

## *Christ in Prophecy*

### **Interview 64: Screwtape Letters Commentary, Part 2**

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#### **Opening**

*Tim Moore:* Welcome to Christ in Prophecy. Last week, we engaged in an edifying dialog with Mondo Gonzales of Prophecy Watchers about the Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis' book offering insights into the insidious and incessant nature of spiritual warfare. In these last days Satan is desperate to mislead the masses and undermine the effectiveness of our witness for Christ. Until Jesus calls us home we must be vigilant to submit to God and resist the devil, knowing that our infernal adversary prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Here now is Nathan Jones to jump back into our conversation.

#### **Interview with Mondo Gonzales**

*Nathan Jones:* The one letter that stuck with me my whole life is Letter number 17. If we're ready, I'd like to dive into one of these because I think we'll pull it up here. But the main thought in this was greed through gluttony. He's talking about the patient's mother. Hey, you know, you need to focus on gluttony. And of course, our first thought about gluttony is, well, it's got to be overeating. But this is his advice. If I can read this real quickly it says, "The woman is in what may be called the "All-I-want" state of mind. All she wants is a cup of tea properly made, or an egg properly boiled, or a slice of bread properly toasted. But she never finds any servant or any friend who can do these simple things "properly"— because her "properly" conceals an insatiable demand for the exact, and almost impossible, palatal pleasures which she imagines she remembers from the past; a past described by her as "the days when you could get good servants" but known to us as the days when her senses were more easily pleased and she had pleasures of other kinds which made her less dependent on those of the table." Oh, my mind blew, it's like gluttony, the sin of gluttony isn't overeating, it's turning food into an idol. And this is the brilliance of C.S. Lewis, is that he had identifies our sins. He breaks the barriers of what we think of it, and he shows you how you can use these little things like, oh, I'm not overeating, I'm obsessed with how I eat and how it distracts us from God.

*Tim Moore:* Or any other aspect of our nature. We can obsess about other things.

*Mondo Gonzales:* Oh, letter after letter.

*Tim Moore:* Gluttony is not just about food, but about other aspects of life.

*Nathan Jones:* Excellent point.

*Mondo Gonzales:* One of the ways that I chased down all the phrases of gluttony in the Bible, in this particular letter. So maybe I'll take a moment to describe. So the particular study guide, what I did is I made it to hand out to people, so I have a front and back. And so I start

out with some themes. I give a synopsis of the letter and then I talk about theological themes. And so I'll take something like gluttony here. This is a theological theme. And so I have a paragraph, hey, let's chase this down in the Bible, here is all the verses in the Bible. And then I give a section of the handout of some of the vocabulary. And then I have I'll have between 20 and 30 study questions that people can use all with Scripture, people looking up Scripture. But in this particular situation, you look up gluttony and gluttony does appear in the Bible it's talked a lot about two ways. One is quantity. This is where we often think of, hey, I ate too much, my quantity. But what Lewis brings out here, he doesn't deny gluttony of quantity, the Bible speaks a lot about it. But he talks about, beautifully, more than anything else is a gluttony of quality, quantity and quality. And so if you look at it, he's like, let's talk about, hey, guys, everybody knows in one sense, the quantity issue. That's normally how we think. Let's talk about the gluttony of delicacy. That's the word that he uses in the letters. And it's about this quality. It's like she's over here having this little piece of toast and she's like, see, I'm not a glutton. And he goes, oh, no. And Screwtape is having a great time saying, continue to convince her that she's not a glutton when in reality she's a glutton of what? Of delicacy, of quality, that nothing can be done right. And she becomes a tyrant to having her particular tastes satisfied. And she doesn't realize that she's fallen into a different area of gluttony.

**Tim Moore:** And not only gluttony, but we could say that being one of the seven deadly sins that used to be talked about and preached about and is not anymore. Also, she could be very proud of the fact that she's not being gluttonous. This is all I want. And I have some of the proudest people I've known would deny that they had any pride whatsoever, and they were proud of not being proud. And so there is a danger that we can get into even if you say, look at me, I'm not gluttonous. Well, okay, then you're blending over into pride.

**Mondo Gonzales:** This is where I think as we go through, especially teaching, this is such a great if I just encourage everybody get, study to teach this because and one of the things that we talk about all the time was be careful, because if you go this way, Screwtape is going to come after you. But if you go, oh, fine, I'll go this way, ooh, I'll get you over here. So the word that I use often and we should as spiritual Christians, is the word balance.

**Tim Moore:** Oh, I love that.

**Mondo Gonzales:** It's spiritual balance. And that's really what I saw in the goal of "The Screwtape Letters" was to find that place where we can't be tempted this way. Again, being humble. Oh, look at how humble I am. Make him proud of his humility. So, okay, let's stay balanced.

**Tim Moore:** It's a straight and narrow path. And if you veer off the path one way or the other, you are erring into sin. You know, I found again the timelessness of Lewis to this moment. He talks about how we used to be, me and human kind prone to accept provable reason. But now people don't believe in anything and their minds are so muddled. And I would dare say that our own media culture today has got people so wrapped in knots that they don't know what to believe. There's no one that they trust in. There's nothing. There's not even the Bible that universally is trusted, even in this supposedly Christian culture. And we are just muddled and confused.

**Mondo Gonzales:** That's a great word, the word muddled, because it's one of those we don't use to use the word muddle, so I have it in the vocabulary section. But so right here in Letter 1. I mean, if you jump into Letter 1 again, he was writing in 1941 and he really wrote these probably at the end of '40, but it got published in '41. So you can tell when he's writing it. But he is such a prophet. And if you look like, for example, his book, "Abolition of Man," talking about education and other things, he's writing at this time. But because he's a thinker, he's saying, let's take this particular thinking all the way to its end and see what happens. In the same way he does this in the "Screwtape Letters." He says, let's take this thought, and we call him prophetic today but he was such a great thinker, he was ahead of his time. And so here in Letter 1, he talks about reasoning and argument versus jargon.

**Tim Moore:** Yes.

**Mondo Gonzales:** And he says, let's fill their mind with words. Let's not ask him whether it's true or false.

**Tim Moore:** Yes.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Let's say whether it's pragmatic or productive.

**Tim Moore:** Academic.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Academic, yes.

**Tim Moore:** But never is it true?

**Mondo Gonzales:** Correct.

**Tim Moore:** And so many of the ideologies that are being spouted on college campuses today and in our national media markets, they have all the jargon, but they are full of air. They're not true.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Yep.

**Tim Moore:** And we've lost the ability to even discern truth as a culture.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Distraction. The whole idea today, and he talks about social justice, that's a whole other topic which is really way ahead of his mind. But when you get into the woke thinking today, these are all words, these are the word progressive. He talks about that. This is progressive. Well, isn't that a good thing? Don't we want to progress? And so he says, fill their mind with these words that end up distracting them from the real thinking argument.

**Tim Moore:** The real thinking argument.

**Nathan Jones:** Some of these letters are just absolutely amazing. Because each sin leads to bigger and bigger sins. And so as he changes strategy and the man counters it, like for instance Letter number nine, what is love? And Lewis writes, or I should say Screwtape writes "all his talk about love must be a disguise for something else. He must have some real motive for creating them and taking so much trouble about him." In other words, why should God love us? And so he starts pushing, well, asceticism. In other words, compared to love that well, Christians response to that means that you have do all this stuff to gain God's love and distract

people from accepting God's love by grace. And instead, well, it's got to be a works thing, something I earn.

**Tim Moore:** Yeah. You know what? I agree that he was before his time. But he used a phrase that stuck in my mind, he said that quoting or using Screwtape to make this point. He said, "Humans are amphibians. Yeah, half human and or half spirit and half animal. And who as spirits belong to the eternal world, but as animals belong to the temporal world." And I thought, boy, that really gets it. And then he gave a tremendous insight on past, present and future, which we are kind of constrained to in this realm. And yet he touched on just a beautiful understanding of how God is beyond all of that. Time has no meaning to God because He's not constrained to it. He says he lives in a perpetual now.

**Nathan Jones:** Yeah, the unbounded now.

**Tim Moore:** Boy that doesn't fit into my three pound brain, Mondo, so how have you grappled with that concept?

**Mondo Gonzales:** So this appears in Letter 15, and Letter 27. And so what I do is he oftentimes, Lewis will say one of the early human writers, Screwtape is saying this, Screwtape, one of the early human writers got this, and he's so I'm like, well, who is this? And so I chased it down. And there's an Italian philosopher, theologian, both, yes, know, fifth century, 470-480 around there, and so I give all the backgrounds. I give the reference his "Consolation of Philosophy" his book. But Boethius was the one who started this idea of this thinking. And so, again, Lewis is brilliant. You know he's read this. So he's bringing this thinking, this philosophy and this very deep thinking on time in, and he writes through Screwtape. And in this particular, the Letter 15 the Christian has to get this. Has to get this because if they do they won't fall to the temptation. And in the letter was the idea of anxiety, the fear of the future. Getting stuck in the past. As it relates to past, present and future and the unbounded now, the way that God sees things. One of the things that I bring up in there is we know that there's a couple of reference in Scripture where God says the One who is, and who was, and who is to come. Right. But we also see when He appears to Moses, what's His name? He's the Great I AM. He's not the great I was. He's not the great I will be, even though I AM has this idea of God exists in the unbounded now. He's above time all together, so He sees everything at once. Well, we don't. We're in time. And so if we get that, and we see that we connect with God, that even right now in the present, the importance of the present and that we connect with God in the present, that we won't get stuck in the past, and we won't fear the future. And so Christians often do this, anxiety is a huge deal today.

**Nathan Jones:** Yes, very much.

**Mondo Gonzales:** And some of it, again, there's a lot of reasons for it. But if we get into the "Screwtape Letters" and we see and we get to the Scripture truth, then we will know Philippians 4:6-7, you know, be anxious for what? For nothing. "But through prayer, and supplication, make your request." And what? "The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard you." So we take what Screwtape is doing, and we know the devil loves to keep us in bondage, to fear and anxiety. And then what do we do? We recognize it. Screwtape is talking about it,

and we bring the scripture in Philippians 4:6-7, and we say, hey, here's the solution. Here's how to overcome these temptations that will come.

**Nathan Jones:** I get this a lot from young men. You hear from mothers who are lamenting that their young sons, about 20 or so, have left the faith. And you always say it's because of a girl, isn't it? And they're like, yes, a girl is it. In Letter 20, he talks about eternal beauty and he makes a comparison between the terrestrial Venus, and the infernal Venus.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Oh, yeah.

**Nathan Jones:** Can you tell us what those are, and how Satan uses those to pull people off the Christian path.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Yes. So we can only barely scratch it because in this letter, in Letters 18, 17 was about gluttony, and 18 is about love. The patient gets a girlfriend or he gets a very godly girlfriend. In 19, 18 and 19 is all about love and feelings of love. And then he comes at 20, says, well, hey, let's corrupt him. Let's bring him to as a man into, again every man has it's every man's battle, right? We see this, it's just human nature. So Letter 20 is talking about the ways in which a godly woman, Screwtape is saying we need to keep him away from this woman, and let's appeal to his senses through the terrestrial Venus. And so these are phrases that appear in Lewis's later book, "The Four Loves" he talks about Venus. And again, he's using Greek and Roman goddesses in to speak his words because he that's just his world. So he talks about the two women, the one that would be, again, God would use that he would want you to marry. He goes, "we need to do everything we can to corrupt him and get him to be drawn to the earthly one that will destroy his soul." It's like the Proverbs 6, where you have the good woman and then the harlot woman. And so I bring up all those scriptures to say, again, this is very scriptural. How do we do it? And not only that, I have three daughters. So I talked about the terrestrial man. And so I bring this up and I say it's not just about a woman, but how do we help our daughters as well to seek godly men?

**Nathan Jones:** Because Screwtape says, "we are more and more directing the desires of men to something which does not exist, making the role of the eye and sexuality more, and more important at the same time, making its demands more and more impossible" And we live in such a sex crazed time period that we've created, and especially through pornography, this ideal people that nobody ever lives up to, and it ruins the relationship we have.

**Mondo Gonzales:** We could spend 20 minutes just unpacking that.

**Tim Moore:** You know, I find it, Lewis touched on this reality, Satan doesn't create anything. Only God creates. Satan corrupts and he twists. We use the example of God gave the rainbow as a demonstration of his covenant with mankind to never again flood the earth. And Satan has corrupted the rainbow to stand for something abominable today. And so he always corrupts. But Lewis says this from the mouth of Screwtape talking about God. He says "he has filled the world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long without his, God minding in the least sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be twisted before it is of any use to us. We fight under cruel disadvantages." Yeah, you think? "He says nothing is naturally on our side" And boy, what an insight that is.

God has made everything good for our enjoyment so that we return glory and worship to Him, and yet Satan twist all these good things to evil design.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Yeah, in Letter 13 he quotes, Screwtape is quoting Scripture now, just like we know, right, Matthew 4 Satan is quoting Scripture to Jesus. And so again, make all these parallels and say it's no surprise. But Psalm 16:11 is "at his right hand, are pleasures forevermore." And so what Lewis also, which Lewis was very much again a philosopher at heart and so he would talk about, hey, look, let's talk about the pleasures of God's world. That again, Satan can't create anything, everything is to be corrupted for it to be used. And so the Letter 13 is talking about pleasures, and it appears over and over in the passage. But he talks about he says everything that is, I've tried to think of the phraseology, it must be twisted, but it's twisted in time, and in ways, and in degrees. And so you think, okay, let's, I'll give you an example. Let's take how does Satan corrupt pleasure? Let's take sex as an example meant for a marriage, right? Marriage only. So in a time factor, Satan seeking to bring you in before marriage, outside of marriage, whatever. What about ways? Well, he talks about an apples is very sweet. It should be enjoyed. But what if it's stolen? That's a way that it's being corrupted. Degrees. You take okay, maybe you like a glass of wine. Maybe you enjoy that. Well, in degrees well if you drink too much, now you've corrupted it. And so something that was meant to be wonderful as a gift is corrupted in ways, times and degrees. And you're like, man, this is great stuff that Lewis is bringing out. But at the end of the day, 1 Timothy 6:17, God has given us all things, what? To richly enjoy. He's given us this world to enjoy. We shouldn't be ashamed of that. But it's to be done in holiness.

**Nathan Jones:** Yes, and that's why I love Letter 18 when he deals with the act of marriage, he says "They regard the intention of loyalty to a partnership for mutual help, for the preservation of chastity, and for the transmission of life as something lower than the storm of emotion." I mean, in the end times here we're seeing a divorce rate skyrocket because people think it's that exciting love, that premarital sex, that passion and not the transcendent covenant relation that God's created with us, that we break with Him all the time because we spiritually are committing adultery. He says, "The truth is, whenever a man lies with the woman, there whether they like it or not, a transcendental relationship is set up between them, which must be eternally enjoyed and eternally endured." And it's interesting how Lewis sees that Satan exists to try to break the covenant relationship that God had with Israel. And now God has with the Church, and each of us individually. And Satan knows how to do it by putting water into the cracks of rocks, you know how it freezes, it breaks the rocks. That's how he does that with temptation.

**Mondo Gonzales:** There's a phrase that often comes up, and there is scripture too, its 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We walk by faith, not by sight." And one of the ways the meaning of that is it gets broad, it's not just by visible, but we walk by faith not by our senses. And in many ways that probably is one of the theme passages in the whole study guide in the book, because what you do see is Satan, as you mentioned, Screwtape trying to get us to walk by emotion. Emotion is probably one of the biggest factors in ruining all of us. Whatever those emotions, it could be anger, again it could be lust, it could be whatever you name it. But it's taking every thought captive, as we know the spiritual battle starts in the mind. We take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. And as we train ourselves, and we get used to, we fill our minds with

Scripture. Right? Psalm 119, "I've hidden your word in my heart so I wouldn't sin." So these are all things that as we fill our minds of Scripture, we will be able to be sensitive to when we see the temptation or the emotion or whatever, or the crafty thought, we're like, whoa, whoa, whoa. And my poor daughters throughout life, I would say, well, you know, Screwtape would be very happy with you right now because of this, this and this.

**Tim Moore:** Oh, your poor daughters, yes. Well, you know, I think that you make a good point even on how we are mindful of what the devil is trying to do. But I'll use an airplane analogy for just a minute. Most of the time we don't fall off suddenly. That happens occasionally. Most time it's a slow drift. So in airplane lingo, we don't usually get off course by making a dramatic change suddenly, and now where are we headed? It's a very slow turn that is almost imperceptible at first until you're going in the wrong direction. And so this straight and narrow path, we can flee from it, which is why I think the writer of Hebrews says we have to keep assembling together. We have to stay in relationship with other believers who can help us identify our blind spots and say, "Hey, brother, you're starting to veer and I love you too much to let that happen," and can speak into our lives. Because in Letter 12, Screwtape says this, "The safest road to hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope, soft underfoot without sudden turnings, without milestones without signpost." And I would declare without hope. And that's where you end up. That's the trajectory someone gets on with just these slow, gentle turnings off that straight and narrow path.

**Mondo Gonzales:** You know and that's one of the most famous quotes of "The Screwtape Letters," and it's so good because we, you know, Matthew 7 talks about the broad road and the narrow road, and we understand that. The narrow road is difficult. And so but right before that, he says, you tempters you want to report spectacular sins, that's because you guys are young, you're immature, he said but murder is no better than gambling, if gambling will do the trick. And so he and so what do we see? We see in 2 Corinthians 11 that Satan appears as angel of light. But not only that but in 14 and 15, he says, "Is it no surprise that his servants will appear as ministers of righteousness?" So I always will test people, would Satan ever encourage you to be righteous? The answer is yes. If he can win your soul, the ultimate goal is your soul. But if he can encourage you to be righteous and self-righteous and be a Pharisee, right?

**Nathan Jones:** Any toppling of Christianity.

**Mondo Gonzales:** He talks about that appears over, and over, and he can win you, he'll absolutely encourage you to be righteous because he wants you on that road that ends in destruction.

**Tim Moore:** Some of the hardest people to witness to are those who say, I'm a good person. Yeah you are, but you're going to Hell, because good persons don't get into Heaven, only those who are forgiven by the blood of Christ because we have a sin nature. I did love this, speaking to our contemporary moment, Screwtape also said that "God, He the enemy, as he describes it, will not be used as a convenience. No, he will not. Many nations who think they can revive the faith in order to make a good society might just as well think they can use the stairs of Heaven as a shortcut to the nearest pharmacy." In other words, I think today, in this moment in our human history, in our American history, we have people who are advocating for Christian faith, not for the sake of saving souls and bringing men and women into the eternal kingdom of God,

but so that we can fix our nation and return to some kind of a sense of order. And that's kind of backwards.

**Mondo Gonzales:** You know, this is one of those ones I remember writing the study guide for this Letter 23, and this is where Lewis brings up using Christianity as a means to an end. And he talks about even for social justice. Now, here we are, I mean, you're like, wow, this could not be any more appropriate than the whole Woke Movement, and the churches and the seminaries saying that for you to be a Christian, Christian is equal with social justice. And then you say, well, can you define that for me? And then we see the definition of we're like, whoa. But they would say Jesus would embrace this movement or this movement, and we've had a lot of movements lately without labeling them necessarily. But they have defined Christianity as a means to an end. And we go, whoa, whoa, whoa, the most important thing for us is, again, God will not be used. And people are trying to use Christianity to get their agenda, their movement, their political agenda, whatever it is. And we go no, Christianity essence is of the salvation of souls, not necessarily a social movement. Even though do we want to see people fed and we want justice? Yes, but let's define it. And when they start defining it we go, no, that's not biblical.

**Nathan Jones:** Well, it's interesting that the patient continuously thwarts Screwtape and Worm Wood's advances on him, and then Screwtape gets all mad because the enemy has given him either a Bible verse or directed, so it's not a one sided battle where they're fighting for the patient's life. The Lord on the other side is working with the Angels and Christians to bring him back. And that verse we read in Ephesians 6 about putting on the full armor of God. It seems, as the progression goes, is that the Lord continues to equip the patient with the full armor God. So what would you say is in our own lives, as we all of us are dealing with temptation, how do we fight this constant attack upon us?

**Mondo Gonzales:** So you brought up something and there's two things that I think that that brings up in the letters. One is Ephesians 6:12 living out, it's living out the armor. It's not so much okay, Lord I'm putting on the armor of truth today, and then I go out and lie. Well okay I'm not necessarily putting it on, I'm living it out. I'm putting on Christ. I'm living Christ. So if we go out and we're truthful, then Satan has less opportunity to trip us up. If we're going out living righteous, you know, through again, love of God. Faith, if we have faith, when the trials come, we're going to have less temptation, in all these things and we're going to have less failure. Okay, so that's one way. The other one is what you brought up in that is getting together, and the key thing in all this, one of the keys is accountability. If we do not surround ourselves, Proverbs 18:1, the one who isolates himself, rages against all sound wisdom. And I bring up that passage over and over because what Screwtape is trying to do is to get him to isolate himself, to not have good friends, choose your friends carefully, other things. But if we refuse accountability, then when I look and you say, "Hey, brother, I see this little speck in your eye." Yeah, you're going to go oh. So but if we come, what does the Scripture say, "iron sharpens iron." "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," Proverbs 27. So there's all these Scriptures that come to play, that if we are humble, Letter 14 is magnificent, if we're humble and we allow our brothers and sisters, husbands, wives to speak into our lives, we're going to go, thank you. You know, it hurts. It's hard. I need to recognize this truth. But pride says I don't want your counsel.

**Tim Moore:** Back to pride again. You know, without giving away the ending. Lewis ends the original "Screwtape Letters" with a very surprising outcome for the target. And yet it shouldn't be surprising for Christians. We have a sometimes a worldly perspective of death. In other words, death is not a defeat for us, it is the victory because it is only the passage to eternity. Death where is your sting? And so what do we have to look forward to in this life and beyond?

**Mondo Gonzales:** Yeah, I think one of the passage I bring up is Hebrews 2:14 and 15, where Satan is the one who peddles the fear of death that mankind is in bondage to. For a believer what did Paul say in Philippians 1? "To die is gain." It's far better for me to go and be Christ, but I'll stay here for you. But to die is gain. And so when you look at the end of "The Screwtape Letters" for a Christian, it's simply a transition. I mean, we immediately get to be in the presence of Lord, 2 Corinthians 5 right? To be absence of body in the presence of the Lord. So I think oftentimes Christians, we have got sucked into the world thinking that the worst thing that can happen to me is to die. When in reality we go, I want to go be with Jesus.

**Tim Moore:** Yeah, I can only celebrate when a saint goes home. I can mourn with the family for the time of separation, for their sakes. But for that brother or sister in Christ, they've gone home. They would not come back. Well, I think that Screwtape captures one more reality that kind of sums all of the contrast between Heaven and Hell up. He says, "We," talking about the demonic realm, "want cattle that can finally become food. He, God Almighty wants servants who can finally become sons." And so C.S. Lewis was so insightful on the human nature, I think the nature of the demonic realm, but really on the promise that awaits all of us who have put our faith in Jesus Christ. So you ask, why are we talking about C.S. Lewis for two episodes of a television program focused on Christ in Prophecy? Because all the promises of God for those who put their trust in Him are, yes, and Amen. We are in the eternal realm already by being united with God who is forever in the present now, and all that awaits us is the glory that is to come.

**Mondo Gonzales:** You know, as we approach the end of the age, we know that it's going to get more difficult, not easy. And so it's important to be equipped, to stand strong in the spiritual war that it's getting in. It's going to get more, and more intense, especially as we're ostracized by our community as the world changes and it becomes more evil, we know it's going to become its going to wax worse and worse. So this is one great way of equipping ourselves to say, am I prepared for this war that I'm already in, whether I acknowledge it or not, how equipped am I?

**Tim Moore:** Well, I think we all have to contend earnestly, which is something that's been a theme of ours in the past for the faith that was handed down to us. And we have to live looking forward to our Blessed Hope, not a concept but a person. Mondo, thank you so much for participating with us on these two episodes of Christ in Prophecy. I tell you what, I'm going to dive into your own study because rereading "The Screwtape Letters" has thrilled my heart again, just with the insight it offers and the prophetic voice that he utters into even our own contemporary age.

**Mondo Gonzales:** Again guys, it's been a pleasure.

**Tim Moore:** Godspeed. Thank you very much.

**End of Program**