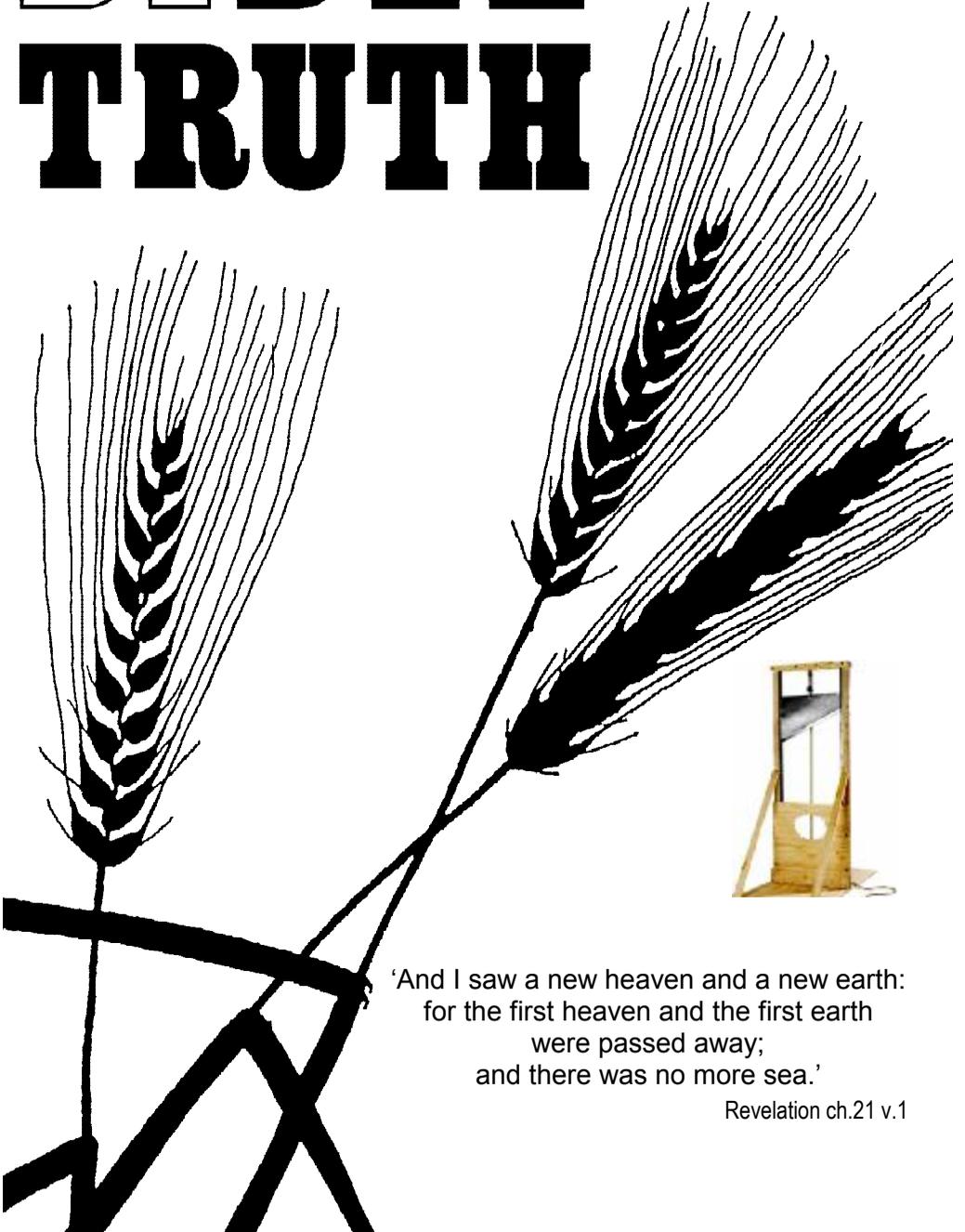


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'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth:
for the first heaven and the first earth
were passed away;
and there was no more sea.'

Revelation ch.21 v.1

THE DANGERS OF NEGLECTING PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY

A devotional article by Pastor John Willans BD, Dip.Th.

The story goes that during the years of the Great Depression in America there was a foolish old farmer who tried to save money by feeding his mule on sawdust. He felt his mule was costing him far too much in oats, so he decided to mix a little sawdust in with its feed. This went on for a week without any apparent ill effects on the animal. As time went on the farmer continued to reduce the amount of oats and increase the sawdust. The mule didn't seem to notice the gradual change, so the farmer thought things were fine, that is until one morning he found his mule dead.

Every so often I come across Christians who thought that they could maintain their relationship with God without feeding themselves spiritually. With the pressures of life they had become 'time poor' meaning something time wise 'had to give'. They looked around at what they could cut back on and thought that their Christianity and their relationship with the One who suffered for them was costing them too much time. They felt it took too much time to go to Communion regularly, to read their Bible and pray and far too costly time wise to be in a house group or Bible study group. Gradually, bit by bit they reduced the amount of time they spent on these Godly pursuits. At first there didn't seem to be any adverse effects and so they reduced their 'time with God' even further. Still there appeared to be little change, until suddenly without warning, the whole spiritual edifice of their life came tumbling down and they found themselves desolate, alone, empty and in spiritual peril.

Without warning, they found themselves besieged by all sorts of different problems. These problems manifested themselves in a variety of ways such as in relationship issues, temptations, worries, a lack of peace, an inability to cope with the pressures of life and so on. Even old problems they had sorted out long ago returned with a vengeance. They noticed a change to their personality at an emotional and psychological level and they had a profound sense of being remote and distant from God. Owing to their 'starvation diet'

they had left themselves spiritually defenceless and being emotionally, psychologically and spiritually exhausted they were left in no condition or state of mind to face these troubles.

In Ephesians ch.6 vv 10-18 St Paul gave the chilling warning to every Christian that unless a Christian ACTIVELY works at his spiritual life, he will become spiritually defenceless against the powers of darkness. He warned that in this life ‘... we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against ... spiritual wickedness in high places ..’. The primary location of this battle is in a person’s heart and mind.

Repeatedly, scripture states that the human race is set in the midst of a spiritual war and warns that there are spiritual forces at work attempting to influence people’s hearts and minds towards darkness and despair. The only way to counteract these dark influences and keep these foes at bay is to actively take up the whole armour of God so ‘that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day’, (See Ephesians ch.6 v.13). Taking up the whole armoury of God means using everything God has given us for our protection and growth such as Holy Communion, Bible reading, praying and having regular fellowship with other Christians.

When people turn to Christ and set their heart on fire with love for Him, they need to keep on ‘feeding the fire’ or it will go out. Every prayer time, and every Bible reading time, every Church attendance and fellowship time is like a piece of coal or wood being put on this fire to stop it going out. A person doesn’t just become a Christian, as though it was some one off event, they have to ACTIVELY REMAIN ONE, constantly feeding the fire of love and faith with spiritual logs and coals.

The individual Christian is sometimes likened to a ‘fortress’ in the desert. When that Christian spends regular quality time with God such as a daily prayer time, the defences are well maintained, the weapons are oiled and polished, the walls are high, the gate is up and all is well. The danger comes when an individual thinks ‘oh this is too time consuming’, the walls become neglected, gaps develop, the gate falls down and before they know it their spiritual fortress is all but destroyed. The frightening thing is that such neglect actually invites ‘attack’. As 1 Peter ch.5 vv 8-9 warns,

‘Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, ...’.

Moreover, like the mule and the sawdust, this spiritual neglect may be so gradual it can go unnoticed until something major happens.

Scripture teaches that making time for God is not ‘an added extra’ to our life, it is a profound necessity. People are not saving time by neglecting their spiritual life, quite the reverse; it is an invitation to all sorts of problems which may take months or years of effort to resolve if indeed they can be at all. The old phrase ‘A stitch in time saves nine’ truly has a spiritual application. Making time for our relationship with God is the most important thing we do, it is the deciding factor as to who has God in their life and who has not.
