrates that fellowship with others of the Lord’s people enables one to keep close to the Lord is that of a circle. The nearer the points of the circumference are to the centre—that is, the smaller the diameter of the circle—the closer all points on the circumference are to each another. As Christians draw nearer to those who stand around the same centre, they will feel they are coming closer to the Master, and draw from Him the same life while experiencing the same joy of abiding in Him.

Another picture of the closeness is a wheat crop. In the early spring, when the wheat is green and young, it is just a little above the soil in which it stands, the plants come up in the lines in which they were sown—each row separate from another—and also parted from one another. However when the full wheat ears wave in the autumn winds, all the lines and separations have disappeared, and there is one unbroken tract of waving golden grain. So it should be in the Lord’s wheat-field—when the love of Christ fills all hearts, all “plants” will be close to each other; experiencing the joy of maturity, the joy of abiding in His love, the joys of being in their Lord’s “body”.■

EDIFY ANOTHER

“Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19)

The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Roman church in approximately AD 57, about 3 years before He was delivered to Rome as a prisoner.

In chapter 13 the Apostle had been instructing the Church members regarding their conduct towards each other in civil matters, prescribing the sacred laws of justice, peace, and order, which were to be observed by the members of the little flock. In chapter 14, and part of the following chapter, Paul turns their attention to their conduct towards one another in sacred things, pertaining more immediately to conscience and religious observance. In particular He gives instruction regarding how to manage their differences and anxieties over what should be minor matters, but which could create disharmony and may result in the stumbling of a new Brother or Sister.

Many of the problems that occurred in the Church came about because the Church of Rome was composed of both Jews and Gentiles with the Jewish converts being in the majority. There were many among the ecclesia who had unsettling questions

regarding the transition from Judaism to Christianity. Paul often reminded the Jews of his own Jewish heritage, and how the Lord had directed him to bring the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul realized that for the Church to be edified, they needed to settle the many questions that were causing discontent, and “*to pursue the things which made for peace*” (Rom. 14:19).

Currently, “edify” is understood to mean “to instruct in such a way as to improve, enlighten, or uplift morally, spiritually, or intellectually”. However the original meaning of “edify” related to the literal building of an edifice, and thus the present meaning loses some of the force and significance of the word.

The meaning of “edify” in Romans 14 conveyed the concept of the members of the church collectively forming a temple, a spiritual one and succeeding the literal one on Mount Zion; a temple in which the Lord dwells by his Holy Spirit: “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of*

God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16 NKJV). Paul’s exhortation deserves close consideration.

Pursue the things which make for peace

In Romans 14:19 the Romans were exhorted to pursue peace, which implies effort is required to acquire it—it cannot be assumed it will “come naturally”, and hence Jesus Christ taught His disciples that a blessing awaits those who strive for peace: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”* (Matt. 5:9 NKJV). Christ’s followers have differing levels of understanding, maturity, talents and experiences, but all are travelling the same narrow way and so everyone must take care to *“follow after peace”* and not stumble another.

Despite their best efforts, peace and harmony will not always be obtained, and so Paul wrote: *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”* (Rom. 12:18).

The responsibility lies with every individual and not with the “other person”. Paul encouraged the Philippians to *“fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”* (Phil. 2:2-4 NKJV). The mind set that *“esteems others”* better than oneself involves putting aside selfish ambitions and self-importance.

However that does not mean compromising the truth or accepting behavior that is not in accordance with the word of God, but the manner in which differences are handled is critical. Some issues are not critical to *“making our calling and election sure”* (2 Pet. 1:10) and Paul lists two examples: esteeming one day holier than another, and the eating or abstaining from meats.

Nevertheless there were some matters Paul deemed required correction: *“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I (Paul) withstood him to his face, because He was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, He would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, He withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy”* (Gal. 2:11-13 NKJV). Peter’s actions were adding to their confusion, seemingly endorsing that they continued to be under the Law Covenant.

Edifying another

Paul continues that pursuing peace is not the end objective, but also to pursue *“the things by which one may edify another”*. Paul lists some of the ministries

that are required to edify the whole body: *“That Christ, our Lord and Master” “...gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Eph. 4:11-12). Paul wrote that there were two overarching purposes to the ministry: equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and edifying the body of Christ.

Equipping the saints

The purpose of this part of the ministry is to enable them to be ambassadors for Christ, spreading the message of hope—proclaiming the good news of the Gospel—that *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16 NKJV)—*“that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation”* (2 Cor. 5:18-19 NKJV). Their message is not their own—they are merely preaching God’s word of hope to the world of mankind.

Edifying the body

The second aspect of the ministry is building up the brethren; the body of Christ. This objective may be accomplished only if there is *“... unity of the faith”*, which in turn requires unity *“... of the knowledge of the Son of God”*, a condition that will not be reached completely until all have come to the condition of *“a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:13). This situation will not be realized until the church is glorified, and hence there is an on-going need for each one of the Lord’s followers to strive to edify each other, so that they are *“... no longer ... children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,” so that we are able to speak the truth in love, growing up in all aspects of the new creature until we are fashioned like our head, Christ”* (Eph 4: 15 NKJV).

The Christians at Berea endeavoured to prove all things: they *“received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so”* (Acts 17:11 NKJV). Paul’s exhortation to Timothy reflected the same level of personal endeavour: *“Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15 Amplified Version). Edification of the brethren is not accomplished by enforcing blind adoption of the teachings of others, but by exhorting personal study of the word of God.

However the benefit of any ministry is dependent on God's blessing, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:6 NKJV). There is no place for personal accreditation.

Knowledge

Edifying the brethren does not mean increasing only their knowledge. Paul warned: *"Yet mere knowledge causes people to be puffed up (to bear themselves loftily and be proud), but love (affection and goodwill and benevolence) edifies and builds up and encourages one to grow [to his full stature]"* (1 Cor. 8:1 Amplified Version). Knowledge without grace puffs up and as a result does not benefit the one who is trying to help nor the one being helped. Consequently Peter wrote: *"Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..."* (2 Pet. 3:18). An increase in knowledge must be accompanied by an increase in grace.

Thus edifying requires continual self-examination, study, and appreciation of God's grace: *"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"* (Jude 20-21 NKJV).

Fellowship

The journey on the Narrow Way is often a lonely one, with few travelers who are often far apart, not able to meet as often as they would like. In the spiritual sense no-one is totally alone in that everyone has access to God in prayer, nevertheless fellowship is a very powerful and therefore important asset: *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Heb. 10:24-25), and so Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to *"...comfort each other and edify one another..."* (1 Thess. 5:11 NKJV).

Subject material

However the invitation to others to meet together for the benefit of fellowship must also be managed wisely: *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations"* (Rom. 14:1). Paul exercised such wisdom in that He did lead his followers at a pace greater than they could handle: *"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able"* (1 Cor. 3:1-2). Nevertheless there is also a requirement that all believers grow and so wisdom in what to present is also required: *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that*

one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for He is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Many members

Above all, it must be remembered that the Lord has called each one and so there is no grounds for being "disappointed" with the "lack of progress" in one to whom one has been ministering: *"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1 Cor. 1:26-29 NKJV).

The diversity of the members of the body has application regarding the contribution each one makes to the welfare of each other: *"The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person He gives the power to heal. The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not"* (1 Cor. 12:6-10 TEV). No one should imagine they have all the gifts that would be of most benefit to everyone else, nor should they strive to surpass the benefits of another's efforts to edify the brethren.

The reason why each one must strive to edify, not only themselves, but all others who are striving to walk the highway of holiness, is that finally all the members of the body of Christ will be knitted together to form one united body. The body of Christ is a mystery to the world, equal to the mystery of a man leaving his parents (who have done so much for him) and cleaving unto his wife: *"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church"* (Eph. 5:32). No member should despise another; every member is a member of the same body: *"And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary"* (1 Cor. 12:21-22).■

THE TABERNACLE

"As long as deep in the heart, the soul of a Jew yearns, and towards the East the eye looks to Zion, our hope will not be lost. The hope of 2,000 years, to be a free nation, in our land, the land Zion and Jerusalem"
Lyrics of Israel's National Anthem—Hatikvah—"The Hope"

The *Hatikvah* (quoted above) is Israel's national anthem. It paraphrases God's promise to Abraham that God will "give them the land for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8). The anthem is not merely the words of an entertainer, but rather it reflects the national conviction that God will yet fulfill that promise.

Another component of Old Testament lore that is prominent in present day Israeli conscience is the tabernacle. There is a model of the tabernacle on display at Tel Shiloh, which is where the temple—the "permanent" form of the tabernacle (2 Sam. 7:12-13; 1 Kings 6:2, 11-14)—stood for 369 years after the Children of Israel entered Israel and completed the initial conquest of the land as a whole.

Purpose

The nation of Israel was God's special people—"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6)—and hence God instructed Moses that the Israelites build Him a place where He could live among them: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exod. 25:8). The Hebrew word for "sanctuary" is "Mikdash", which Strong's Concordance defines as: "a consecrated thing or place, especially a palace, sanctuary (whether of Jehovah or of idols) or asylum". It is the same word used in Chronicles and Ezekiel when referring to the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezek. 44:1; 1 Chron. 22:19).

The Tabernacle was a transportable structure, suited for the desert. It was replaced by the more permanent temple, in the place "that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there" (Deut. 12:5). The Tabernacle was a place where God dwelt within "their midst", in the midst of the Children of Israel.

Unlike pagan places of worship, Israel does not consider the tabernacle to be a physical structure meant to provide a home on earth for a god, but a place which facilitates the relationship between God and His children. This is reinforced by the instructions regarding the Holy Ark. "And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy

seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony" (Exod. 25:21-22). The ark, with its covering and cherubim, was a meeting place between Moses and God, and, in turn, enabled God to communicate with His people, through Moses. The sacrifices and rituals that take place in and around the Tabernacle are all about man meeting God.

Building the tabernacle

The first instruction regarding the building of the tabernacle required both men and women to contribute: "And Moses spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying, Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart... And every wise hearted among you shall come, and make all that the LORD hath commanded; The tabernacle, his tent, and his covering... The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses" (Exod. 35:4-11, 29). The inclusion of everyone and the encouragement of each to donate as his heart prompted them made the project something special—it was not the tabernacle of a selected few, of an elite class or wealthy few, but the tabernacle of the people.

Personnel

"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation." (Num. 18:21). While the tribe of Levi (the priests—Deut. 21:5) was given the task of serving the tabernacle, the high priest was the only one who was allowed to offer the sacrifices: "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people" (Heb. 9:6-7).

Thus there are many lessons that may be learnt from the tabernacle: its construction involved all the people, it was the means by which the nation of Israel communicated with God, God's instructions required attention to detail and their communication with God was via the high priest.■

WHO NEEDETH NOT DAILY

“Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this He did once, when He offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:27)

One purpose of Hebrews 7:27 is to contrast Jesus’ sacrifice with the sacrifices made by the High Priest under the Law Covenant. The contrast is based on the fact that, during His time on earth, Jesus was a High Priest, not of the tabernacle Israel was commanded to build and in which they were required to perform many ceremonies, but of a spiritual tabernacle: *“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* (Heb. 9:11-14).

The High Priest

The contrast is manifest when the characteristics and sacrifices offered by the High Priest are compared with Jesus’ characteristics and sacrifice.

The difference in the characteristics of the two High Priests is stated in Hebrews 7:28: *“For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity...”*. In other words, the High Priests of the tabernacle that Moses pitched, in accordance with the Law Covenant, were human beings, and were not able to completely escape the imperfections of human nature. The first High Priest was Aaron, Moses’ brother: *“And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that He may minister unto me in the priest’s office...”* (Exod. 28:1). Aaron was imperfect—a sinner—because He descended from Adam.

However Jesus *“...came down from heaven...”* (John 6:38), and consequently He was not tainted with any weaknesses inherited from Adam, notwithstanding that, during His time on earth, Jesus was flesh and bones just as all other human beings, as Hebrews 7:26 declares: *“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”*.

The sacrifices

The ministry of the high priest has always included offering sacrifices for the people: *“And Moses said,*

This is the thing which the LORD commanded that ye should do: and the glory of the LORD shall appear unto you. And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself, and for the people: and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them; as the LORD commanded. Aaron therefore went unto the altar...” (Lev. 9:6-8).

Before the high priest offered sacrifices for the people He was required to offer a sacrifice for himself: *“And He shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer **his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself**, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house, And He shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation”* (Lev. 16:5-7).

The requirement for Aaron to firstly make an atonement for himself and his house (his sons) is emphasised by it being repeated in Leviticus 16:11-15: *“And Aaron shall bring the **bullock** of the sin offering, which is **for himself**, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself... Then shall He kill the **goat** of the sin offering, that is **for the people**, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as He did with the blood of the bullock...”* (Lev. 16:11-15)

Hence there is a contrast between the sacrifices of the High Priests: Aaron, being imperfect—having infirmity—had to firstly offer a sacrifice for himself, whereas Jesus did not have infirmity and therefore did not need to offer sacrifice first for himself.

Repetition

Another factor that contrasts the sacrifices offered by the Israelites in their tabernacle and the sacrifice of Jesus was that the sacrifices offered under the Law Covenant had to be repeated every year: *“And this shall be a **statute for ever** unto you: that in **the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month...** on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, **by a statute for ever**. And the priest, whom He shall anoint, and whom He shall consecrate to minister in the priest’s*

office **in his father's stead**, shall make the atonement... And He shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, and He shall make an atonement for the tabernacle of the congregation, and for the altar, and He shall make an atonement for the priests, and for all the people of the congregation. And this shall be an **everlasting statute unto you**, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins **once a year**. And He did as the LORD commanded Moses" (Lev. 16:29-34). The requirement was a statute (a law, a binding requirement) for ever, it being made clear that after Aaron's death, his successor, whom He had anointed, was to continue the practices.

Nevertheless, in spite of such sacrifices being offered, they did not eradicate the sinful nature Israel inherited from their human ancestors: "*For the law having a shadow of good things to come... can never with those sacrifices which they offered **year by year** continually make the comers thereunto perfect... But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins **every year**. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins*" (Heb. 10:1-4).

Thus the sacrifices God required to be offered under the Law Covenant had two critical aspects: firstly the high priest had to offer a sacrifice for himself (because He had infirmity), followed by another sacrifice for the people, and secondly the sacrifices had to be repeated every year.

Hence the contrast between the sacrifices that had to be offered in the tabernacle and the sacrifice of Jesus is evident—firstly because Jesus did not need to offer a sacrifice first for His own sins (because He did not have any sin—"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:21-22))—and secondly because His sacrifice did not require repetition. Romans 5:18 explains why Jesus had to die only once: "*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life*".

Symbolism

Romans 15:4 reads: "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*". It seems reasonable to regard the writings that comprise the Old Testament as being some of the "*things written aforetime*", and therefore they have been written for the Christian's learning.

The instructions to the nation of Israel regarding their obligations under the Law Covenant are complex and extensive, comprising almost the whole of the book

of Leviticus, which ends with the words "*these are the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai*" (Lev. 27:34)—as well as substantial portions of the latter part of the book of Exodus and the book of Deuteronomy: "*Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them... Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you*" (Deut. 4:1-2). Thus it is not surprising the Lord's people have studied the requirements of the Law Covenant and wondered just what benefit a knowledge of them provides to the church, and especially since "*...Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*" (Rom. 10:4).

Further, while one purpose of the Law Covenant was to offset to some extent the wiles of the flesh for fleshly Israel—"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19)—its grand purpose was to point to the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ: "*... the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*" (Gal. 3:24).

Thus it is not surprising that several expositors have attributed meanings to each of the facets of the tabernacle, and credited them with being symbols. In that vein it is not surprising the bullock and the goats have been ascribed meanings which illustrate the Christian's walk.

It is not the intent of these columns to denigrate nor dispute the symbolic meaning ascribed to any element of the Law Covenant arrangement; rather it is acknowledged that it is the Lord who provides insight into the secrets of His word: "*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 the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 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).

Whatever meaning is ascribed to any element of the sacrifices required under the Law Covenant, the principal reason for the Old Testament record is that it foreshadowed Jesus Christ's sacrifice which gives mankind hope of eternal life. ■

UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

The promise recorded in Isaiah 9:6 is not only that Israel would be given a child, but that that child would be a son, as God promised Abram: *"And He (God) said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son..."* (Gen. 18:10).

A son was necessary to perpetuate the family name: *"Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar... for He said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and He called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place"* (2 Sam. 18:18).

The importance of a son is further illustrated by the case of Zelophehad. Zelophehad did not have a son but He had daughters. However his daughters were not entitled to any inheritance so they made a special plea to Moses: *"Then came the daughters of Zelophehad... And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation... Our father died in the wilderness... and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because He hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father. And Moses brought their cause before the LORD. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren..."* (Num. 27:1-7). (The Hebrew for "brethren" means a brother; Gen. 4:2). When Israel entered the promised land Joshua complied with the Lord's direction: *"Therefore according to the commandment of the LORD He (Joshua) gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father... because the daughters of Manasseh had an inheritance among his sons..."* (Joshua 17:3-6). **Thus a son was a precious progeny.**

Further, if there was more than one son the first born son had priority: *"If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when He maketh his sons to inherit that which He hath, that He may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But He shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn... for... the right of the firstborn is his"* (Deut. 21:15-17).

The pre-eminence of the firstborn is reflected also in Joseph's objection to Jacob blessing Ephraim before Manasseh, Manasseh being the firstborn: *"And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim... He held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it... his younger brother shall be greater than he..."* (Gen. 48:17-19).

Only son

The importance and esteem given to the firstborn son emphasizes Abraham's dedication: he was prepared to kill Isaac as a sacrifice—the son of his old age (Gen. 21:2), Isaac was regarded as his "only son" (Gen. 22:12, 16), God had promised Abraham that his seed would be fruitful (Gen. 15:5) and that it was through his seed that all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 22:18).

Jesus the only begotten son

All of those features apply to Jesus:

- Jesus was *"a sacrifice to God"* (Eph. 5:2);
- Jesus was God's only son: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16);
- Jesus was God's first born son, indeed, in the spiritual realm He was *"the firstborn of every creature: that in all things He might have the preeminence"* (Col. 1:18), and when He came to earth: *"Then Joseph... took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and He called his name JESUS"* (Matt. 1:24-25);
- Jesus is God's heir: *"God... hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things"* (Heb. 1:1-2).■

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