

A Problem Resolved – (Or should be)

I use an extension for WordPress (plugin) called Subscribe2 that automatically sends e-mails of the posts written, when they are published. However, since I upgraded to version 2.7 of WordPress, the plugin has been sending the HTML e-mail version with the background image of the blog. That would not be so bad, except the background image is dark purple and the text is black.

It makes for really nice reading, but only if your vision is somewhere in the near UV or UV range.

I have been doing the proverbial banging my head against the wall trying to think of a solution that would work, and not break the blog. Since I am not a “script kiddie” or a PHP whiz, this took a bit of time.

What I figured was the plugin had to be picking up the <body> callout in the CSS file and utilizing the graphic and background color defined there. I figured this had to be the case since I have background images for the sidebar and post, and it never picks that image up. However, that image is the background for the <div> that wraps the content of the post page.

Hmmmmm. . .

Hence, the solution would have to lie in wrapping the entire blog template with a <div> and then removing the background color and graphic from the <body> of the HTML document and applying it to the <div>. Since I maintain a development and testing blog, I tried it. After all, if I trash the development blog it really is no big deal and I will simply wipe it out and start over. Apparently, it worked. This post is the first post with the reworked Template and CSS files.

Thus, if your e-mail of the post is unreadable, drop me a line and I will rework the solution. But, I think it will work as it did on the Dev. blog.

An Uncooperative Tool

Running and managing a blog is an interesting exercise in patience, particularly when that blog is in your own web space and you are solely responsible for all the management, housekeeping and troubleshooting of the problems that can occur when it is upgraded, features are added, etc.

Recently, I upgraded the software that runs the blog, turned all the added features back on, and tried to post. The posting part went well, but the e-mail notifications of the posts didn't occur like they were supposed to. After considerable troubleshooting, it was narrowed down to a server issue of indeterminate origin. The author of the feature (called a "plugin") that allows the automatic e-mails, had developed a workaround as my problem is not that uncommon. Apparently there are quite a few web hosts that have interesting server configurations.

For now, the problem is resolved and the e-mailer is working. Some of you will have received a "test post" notification. Kindly delete it. Hopefully, I will not have to go through this again, but I kind of think that is like hoping the sun won't rise tomorrow. But, for now, it's fixed.

Bugs

Sometimes, “Default” is really the only way to really make something work. Since I use WordPress, and it is “free” all the responsibility for making sure it works correctly falls upon my shoulders. I must do all the testing, all the modifications, and if I mess it up, then I have no one to blame but myself.

So it is with “permalinks” and changing them. I thought it would be somewhat better to change the permanent links to the articles to make them a bit more friendly (instead of just numbers), and instead, I found out that it rendered most of the blog inaccessible. I found “**404 – page not found**” errors on almost all the blog.

Sigh, grumble.

Convert back to “Default” link structure.

Guess I will bring it up to the authors and creators of WordPress and see what they say.

At least the blog is now accessible again.

Remember, nothing is ever actually “free.” Someone, somewhere, at some time, must bear the cost.

BTW, this goes for salvation too. It may be free for us (and it is), but it cost the Lord Jesus Christ beyond our understanding and comprehension.

Next time someone someone says something is “free,” kindly let them know that nothing is ever truly “free.”

Security

I have had to take a slight hiatus due to security concerns over this blog. I have a non-standard install and that doesn't help any at all in trying to secure things. However, in checking the normal security items, the blog seems pretty secure. Nonetheless, someone created some strange links to posts that I could not quite figure out what they were doing, or why.

So, hours were spent trying to learn everything I could about php hacks, SQL injections, and WordPress security issues. Hence, no articles were posted and little to no work was done on the rest of the websites. I would hate to think that I would have to create a virtual Fort Knox to simply publish on the web without constantly fighting intrusions. However, that is a sign of the world we live in. There are far too many people who delight in creating evil. After all, there is really no point in hacking a blog. There is no point in spreading spam everywhere either. Yet, individuals insist upon doing those very things.

Anyway, things should return to a more normal schedule this week.

Arrgh!!! – An Upgrade

This is one of those very rare times I actually use exclamation points.

Well, it was not the fun thing to do. However, according to the release notes the upgrade would fix a critical security flaw and various other issues. Okay. I guess I'd better do it

– and soon.

Should I mention that disasters always seem to happen at the most inopportune time? I performed the steps for an upgrade of the blog software. Went to upgrade the database and everything looked okay, except all the special characters (those beyond ASCII's 128 standard characters) were all strange when I looked at the front page of the blog. In short, it was not displaying UTF-8 encoding correctly.

Uh, not good. That means lots of work to correct the improper encoding after I log in.

I try (notice I said "try") to log in. It takes the username and password, and then the screen goes blank, that is, white with nothing displayed. The url shows that I am still on the login page. This is really not good. I try other pages, Nope – nothing. Nada. No dice. I now have no access to the Administration of the blog.

I hate this.

Try to troubleshoot. Dump the files. Reload. Rerun the upgrade. Nope – no fix.

Change the parameters for accessing the database in the configuration file. Does it connect – Yes, it connects because with invalid parameters it won't connect.

Okay, change the password, maybe it got scrambled during the upgrade. Okay, it changes, but still can't login.

Get into MySQL and use phpMyAdmin and check the database. It says the database has broken links in the indexed fields – not good.

By this time, due to reading, researching, and trying different things, it's now 0300 hrs Saturday morning, and I have to prepare for a presentation on Sunday.

Bye – it's broke.

I'm going to bed.

Get up at 0800 hrs. Try again. Read and research some more.

By now it is 1100 hrs, and I have gotten nowhere. I even tried rolling back the upgrade. No dice. Nothing works. By now I am worried that I may have to completely reload each and every post and page – plus all the comments. In prep for this I access phpMyAdmin and backup and download the database.

I also run the repair and optimize options on the database. It says everything is good.

Strange.

How can my database be good, yet not return back the calls by the php script in the blog software. And, why am I hanging on login?

Okay, try deleting unnecessary (certain plugin) tables in the database. Still no workee. Time to quit. Got too many other things to do. Will have to wait until Monday.

Monday Morning

Can't work on it now, other things pressing.

Finally start at about 1300 hrs. Have a thought – what if the problem lies in the way the database got upgraded? Like – maybe some of the plugin fields in the tables are causing the problem? Also, what if, since the database is already setup as UTF-8, the [define] statement in the configuration file is conflicting with the database setup? After all, all my UTF-8 encoded characters do not display correctly.

So I access phpMyAdmin again in the MySQL administration portion of the host control panel. The [Options] table has a LOT, and I mean a LOT of old plugin entries that were never

deleted when I deactivated and removed them.

Clean-up time.

I get it cleaned up and reset the software version number and database version to the pre-upgrade numbers.

Get back out and change the configuration file to remove the [define] statement.

Load all new and clean files for 2.5.1

Rerun the upgrade. Look at the front page of the blog. Hey, all my extended characters look normal.

Try to log in. It takes. The page title appears at the top of the browser screen and it very nicely says [Dashboard – WordPress].

Success. Thank the LORD!

So, what went wrong?

This one line:

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define('DB_CHARSET', 'utf8');
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This line created a conflict with the database setup and content and would hang the scripting software and not allow the characters to display correctly. It also wouldn't allow access to the admin functions of the blog.

How many hours consumed by this one little line?

About eight.

However, it wasn't all bad. I learned a lot in a hurry about MySQL database administration and phpMyAdmin. I also learned a lot about what makes WordPress tick.

I couldn't have posted on Saturday or Sunday anyway. Saturday

I was preparing for Sunday. Sunday I was two hours away at my home church in Missouri presenting the mission and ministry.

See, not a total loss. In fact, I could look at it as no loss at all – just a learning experience.

Moving Forward (I think)

After some time of neglect (I really cannot put it any other way) I returned my attention to my website – [Reproach of Men](#) and began to deal with some of the issues created by the browser wars (primarily IE6 and below). I finally gave up on trying to have a decent fluid layout for IE6 and below and set everything for IE (up to version 6), to a fixed-width of 800 pixels. I hate that as I like liquid and elastic layouts ((Yes I know, this theme is fixed-width – I didn't catch that when I first looked at it. However, I like the theme, but cannot find the author to talk about changing it – so I am in the process of making it liquid.)). However, I cannot tolerate the quirks and weirdness of IE6, and so I am forced to do something I don't like.

For the rest of the standards-compliant browsers out there ((if you don't have one, please get one – they're usually free to download and use – besides, your web experience will be so much better)), the layout remains liquid from 400 to 1200 pixels (there is a limit you know). After that the page is a column in the middle of the screen with a black background. I know, kinda stark, but it draws your attention to the content, and only the content.

I am also in the middle of revising the coding for all the hymns pages, which ought to be done in the near future. Then, LORD willing, I will rework and actually properly format the

rest of the articles on the site. I really do not want to do content management for the site, but may be forced into it if things ramp up considerably.

However, before I quit this post, I would like to say one last time how very much I hate IE. In fact, I really don't care for Microsoft either. Particularly since Bill Gates is such a liberal and donates a considerable sum to causes that are destroying America and its people. Unfortunately, time is the most precious commodity I have, and it takes time to learn a new OS like [Ubuntu Linux](#). For now, I am kind of stuck – just like having to code for IE.

That's really not moving forward is it?

WordPress 2.5 Update

Last week I wrote a note that I had upgraded to WordPress 2.5 and was not entirely happy with the result. I lost one of my favorite plugins and the blog was running slow, etc. I was pretty much not happy with things overall concerning the blog and software to run it.

However, things change. For one, the host fixed the problem with accessing the blog in a timely manner so that access time went from 3-5 minutes down to 3-10 seconds (for dial-up that is pretty quick). Also, the plugin I like so well got upgraded to work with version 2.5, and I found that Firefox 2 works better with WordPress than Opera 9.26 when working in the admin pages. Additionally, I went back in a tweaked some of stylesheets to change the appearance a bit (hopefully for the better).

Now that these things are working better I can go back to my plan of changing the theme from fixed width to liquid, or at least elastic. We shall see how that goes.

Upgrade to WordPress 2.5

Well, I upgraded the blog software to version 2.5. There are some issues that need to be resolved with plugins and the theme. We will see how it goes.

There are a couple of things I am not pleased about with the new version, particularly concerning the editor.

There is also still the problem of my host's MySQL server not handling the volume. They are adding more capacity, but it will be a while.

Blog Upgrade

Did it Saturday evening. (*No, I won't go into what that makes me for doing it on a Saturday evening!*) It was an interesting experience, particularly when I viewed the blog in the browser after finishing it, and refreshed the browser – and no posts whatsoever, no links, no calender, no categories, just the theme! Just a little disturbed, I went to login and that worked okay. Then a new screen telling me I had to upgrade the database.

Did that. It told me it was successful. That's good. I then opened a new tab in the browser and revisited the blog. After

refreshing the window, everything came back. Big sigh of relief.

Now we are running WordPress 2.3.3. Quite a few different options and upgrades from the older version that I was running.

However, this post would have been done last night, but the web host I use had a failure of the MySQL server about the same time I went to publish this post. You can just imagine my surprise when I received a white screen with the message "Cannot connect to database." Uh, okay. That's not what I call good. Tried to go to the blog. Not happening, same message.

I logged into my hosting account and tried to reach the MYSQL Administrator and could not go there. Called the host "We are experiencing heavy call volume at this time." Hung up.

I'll bet. I think I'll go to bed.

Checked it this A.M. and the blog worked fine. Somebody (or sombodies) had a long night. However, they made sure that it came up as quick as possible. Which is why I use them (plus they're very helpful when you call, and not rude like some folk).