

January 14, 2019

Dear Members, Co-Workers and Friends,

"Expect the unexpected" is a saying commonly used as preparation advice for unpredictable circumstances and situations. Traveling to new places or beginning a new commitment in life that disrupts our current patterns are examples of events for which we might apply such advice. By expecting the unexpected, we can theoretically prepare ourselves to adapt when we need to change direction at short notice.

However, in this age, applying the tenet of expecting the unexpected is exercised less and less. When life is going along according to normal routine without any plans for change or impending threat of disruption, are we in a position where we can adapt to the unexpected when we don't expect it?

Today, an increasing amount of action is based upon decisions rooted in predictability. The recent advent of artificial intelligence inherently involves predictability. From automobiles that can predict when a car in front of it is slowing down, to suggestions of what videos we might want to watch next, information about expected results in controlled contexts drive decisions that affect our lives. Surprisingly, a lot of this actually works! To an increasing degree, many of the circumstances in our lives are proving to be predictable. But not everything can be predictable!

The problem with the effectiveness of predictability is that it creates a false sense of security. If we can trust that automobiles will drive themselves safely, we don't have to dedicate any effort thinking about driving ourselves, which might seem great. However, when we rely on expected behavior in so much of our lives; when we rely on the rules being followed, we leave ourselves exposed to the risk of the unexpected happening when the rules of behavior are not adhered to.

We know from the teachings of the Bible that most in the world will be caught off-guard when certain disaster takes place on the earth. "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, also compare Matthew 24:43-44, Luke 21:34, Revelation 3:3). The pride of man in our present society has lulled such a delusional slumber that it is generally believed that problems can be predicted and prevented without the help, or even existence, of God. The Bible explains that this is foolishness. We know that the knowledge of man himself is diminutive in comparison with the glorious knowledge and power of God. Mankind cannot possibly predict the terrible ways that institutions and nations will collapse. As we read, destruction will be sudden.

The thing that's most shocking about the fact that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night is that *it is not a secret!* The warnings written in this letter come from the Bible, which has been printed billions of times and been made available to people all over the world. The teachings have been presented for thousands of years, by millions of people. Yet, as we can see, the completeness of the warning to expect the unexpected will not be understood by most. What we know and can expect with all certainty, is that the events that Jesus Christ describes in Matthew 24 about the beginning of sorrows and the tribulation will absolutely take place. Even though the signs of the times clearly indicate that Christ's return cannot be far off, we don't know yet—and cannot predict with specificity—exactly how and when the details of those events described in Matthew 24 will become manifest. Those details are the ones that affect our lives most directly. Tragic as it may seem, there is absolutely nothing that anyone can do to prevent doom and destruction prophesied in the Bible

from taking place. The only thing that anyone can do is prepare for it.

Preparation for the unexpected can take many forms. The greatest risk is to prepare in the wrong way. As humans, that means falling back on the pride of expectation, and making preparations that involve events occurring in a predictable way. Such preparation will be doomed to failure, because it places trust in man's abilities, rather than God's protection. Contingency plans for hiding out in remote locations and building up stockpiles might preserve physical life in the short term, but can do nothing in the long term. We remember, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" (Luke 9:24-25). Therefore, the most effective preparation involves acknowledging that God is in control, and preparing ourselves spiritually by drawing close to Him.

Drawing close to God involves dedicating our time, energy, hearts, and minds to living His Way. As simple as it sounds, taking this approach is our only hope for protection. In expecting the unexpected to take place, putting our faith in God to see us through those unpredictable circumstances provides us with relief from having to rely upon ourselves for protection. There's no possible way that we can protect ourselves without His help. We have to remember that while our situations in life might not be under our direct control, they are under God's control. Because of that, we can trust in Him to lead us through the most impossible circumstances when we follow Him above all else.

As God's children, we have a responsibility to take action right now that will transform our lives to please God so we can be found pleasing in His sight. We are to be found doing the Work of God when Jesus Christ returns. This involves continually learning about the Truth and applying what we learn. Becoming righteous, which is the goal of all Christians, takes practice. And practice requires increasing in our knowledge and understanding of the Truth.

As you are undoubtedly aware, the *Church of the Eternal God* and its international affiliates in Canada, the U.K., and Germany work tirelessly to provide you with the raw materials that you need to transform your life and draw near to God. We encourage you to take advantage of it! We share this knowledge with you because we know that you need it for your own protection. The Word of God and the understanding of it provides you with a double-edged sword to fight the spiritual fight and emerge victoriously. By using the materials that we produce, and by supporting the Work of the Church through your prayers, tithes, and offerings, you take an active role in preserving your eternal life, protecting yourself against the unexpected, and providing others with the means to do the same.

In Christ's Service,



Eric Rank