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The
Christadelphian Tidings
of the Kingdom of God

**Living
the
Word of God**

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of the Kingdom of God

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Instructions for Living the Word of God

Introduction

This special issue is devoted to two interlocking topics:

- 1) How to look at the Bible, and ways to study the Word of God
- 2) The purpose of Bible study: how to Live by Faith in its message

The inspiration of the Bible is assumed in this Special Issue: “The Bible is God’s word and the only message from him. It is without error, except for copying and translation errors.”¹ So our only source of knowledge of God’s ultimate purpose for mankind, His atoning work through His son, and His plans for this earth are revealed to us through its pages. The Bible was written in several languages, by many individuals, and over a period of many centuries. It was written against quite different cultural backgrounds, to hearers with different amounts of knowledge of their past history. It was indeed written for ourselves, but its message is best appreciated by understanding its meaning and relevance for the audience at the time of its writing, and the words it was written in. And its message is all the more relevant today, as in many areas the Christian Faith is being submerged by the materialistic culture of our times.

People of the Book

This term is quite often used in our times by our community to describe itself both in lectures and in exhortations. In this we are not the only group which does so. A quick survey, both of our literature and that of others, shows²

- Among Christian religions, the most common use is by the Seventh Day Adventists, although many in the missionary regions of this world, especially Africa and Asia, refer to any Christian denomination by this term.
- The Catholic Church rejects the similar expression “religion of the book” as a description of the Christian faith. They prefer the term “religion of the Word of God”, since the faith of Christ, according to Catholic teaching, is not found solely in the Christian Scriptures, but also in the Sacred Tradition and Magisterium of the Church.
- Among our literature, the most common use of the term for many years was of the Jewish nation: it only gradually that the most frequent use was to refer to our community, if a quick survey of *The Christadelphian* archives is any indication. After about 1960 the majority of uses was to refer to our community, mainly questioning whether such a use was correct.



The Bible Companion³

Most Christadelphians, when asked about any sort of daily Bible reading schedule, will cite what is known as the Bible Companion. Many know that it was originated by Robert Roberts, and quite a few will know he developed it as

a teenager. Indeed, some will have read the passage in his autobiography, where he describes its development.

“I... finally came down to three at one sitting — which I have continued ever since. At the commencement of my Bible readings, I trusted to memory for the next chapters to be read. But after several years’ experience, I found it convenient to have a written guide. So I made a calendar of the entire readings for the year, in a penny pass book, which greatly facilitated the process. Friends got to know of this, and first one and then another asked me to provide them with a copy. I did this with much pleasure, until I had written 18 copies. Then I came across a printed little work of the same character, which suggested the idea of having my guide printed. This was done, under the name of *The Bible Companion*, which, with some modification, has continued in use ever since.”

The schedule takes one through the Old Testament once, and the New Testament twice in the course of a year. If you look at my Bible, it has 1298 pages, with the Old Testament taking up 1021, which is about 80% of the total. So simple logic would say if the two portions of the Old Testament each take up 40% of the whole, in the time it takes to read one Old Testament portion we can read two New Testament portions. Note the divisions in practice are not quite this simple: the first portion (Genesis-Job) has about 379,000 words, the second (Psalms-Malachi) has 230,000, and the New Testament has 179,000 words. Thus we read about the same number of words for the first and last portion, as we read the last portion twice in a year.

Of course, there are other Bible Reading planners, some of which quite simply take you through the whole Bible once per year. However, one of the advantages of the Bible Companion is that it often illuminates the resonances typical of the way the inspired authors dwell on similar themes, and stresses the inter-dependence of the whole word of God. In addition, the fact that most Christadelphians have and do use the Bible Companion gives it a special place among all of the available Bible reading guides.

The People of the Book revisited

As I have said, we often claim we are the “people of the Book”, and base this on our “diligent” readings as based upon the Bible Companion. This is most often seen in our Bibles in the form of a set of three inserts, one for each portion. The actual booklet is much rarer, but is of some interest for Bro. Roberts’ introduction. He says, in part:

“**Salvation** depends upon the assimilation of the mind to the divine ideas, principles, and affections, exhibited in the Scriptures. This process commences with a belief of the gospel, but is by no means completed thereby; it takes a lifetime for its scope and untiring diligence for its accomplishment. The mind is naturally alien from God and all His ideas (Rom 8:7; 1Cor 2:14), and cannot be brought at once to the Divine Likeness. This is a work of slow development, and can only be achieved

by the industrious application of the individual to the means which God has given for the purpose, namely, the expression of His mind in the Scriptures of truth. Spiritual-mindedness, or a state of mind in accordance with the mind of the Spirit as displayed in these writings can grow within a man by daily intercourse with that mind, there unfolded. Away from this, the mind will revert to its original emptiness. The infallible advice then to every man and woman anxious about their salvation is — READ THE SCRIPTURES DAILY. It is only in proportion as this is done, that success may be looked for. The man, who sows sparingly in this respect, will only reap sparingly.”

These are valuable reminders of the necessity of frequent and deep familiarization with the Word of God, but perhaps some of the choice of words is a little unfortunate. We must remember

- Salvation is not by works: not all are capable of absorbing all the words, and indeed familiarity can lead to a skimming of the readings, not a contemplation as to how the words can act in our lives.
- Mere Bible knowledge is no pathway to the Kingdom. We remember that the Jews of Jesus’ day were famous for their knowledge of the Old Testament, and many could recite much of it, if not all, from memory. But they were condemned by Jesus for their lack of grasp of the message of hope, of forgiveness, of the grace of God.

So although the greater part of this special issue concerns the Word of God, how to study it and learn from it, we will also consider how it should act in our lives: “works”, the fruit of the Spirit, shows how this knowledge has resulted in actions. Not only that, but faith without acknowledging our need for repentance in baptism is also departing from the words of Christ. Faith without works is dead: but faith alone is also insufficient.

So in this Special Issue we will also include discussions on

- The way our “first principles”, as derived from the Word of God, should cause a moral reaction as well as an intellectual assent.
- How to use the Bible to live like a King.
- The way the Word, the *logos*, of God finds its true meaning and fulfilment in our savior, the Lord Jesus.

It is our hope and prayer that all will find help in this issue, whether it is to improve our Bible study habits, to strengthen our faith, or to ensure our faith has a deep hold on our beings through our actions.

Peter Hemingray

Notes:

1. From <http://www.christadelphian.org.uk/wcb>.
2. The easiest source is Wikipedia, along of course with our own literature
3. The section is extracted from my editorial in *The Tidings* of July 2010.

How to Study the Bible

Many of us learned what it means to be a Bible student by reading Bro. Harry Whittaker's *Exploring the Bible*.¹ For a decade or more, I used to read this little book in the first week of each year, just to remind myself of the methods he describes. His promotion of "do it yourself" Bible study methods and his lifelong example of applying them remain an inspiration to me. My thoughts will do little to add to his wisdom.

This article is divided into two major sections. The first section emphasizes the importance of regular reading of the Bible. Bible students read seriously, carefully, thoughtfully, and analytically. They observe, interpret, and apply the teachings of the Bible. It isn't like a novel you read once. Rather, the Bible is like the essentials of life, like the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, so we must read it routinely. The second section highlights the importance of context in understanding the Bible. It uses the book of Exodus as a source of examples to illustrate some Bible study methods that use context as a key to interpretation.

Read the Bible

Elementary reading and more. To study the Bible you must first read the Bible. There are multiple levels of reading.² Elementary reading answers the question: "What does the sentence say?" We learn to read at this level in elementary school. Of course, we learn to read in our native language, which, for most of my audience here, is English. The original texts of the Bible are mostly in (Biblical) Hebrew and (*koiné*) Greek. Unless we learn these ancient languages (and few of us have the time or inclination to do so), we will need to read the Bible from a translation. There are many excellent English translations of the Bible.³ A good Bible student will want to read from multiple translations. I use the AV/RV Interlinear as my primary study Bible. It has both the King James Version and the (English) Revised Version, and the best marginal references of any Bible I know. I also read from the New International Version (NIV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the English Standard Version (ESV), the Message, the New English Translation (NET), and others. The New English Translation (NET) has the best translation notes of any Bible I know.

The major difference between a Bible reader and a Bible student is that a student reads with additional purpose than merely determining what the text says. Knowing what the Bible says is critical, but it is only the beginning. From a cognitive perspective, we should also strive to understand, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what the Bible has to say.⁴

Bible marking and notes. While you are reading, you should mark your Bible:

- Highlight repeated words; the syntactic structure of sentences; the logic of paragraphs, chapters, and books.
- Number the patterns for lists (e.g., the "3 + 3 + 1" pattern of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3; the "3 major + 12 minor" pattern for the patriarchs, for the judges, for the prophets, and, approximately, for the kings of Judah; the "12

- + 1” pattern in Mark’s gospel for Jesus and the 12 apostles, the 12 Jewish + 1 Gentile healings, and the 5 + 7 + 1 loaves for the 5,000, the 4,000, and Jesus’ loaf in the boat and at the last supper; the multiple sevens of Revelation.
- Identify parallel texts (e.g., Chronicles with Samuel and Kings; the gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the epistles with Acts; Ephesians with Colossians; Jude with 2 Peter; 1 John with the gospel of John).
- Mark elements of type scenes (e.g., engagement at a well in a foreign country).⁵
- Note poetic parallelisms and contrasts in the Psalms and Prophets⁶ and in the sayings of Jesus.⁷

You should also keep a notebook handy for jotting down questions, comments, thoughts, lists, etc. Some of you may prefer to do these things with modern electronic devices. Regardless of the technology, a good Bible student always takes notes.

A three-step process. Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, in their book, *Living by the Book*, suggest a three-step process for Bible study: “Step 1, Observation; Step 2, Interpretation; Step 3, Application.” They give good advice for each of these steps.

For the **Observation** step, they recommend ten useful strategies: “Read Thoughtfully; Read Repeatedly; Read Patiently; Read Selectively; Read Prayerfully; Read Imaginatively; Read Meditatively; Read Purposefully; Read Acquisitively; Read Telescopically.” They also identify six things you should look for: “Things that are... Emphasized, ... Repeated, ... Related, ... Alike and Unlike, ... True to Life.” They encourage their readers to summarize their observations, often with a chart or table.

For the **Interpretation** step, they point out that it is critical to identify the type of literature a text is. That is, what is its genre? In my opinion, this is perhaps the most important aspect of being a good Bible reader or student. There are significant differences in how we read narrative texts versus poetry, and historical records versus legal tracts versus prophetic writings versus apocalyptic literature. Misjudging the genre or applying the wrong methods to a genre can prevent us from properly grasping the meaning God intended in the various kinds of literature He gave us in the Bible. The results can be disastrous. One author uses the movie *Galaxy Quest* to illustrate what can happen:⁸ the premise of the story is that a group of aliens under attack reach out to the cast of a now off-the-air science fiction television show, thinking that the episodes were a historical record of events that had actually happened and so expecting that the cast of the TV show could actually help them in their current perils. The parody is easy to see which is why it is funny. Unfortunately, many miss the analogous misinterpretations of the Bible caused by genre errors.

They list five keys to interpretation: Content, Context, Comparison, Culture, and Consultation. Content is based on the observations made in Step 1. We will look at some of the other keys in the second section of this article.

For the **Application** step, they list four steps: Know, Relate, Meditate, Practice. They identify nine questions to ask: “Is there an example for me to follow? Is there a sin to avoid? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a prayer to repeat? Is there a command to obey? Is there a condition to meet? Is there a verse to memorize? Is there an error to mark? Is there a challenge to face?”

Recap. Read the Bible. Read it over and over again. Read it in different translations. Read it for different purposes. Observe. Interpret. Apply. These ideas are illustrated in “Hearing the Word: Studies on the Parable of the Sower,” *The Tidings*, Special Issue, August, 2009, which presents six studies, each of which applies a general method of studying. The epilog summarizes:

“These studies encourage readers to seek the full meaning of God’s Word. There is no end of searching, because God’s Word has no limits. Examine a passage in its immediate context. Study it in conjunction with its parallels, seeking exhortation from their similarities and their differences. Find the allusions to Old Testament Scriptures. Memorize passages and meditate upon them, especially foundational passages like the Shema and the Parable of the Sower. Draw exhortations from the examples of Bible characters. Apply these lessons in your daily life.”

The importance of context

A brother once said that most Christadelphians will never be great textual scholars, but we should all strive to be great *contextual* scholars. I agree with this sentiment and hope to illustrate it in the following examples based on Exodus.⁹

Outline of Exodus. In his book *Explore the Book*, J. Sidlow Baxter has four lessons on Exodus, and for each of these he recommends reading some or all of Exodus; in particular: “(1) Read Exodus 1-40 through twice, and Exodus 1-18 a third time; (2) Read Exodus 19-24 three times; (3) Read Exodus 25-34; and (4) Read Exodus 25-31; 35-40.” Baxter provides the following outline (p. 74):

“The Book of Exodus: The Divine Power, Holiness, and Wisdom

<p>I. The Exodus (1-18)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projected (1-4) • Obstructed (5-11) • Effected (12-18) 	<p>II. The Law (19-24)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Commandments’ (Moral) • ‘Judgments’ (Social) • ‘Ordinances’ (Religious) 	<p>III. The Tabernacle (25-40)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed (25-31) • Delayed (32-34) • Completed (35-40)¹⁰
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The following table gives an alternative outline:

Bondage	Deliverance	Journey	Covenant	Tabernacle
Exod 1-2	Exod 3-13	Exod 14-18	Exod 19-24	Exod 25-40
Israelites Numerous in Egypt New Pharaoh Moses	Ten Plagues Passover Exodus	Cloud & Fire Red Sea Manna Water from Rock	Mount Sinai Theophany Book of the Covenant Sacrifice	Outer Court Holy Place Most Holy Place Filled with Glory

The preceding context: Continuing where Genesis left off (Exod 1-6). The opening chapters of Exodus explicitly connect it to Genesis, as illustrated by the following links. The family tree in Exodus 1:1-5 repeats the one in Genesis 46:8-27. The death of Joseph (Exod 1:6) echoes the last verse of Genesis (50:26). The emphasis on the increasing population of the children of Israel (Exod 1:7-9, 12, 20; cf. Acts 7:17) starts the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that his seed would become a great nation, increasing almost without limit (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 22:17). The affliction of Israel by the Egyptians (Exod 2:23-25; 3:17; 6:5) fulfills the prophecy to Abraham that his seed would be afflicted in a strange land (Gen 15:13-14) and Joseph's faithful expectation based on it (Gen 50:24-25). This prophecy to Abraham is also echoed in Moses' naming of his son Gershom (Exod 2:22) and in the Israelites leaving Egypt with the wealth of their neighbors (Exod 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36). The references to God taking them to a land flowing with milk and honey (Exod 3:8, 17; 6:4, 8; 33:21) pick up on the promises to the patriarchs (Gen 12:1, 7; 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18-21; etc.), including the list of current inhabitants. When God appears to Moses, He emphasizes that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:6, 15-16; 4:5; 6:3). How can one discover these connections? Most of them are in the marginal references of any good Bible. Others will ring out as you become more familiar with the text.

The call of Moses, the prototypical reluctant prophet (Exod 2-7). On eight separate occasions, Moses challenges the call from God (Exod 3:11; 3:13; 4:1; 4:10; 4:13; 5:22-23; 6:12; 6:30). Read Exodus 2-7 to find out God's responses to these objections, and to see how serious the situation was. At one point it says that God was angry with Moses (Exod 4:14) and at another that God attempted to kill Moses (Exod 4:24-26). On the other hand, it also states that God assured Moses by guaranteeing that He would be with Moses; by declaring His name and its meaning; by providing signs as evidence; by reminding Moses that He is the maker of man's mouth; and by promising that He would put His words in Moses' mouth. This pattern of reluctance and reassurance is also exhibited, for example, by Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 1-3, and, of course, Jonah. Have you ever been hesitant to fulfill God's calling for you? You know, the assignments He has clearly prepared you for, the ones you may have been less than eager to do, the ones you tried to get out of by providing any number of lame excuses? I know I have, and I find comfort that despite Moses' reluctance, God still reckons him to have been faithful (Heb 11:23-29; cf. Acts 7:17-44).

The "3 + 3 + 3 + 1" pattern of the ten plagues (Exod 7-12). The LORD provides "3 + 1" signs to Moses (Exod 4:1-9, 21-23), foreshadowing the ten plagues, which follow a "3 + 3 + 3 + 1" pattern. For the first plagues of each series (1, 4, 7) Moses is to go "in the morning" and he is to "stand before Pharaoh" when he comes to the water. For the second plagues of each series (2, 5, 8) Moses is to "Go in unto Pharaoh", that is, at his palace. There is no warning for the third plague in each series (3, 6, 9). Aaron is the agent for the plagues in the first series (1, 2, 3); Moses is the agent for the third series (7, 8, 9); for the second series, God is the agent for the first two plagues (4, 5), and Moses for the third (6); and God is the agent for the tenth plague, the killing of the firstborn. The Egyptian magicians

are able to mimic the first two plagues (1, 2), but not the third (3) or the sixth (6). The purpose of the plagues is stated multiple times: “That thou shalt know that I am the LORD”, which applies to both the Egyptians and the Israelites. It is highlighted that plagues 4-10 do not come upon the Israelites. For each of plagues 7-10 it is emphasized that there is “none like it” either before or after. Pharaoh hardens his own heart for plagues 1-5 and 7; whereas, God hardens his heart for plagues 6, 8, 9, and 10. Pharaoh promises that he will let the Israelites go after plagues 2, 4, 7, and 8, only to renege on his word. It is useful to put all this information in a table including the supporting verses for each of the details (see the table below, patterned after Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 76). The plagues are referred to in the Psalms (Psa 78; Psa 105) and the language of the plagues is used in Revelation (Rev 8-9 trumpets; Rev 16 vials).

The Ten Plagues

	Plague	Dates	Pharaoh Warned	Time of warning	Instruction	Agent	Magic class	How shield Israel	Not on Israel	None like it	"I will let you go"	Pharaoh's heart hardened by
First Series: Egypt shall know that I am the LORD	1 Blood	1:14-25	Yes	in the morning	"Get thee into Pharaoh, so he shall call unto the water, and thou shalt stand by the river's bank to meet him"	Angels	Yes (1)	(17)				Pharaoh (1:2)
	2 Frogs	8:1-11	Yes		"Go unto Pharaoh"	Angels	Yes (7)	(10)			(8)	Pharaoh (1:1)
	3 Lice	8:16-19	No			Angels	No (1)				(8)	Pharaoh (1:1)
Second Series: Not on Israel	4 Flies	8:26-32	Yes	"Five up early in the morning"	"Stand before Pharaoh, so he shall say unto the water"	God		(12)	(11, 20)		(8:26)	Pharaoh (1:1)
	5 Murrain	9:1-7	Yes		"Go in unto Pharaoh"	God		(14-15)				Pharaoh (1:1)
	6 Boils	9:8-12	No			Moses	No (1)					YHWH (1:1)
Third Series: None like it	7 Hail	9:13-35	Yes	"Five up early in the morning"	"Stand before Pharaoh"	Moses		(14, 26)	(24, 28, 34)	(14, 18, 28)		Pharaoh (9:1)
	8 Locusts	10:1-20	Yes		"Go in unto Pharaoh"	Moses		(2)	(6, 14)	(14-15)		YHWH (1:20)
	9 Darkness	10:21-29	No			Moses		(21)				YHWH (1:21)
4th Series	10 Destruction	11:1-2	Yes			God		(11:1, 8)	(11:1, 12-13)	(11:1)		YHWH (11:1)

Compare Psalm 78 (esp. 78:45-51) plagues 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10 and Psalm 105 (esp. 105:27-36) plagues 8, 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10

Liturgical contexts¹¹ (Exod 12-19). Over 25 years ago I stumbled upon a book that had a profound influence on me; it added a whole new aspect to my study of the Bible. The book was *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* by Michael Goulder. He emphasizes the Jewish calendar and the reading plan associated with it. The results are astonishing. To give just a couple examples, the readings for Passover include the special festival reading Exodus 12-15 (Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea), the third weekly Torah reading, Genesis 12-17 (Abraham), and readings from the book of Joshua in the Former Prophets. There are many connections between these three passages. Genesis 12:10-13:2 is a microcosm of the Exodus: Abram goes down to Egypt because there is famine in the land just like Joseph and family would later go down to Egypt because there is famine in the land. Abram sojourns just like Israel would be a sojourner in a strange land. In both cases, God inflicts plagues upon Pharaoh. Abram comes out of Egypt with great wealth just like the Israelites would. Further, as mentioned above, Genesis 15:13-14 is a prophecy of the Exodus.

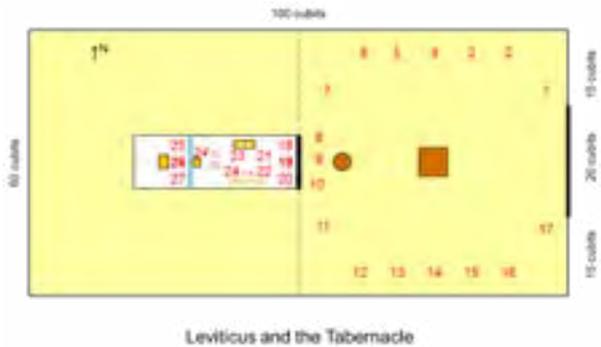
Also, the record in Joshua 1-5 is told in a way that highlights the parallels with the Exodus. Joshua is to be a prophet like unto Moses. God would be with Joshua

as he had been with Moses. Joshua leads Israel through the Jordan River on dry ground just as Moses had led their parents through the Red Sea on dry ground; the connection between these two events is stated explicitly in Joshua 4:23. After they are circumcised at Gilgal, they eat the Passover just like their parents had eaten it 40 years earlier. Like Moses, Joshua is told to take off his shoes because the ground he is standing on is holy. The parallels are obvious and abundant.

The liturgical context for Passover also includes Psalms 105-118 and the latter chapters in each of the gospels, which make it clear that Jesus was crucified and raised at Passover time. Comparable results can be found for the feasts of Pentecost (e.g., Exodus 19-20; Psalm 119; Daniel 2-7; Matthew 5-7) and of Tabernacles (e.g., Psalms 90-106; Isaiah; Matthew 13).¹²

“When studying a book of the Bible, we are used to asking questions like: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? When was it written? Why was it written? Where was it written from? Answers to these questions help us to understand the book better because they give a setting for the book, a setting which almost certainly influenced what was written and how it should be understood... Michael Goulder... caused me to see the importance of two other questions that require answers: When was it read? What was it read with?”

The subsequent context: Leviticus and the Tabernacle (Exod 19-40). The floorplan of the Tabernacle is repeated seven times in Exodus (Exod 25-30; 31:1-11; 35:1-19; 35:20-39:32; 39:33-43; 40:1-16; 40:17-38). In her book *Leviticus as Literature*, anthropologist Mary Douglas observes that the layout of the Tabernacle acts as a spatial mnemonic for the literary structure of Leviticus. The following diagram overlays the chapters of Leviticus on the layout of the Tabernacle. Leviticus 1-17 corresponds to the Outer Court; Leviticus 18-24 corresponds to the Holy Place; and Leviticus 25-27 corresponds to the Most Holy Place. These three zones of holiness also correspond to the three zones of holiness at Mount Sinai. All of this is a reflection of the gospel with shadows of Christ’s sacrifice and our baptism portrayed in the Outer Court (Lev 1-17); our current life of fellowship in the Holy Place (Lev 18-24); and our future immortal life in the Kingdom in the Most Holy Place and the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25-27).¹³



Conclusion

Reading and studying the Bible is like compound interest, the more you do it, the more it pays off. You will never read a book or chapter the same way twice.

Each time you read a passage you will have a new outlook based on what you have experienced since the last time you read it. As you read and study the Bible over and over, you strengthen the neural pathways in your brain; you are almost literally filling your mind with God's word. This makes it easier to recognize patterns and connections, and to see passages in all their contexts.

Joe Hill (Austin Leander, TX)

Notes:

1. *Exploring the Bible* is still available in print from the Christadelphian Office and other book sellers. Bro. Whittaker's follow up book, *Enjoying the Bible*, is also full of methods with lots of examples. *The Joy of Bible Study*, by Harrington Lee, published in 1910, is another book comparable to these, but it is long-since out of print; a kind brother gave me a copy when he was pruning his library.
2. In their excellent book, *How to Read a Book*, Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren identify four levels of reading: Elementary Reading (just being able to read the words, sentences, etc.), Inspectional Reading (preliminary skimming and preparatory reading), Analytical Reading (serious study of a text), and Syntopical Reading (reading multiple texts together). Their ideas have influenced many students of literature, including myself and this present article.
3. See Bro. Steve Davis, "The Bible Today", *The Tidings*, August, 2015, pp. 361-367.
4. Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* identifies these six levels of cognition: Knowledge, Understanding (or Comprehension), Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation.
5. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Chapter 3, "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention."
6. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*.
7. See Joe Hill, "The Sermon on the Mount (4): The Poetry of Jesus," *The Tidings*, April, 1992, pp. 121- 125, based on Michael Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, chapter 4.
8. Steven L. McKenzie, *How to Study the Bible*, p. 14.
9. The examples in this section are based on years of reading the text and have also been influenced by many writers and speakers. Among others, these include: Avigdor Bonhek, *Studying the Torah: A Guide to In-Depth Interpretation*; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A literary reading of selected texts*; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel*; Mark Vincent, *The Exodus: A Commentary on Exodus 1-15*; as well as others mentioned below.
10. Baxter provides additional, more detailed, outlines on pages 84 and 99.
11. The word "liturgical" means things associated with public worship services. For Israel, these revolve around the annual calendar of feasts and fasts (Passover, Pentecost, Ninth of Ab, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles, Purim, Hanukkah) as well as the weekly synagogue service. For each of these days, there were and still are special readings, psalms, activities, and words of prophecy (like our exhortations), which together make up the liturgy. There is evidence that the New Testament ecclesias developed liturgies around the same Jewish calendar, adding appropriate material about how Jesus fulfilled the liturgical themes, thus proving his claim, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Similarly, Paul states that the holy days are "a shadow of things to come; but the body [substance, reality] is Christ."
12. For details, see Joe Hill, "An Ancient Bible Companion," *The Tidings*, January, 1993, to December, 1994, based on Michael Goulder's books *Midrash and Lection in Matthew and The Evangelists' Calendar*, and Joe Hill, "Patterns in the Book of Psalms," *The Tidings*, 6/2000, 8/2000, 10/2000, 12/2000, 2/2001, based on Michael Goulder, "The Fourth Book of the Psalter," *Journal of Theological Studies*, October, 1975, 269-289. See also, Michael Goulder's books, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah and Isaiah as Liturgy*.
13. For details, see Joe Hill, "Leviticus and the Tabernacle," *The Tidings*, December, 2010, to October, 2011.

The Use and Misuse of Concordances

Context is all

The Bible was written “*for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*” (Rom 15:4), but we should not make the mistake that the Bible was written to us. It was written for us and the distinction is important because one of the main elements of Bible study is to ascertain what it meant to the original audience. Only then can we apply the lessons to ourselves. In order to facilitate determining the original message various tools are at our disposal including concordances and lexicons, which are useful for understanding the use and meaning of words in Scripture. Scripture was not written in 21st Century English or even of course English at all, so the words employed in the Bible need to be understood within their original historical context. That’s where a concordance and lexicon can prove useful.

However a big mistake Bible students can make is failing to read the Bible in context, especially when it comes to the study of words. Contextual Bible study is the biggest key to good exposition and without it, well, not only do you miss the intended message, you can almost make it say anything you want. This is especially the danger when taking single words out of context. In fact most words have little meaning unless placed within a context. Even nouns like “bear” (meaning the furry animal) could mean a number of things without understanding the context. Does it refer to the animal itself or what the animal might represent? For instance saying, “The bear is eating a salmon.” Is quite different from saying, “That exam was a bear!” Even though both might refer to the animal as far as the original etymology of the word is concerned, one use of the word refers to a literal bear, whereas in the other example the word “bear” has morphed into a completely different meaning. We would never read the second of those two sentences as someone saying their exam literally was a bear, but when approaching the Biblical text many Bible students do make this sort of mistake.

Words, then, only have meaning with their Biblical, historical, cultural and linguistic context. A word on its own is ambiguous and only takes on meaning when it forms part of a sentence, and understanding the use of the word within that sentence can mean different things to different people in different times. For instance, the word “grace” means one thing to an average 21st century audience, but the word meant something different to its original audience in Bible times. We need to find out what it meant originally in order to learn the application of its meaning to ourselves.

Concordances

With these things in mind what sort of tools are available for concordance and lexicon work? The most commonly-used concordance is of course Strong’s, and also much use has been made of Young’s, Englishman’s and to a lesser extent Cruden’s. With the advent of computer and online Bibles the use of hard copy concordances is becoming obsolete, but the heritage of Strong’s is found in most

electronic Bible study resources and this article concentrates on the use, and misuse, of Strong's and Englishman's, the combined use of which is mimicked a lot of times in electronic Bible word and phrase searches.

To do a simple concordance search, for instance if you're looking for a verse or list of verses with a particular word or phrase as translated into English, it is a simple matter of typing in the word or phrase and hitting the button. In a flash, when performing this search on a computer, you are presented with a list of verses, but herein lies the first danger of using a concordance. Just because a word is used in a number of places doesn't necessarily mean that those passages are connected together. They *might* be, especially if you find the same phrase in different passages, but don't assume, just because similar words are used, that you can do Bible study simply by stringing together a list of verses which uses the same word. A more accurate way of searching for a word is to look it up using the Hebrew or Greek original rather than an English word. You can do this in computer software usually by typing in the Strong's number. What you are presented with is what Englishman's would present you with if you were to use that concordance on its own; a list of occurrences of a Hebrew or Greek word. But again the Bible student should not assume that passages are linked simply because the same original word is used.

One of the keys to Bible study is letting your study lead you to conclusions rather than reading things into the text. The former is called *exegesis* (reading out of the text) and the other is called *eisegesis* (reading into the text). Unfortunately *eisegesis* is extremely easy to perform when doing word studies. We tend to like finding patterns and connections and the temptation is, when finding two or more verses that use the same Hebrew or Greek word, to make up connections when none really exists. This can especially be the case with unusual words only used a handful of times. We might assume that every occurrence of the word is connected together and we can, if we don't perform contextual Bible study, force connections and end up making up a Bible study point that wasn't part of the text's intended meaning. If the connection is not truly contextually there, we are not finding out what God is communicating to us but what we have invented for ourselves.

Having said that there is nothing wrong with noting down where a word occurs. If you do this real patterns can emerge as you go through the passage you're studying. For instance, you might find that a particular word in the passage you're looking at is used in another book of the Bible. Note it down but don't assume anything yet. Later on in your study let's say you find other words that are used in both of these passages and you soon realize that they both use similar language. Now it's time to compare the contexts to see if they mesh together. For instance, the book of Malachi uses the word translated "healing" in 4:2. From doing a concordance search we find the exact same word is used in 2Chron 36:16. Does this mean something? Not necessarily. But upon further study we find out that it's not the only word shared by the two contexts, and also the two contexts match as far as the general message of the texts. Then by looking at the contexts we find one refers to the generation that went into captivity and the

other the generation that fell away after returning from captivity. A conclusion we might reach from this connection is that Malachi is telling the people of his day they are no better than those who went into captivity in the first place. Contextual study needs to be the overarching principle in our Bible study and word connections need to be governed by it.

For another example consider the word translated “rib” in the passage about the creation of Eve. When doing a concordance search on this word we find out that nearly every other occurrence refers to the “ribs” or “sides” of the tabernacle, Solomon’s temple and the temple of Ezekiel’s prophecy. Looking at the context of Eve’s creation we also find out that the word “made” in Gen 2:22 is the word used for the building of a house. So we might come to the conclusion that Eve represents, in some way, the house of God. And we would be correct because that’s a theme taken up in places like the epistle to the Ephesians where the body of Christ is also described as a temple. So the use of the word “rib” when it comes to Eve is interesting. However not all occurrences of the word are to do with the house of God. There are a few other times the word is used and the danger is, having found out this original interesting link with the house of God, we look for connections in the other passages. If we can’t find something obvious the temptation is to force a connection. Again, we must always be led to conclusions and not force them.

Strong’s word definitions

Perhaps the biggest danger of Strong’s concordance, however, is the use of the word definitions that accompany the concordance itself. Each word in Strong’s has an associated number and the number stands for a particular Hebrew or Greek word. In Bible talks we often hear the speaker talking about this or that “Strong’s number” when referring to a word in text. However there are two things we need to remember about the word definitions in Strong’s, definitions that have found themselves in most computer software.

Firstly Strong’s is not a really a lexicon or dictionary. Rather the definitions Strong’s gives, in the main, are a very brief definition followed by how the word is translated in the passages it is found. For instance:

6113 אָטַר ‘âtsâr, aw-tsar’; a primitive root; to *inclose*; by analogy, to *hold back*; also to *maintain, rule, assemble*:—x be able, close up, detain, fast, keep (self close, still), prevail, recover, refrain, x reign, restrain, retain, shut (up), slack, stay, stop, withhold (self).

One problem with this very brief definition is that it is, in itself, open to interpretation. A good lexicon will provide more details beyond the lemma (root word) but Strong’s doesn’t go beneath the surface and is really just a glossary. Also, what are we to do with this information? Strong’s gives several different meanings of this word: maintain, rule, assemble for instance, and the word is translated in a number of different ways, including recover and reign. There are several logical fallacies often committed in relation to the use of Strong’s definitions:

Illegitimate Totality Transfer — where all the various meanings of a word are forced into a passage without regard to context. So we might find a passage using Strong’s #6113 and say that the word means all of the above — rule, assemble etc. This is to read a text without regard to context and without considering the nuance of the word that best fits that context.

Selective Use of Meaning — this is illegitimate totality transfer in reverse where the Bible student selects from the range of meanings the one he or she likes best. Again this is to disregard the context and is a form of eisegesis that seems more legitimate because you’ve looked up the meaning of a word in a concordance.

The other main logical fallacy committed when using Strong’s definitions is called the *root word fallacy* or the *etymological root fallacy*. Often in Strong’s concordance you will get a definition like this:

6114 עָרַבְתִּי ‘etsar, eh’-tser; from 6113; restraint:— magistrate.

The word “from” denotes that this particular word has a root (the word used in the previous example), and most words, unless they are what is called a “primitive root” have root words associated with them. Again in Bible talks you’ve probably heard a speaker say something like “and the root of this word is Strong’s number such-and-such” and some sort of conclusion is drawn. However, while root words can be meaningful there is a very great danger of taking things completely out of context with root words and once more inventing a Bible point where none exists. It’s easier to understand the root word fallacy from an example in the English language. Take the word “butterfly” which is made up of two words “butter” and “fly” so we can say that the word comes from two root words joined together. However whereas the word “fly” might have some meaning in this context the word “butter” is entirely meaningless and to try and say this insect has anything to do with dairy products is ridiculous. But Bible students are guilty very often of doing such things with Bible words.

Ecclesia

One of the most common examples of the root word fallacy among Christadelphians is from considering the word *ecclesia*. Here is Strong’s definition:

ἐκκλησία *ekklesia*, ek-klay-see’-ah; from a compound of G1537 and a derivative of G2564; a calling out, i.e. (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):—assembly, church.

Notice Strong’s gives two roots – Strong’s numbers 1537 and 2564 which mean “out of” and “to call” respectively. So it is that some would say that the word *ecclesia* means “called out ones” as if it is a word that specifically means a group of people



called out and separated from the world. But that's not what the word actually means. What it actually means is this:

1711 ἑκκλησία (ekklesia), : n.fem.; DBLHebr 7736; Str 1577; TDNT¹ 3.501—1. LN 11.32 **congregation**, an individual assembly of Christians (or OT believers Ac 7:38; Heb 2:12), usually with leaders who conform to a standard, and have worship practices, with members interacting, more or less local (Mt 18:17; 1Ti 3:5; 1Co 11:16–22; Jas 5:14; Rev 1:4; 1Pe 5:13 v.r.); 2. LN 11.33 **church**, the totality of all congregations of Christians at all times (Mt 16:18); 3. LN 11.78 **assembly**, gathering of persons for a purpose, even riotous (Ac 19:32, 39, 40)²

The word means “congregation”, “church” or “assembly” as any good lexicon will tell you. The word means no more “called out ones” than butterfly means “a fly made out of butter”.

Classification of Hebrew words

Another problem with Strong's definitions is that they ignore the *binyan* of a Hebrew verb. A *binyan*, of which there are seven in Hebrew, is a way in which a Hebrew root word is classified. Consider Strong's number 6113 (*atsar*) that we looked at above but this time in another lexicon:



6806 אָצַר (*a sar*): v.; Str 6113; TWOT³ 1675—1. LN 68.34–68.57 (qal) **hold back**, restrain, stop, i.e., have a state or condition cease (Ge 16:2; 1Ki 18:44; 2Ki 4:24; 2Ch 14:10[EB 11]; Job 4:2; 12:15; 29:9+); (nif) **stopped** (Nu 17:13[EB 16:48], 15[EB 16:50]; 25:8; 2Sa 24:21, 25; 1Ch 21:22; Ps 106:30+); 2. LN 87.76–87.86 (qal pass.) **be enslaved**, be constrained, i.e., be made personal property or force into indentured service (Dt 32:36; 1Ki 14:10; 21:21; 2Ki 9:8; 14:26+); 3. LN 37.108–37.110 (qal) detain, i.e., impede the movement of a person, and so have one's movement controlled (Jdg 13:15, 16; 1Ki 17:4+); (qal pass.) **be kept from** (1Sa 21:6[EB 5]; 1Ch 12:1; Ne 6:10; Jer 33:1; 36:5; 39:15+); (nif) **detained**, in custody (1Sa 21:8[EB 7]+); 4. LN 79.114–79.117 (qal) **shut up**, i.e., close up an object so there can be no passage of a mass or collection (Ge 20:18; Dt 11:17; 2Ch 7:13; Isa 66:9+); (qal pass.) **be shut up** (Jer 20:9+); (nif) **be shut up** (1Ki 8:35; 2Ch 6:26+); 5. LN 37.48–37.95 (qal) **govern**, formally, restrain, i.e., rule over a people with a focus that the rulership restrains and controls the behavior of the people (1Sa 9:17+); 6. LN 74 (qal) **be**⁴

Notice how much more descriptive this entry is. Left to the Strong's definition we could very easily be guilty of exegetical fallacies when selecting a meaning that we like. However a good lexicon will split a word up into its verb forms, or *binyanim*. Notice the words in parentheses like 'qal' and 'nif'. Each one tells us the *binyan* of the verb, and often these definitions are very different while retaining a connection to the root. The *qal*, for example, also called the *pa'al* is

the simplest form of the verb, while the *nif* (or *niph'al*) tells us that the word is in the passive voice. None of this is detailed in Strong's.

For more information of the use and misuse of Strong's concordance it is well worth taking a look at <http://www.armchair-theology.net/bible-study/how-not-to-use-strongs-concordance/> and also meta.hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/923/strongs-is-a-concordance-not-a-lexicon. What most of us need to realize is that we are not Hebrew or Greek experts. We rely on the tools provided by others, such as Strong's, but it is very easy to misuse these resources and come up with fanciful ideas simply because we can look up words in a concordance. We must *always* default to contextual Bible study as main method.

Another problem with Strong's word definitions, which is also true of older lexicons like Thayer's, is that very often those definitions are out-of-date. In fact when Strong's and Thayer's were first published Koine Greek (the Greek of the New Testament) was considered to be a strictly Biblical language. Not all New Testament vocabulary could be found in secular writings and so many meanings had to be figured out without any historical or cultural context. However after these works were published many secular writings were found that did in fact use the Greek words of the New Testament and later lexicons reflect these discoveries. As more linguistic research is done it is always best to try and find more up-to-date resources for our Bible study.

Remember that the list of definitions in Strong's concordance is a glossary, not a lexicon, and only provides brief definitions of the *lemma* (root word). To get a proper idea what the actual occurrence of a word means it is wise to find a modern lexicon such as Louw-Nida or Swanson. However sometimes these lexicons are not as accessible as the Strong's and Thayer's, both of which are extremely cheap to buy and often free in Bible software. So if you do use Strong's use it with care and don't let it lead you down the path of *eisegesis*. And remember that those who translated the Bible for us into English have done the spade work for us. Getting a good modern translation, or range of translations, is often better, and has fewer pitfalls, than using a concordance or lexicon. In particular it is worthwhile obtaining a copy of the New English Translation (The NET Bible). This version of the Bible can be termed a transparent translation since the team who put it together included thousands of footnotes that explain why a particular word has been translated a certain way with copious references to the lexicons and other tools that they used.

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[Editor] The "Logos Research System" is the same one in which *The Christadelphian* is available: it is not cheap, but almost required these days for serious Bible Students.

Notes:

1. TNDT 3-501 refers to "The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament" by Kittel et al: 3:501 refers to volume 3, p 501.
2. Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
3. TWOT 1675 refers to "The Theological Word Book of the Old Testament" by Harris et al.
4. Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

How to Put Together a Bible Study Presentation

“Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1Tim 4:13, 15-16)

Making the effort to prepare and give a good Bible presentation isn't simply a means to share the results of our own Bible study. As Paul told Timothy, it is a matter of salvation, both ours and those who hear us. It is something that requires attention and perseverance. Becoming effective communicators of God's word takes time, but if we are absorbed in it, progress will be evident to all. In this article I will share some guidelines I have found helpful when preparing public addresses, exhortations and in particular Bible classes.

1) Prayer

“Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people...” (2Chron 1:10).

Perhaps it should go without saying that prayer should be the first step of any endeavour, and yet in the looming deadline of a talk (or an article for *The Tidings!*) we can all too easily rush in without first sitting still, meditating and appealing for guidance from him who gives wisdom “generously and without reproach” to assist us.

2) Chapter/Book vs. Thematic/Word studies

“Preach the word” (2Tim 4:2).

Pick a section of Scripture and stick to it. In recent years I have become increasingly persuaded that studies that primarily focus on an individual unit of Scripture are to be preferred over thematic studies.

The main reason for this is because this is how the Bible was written and how it was received by its original audience. In most cases the original audience did not have access to other books. Even in later times when the Canon was nearing completion, they did not have the ability to skip from verse to verse across the entire Bible as we can with bound Bibles or electronic tablets. Their primary contact with God's word was in the individual letter, prophecy or book that was addressed to them. Our presentations of God's word ought to follow this approach, where we explain first what the text meant to the original audience and only then then finding applications to the 21st century. The Bible was written for us (Rom 15:4) but not “to us”.

Therefore, aim to have your audience understand what the original audience would have heard as it impacted their lives. Try to restate it in your own words, giving careful attention to the context and the logical flow of the text. The goal

is to let the word speak (exegesis), and not for us to impose our thoughts on it (eisegesis). Explain who wrote, to whom they wrote and why they wrote.

Word studies, where one relies on following the use of a particular word using Strong's concordance, or thematic studies on a particular subject that rely on topical Bibles or books like the Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge may seem quicker to prepare, but pose the danger of selection bias where we unconsciously pick and choose the verses that suit the destination we have in mind. This can be seen especially in some expositions of prophecy that string together a selection of verses without any consideration as to what the original audience would have understood. Chaining references together without considering the context can lead to us to conclusions that were never intended. Certainly there are times where authors such as Paul would use a list of verses to establish a point that he was making (e.g. Rom 3:10-18), but this is not common. If you find you are assigned a thematic title, try to find one particular passage of Scripture that will serve as the backbone of your talk.

It is important to have a logical structure to your presentation. This should come from the passage of Scripture you are presenting. One of the first steps in your preparation should be to identify this structure in a few bullet points. At the beginning of your presentation, either share this structure, or pose a question that will be resolved in the passage you are speaking on. Then, keep to that flow with minimal digression. It is very difficult for an audience to follow a class if they don't know where it is going.

Many brothers find it helpful to consider a chapter from the daily readings when preparing an exhortation. This is a positive way to encourage all to engage in the daily readings and helps unify the ecclesia in a common endeavor. A word of warning though, resist the urge to artificially tie all three portions into a common theme unless they are genuinely connected.

3) Speaking with Conviction

*"I am full of words;
The spirit within me constrains me.
Behold, my belly is like unvented wine,
Like new wineskins it is about to burst.
Let me speak that I may get relief;
Let me open my lips and answer" (Job 32:18-20).*

One of the most important ways to effectively share God's words with others is to speak from conviction and with zeal. Enthusiasm is infectious. On the other hand, a flat presentation where it looks like the speaker is not engaged with his subject will dishearten all present.

Remember the following when preparing your class:

- There is no reason to be nervous. Your brothers and sisters want you to succeed and they are all willing you on to do well.
- Pick a subject that interests you and let your audience see the enthusiasm you have for it.

Speak as you naturally would in a conversation. There is no one best way to talk, and you will be most effective if you use language and tone that you are most comfortable with. Therefore:

- Avoid using words you wouldn't normally use. Use of jargon or pioneer phraseology can create a false impression about a speaker's knowledge while also impeding comprehension.
- Avoid including Hebrew and Greek words. Never quote Strong's numbers! Better to just tell your audience what a particular word means.
- Don't try to mimic the style of other speakers. I remember growing up in Australia there was one particularly exuberant brother who was very effective in presenting God's word, both because he was a good expositor and he was sharing his excitement for the word. But it led to some other younger brothers trying to adopt that same style when they spoke, even if though it was completely unnatural to them. It was not effective.
- If you are comfortable with it, sparing use of humor can help you engage your hearers. But remember, keep it sparing and respectful.
- Also helpful for engaging an audience, if used sparingly, are the use of stories that are relevant to the Biblical topic, like the way our Lord Jesus used parables.
- Don't read your notes.
- Make eye contact. Pick a few people in various parts of your audience that you look at.

Those last two points require you to be completely familiar with your subject matter. This takes time, so don't leave preparation to the last minute. Spend time reviewing your material — either by directly practicing it or freeing yourself from other distractions to mentally run through your presentation. Going for a walk (or in my case a swim) is a great time to do this. Remember, you are not putting on a performance — a successful presentation is one where the hearers remember the message, not the messenger.

4) Know Your Audience

*“I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some”
(1Cor 9:22).*

An exhortation is not a public lecture, nor is it a Bible class. It is important to consider the purpose of your presentation and prepare accordingly. It is also important to remember who is in your audience. A public lecture needs to assume the audience may know very little about the Bible. Avoid Christadelphian clichés and phrases like “as we all know”. Often your audience will be mixed. There will be some who have never heard about your subject, others who have heard it many times. Remember both groups as you prepare, you want to not go over the heads of the former, and yet at the same time you do not want to bore the latter.

5) Length and Interaction

“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead” (Acts 20:7-9).

Rather than indicate what Paul spoke about as he usually did, Luke seems to be implicitly critical of Paul in that:

- He was talking **TO** them
- He prolonged his message until midnight
- He kept on talking, despite the fact that the room was hot and his audience were drifting

Clearly it is possible to talk too long. A good Bible presentation must avoid this. There is no right length, as it depends on many factors such as the subject and style of the presentation. I have been enthralled by some presentations that lasted two hours. At other times ten minutes seemed too long! It is better to finish earlier than your audience expects. Don't overestimate your ability to continue to enrapt an audience.

“When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left”(Acts 20:11).

Note the difference when Paul resumed his presentation. Now he talked **“with them”**. The Greek here implies a more interactive style, a dialogue rather than a monologue. Asking occasional questions of the audience and inviting feedback at the end will help maintain their attention. Other effective ways to engage an audience are to make use of worksheets and encouraging them to take notes.

6) Multimedia and Object Lessons

“Then you are to break the jar in the sight of the men who accompany you”(Jer 19:10).

Visual aids can be a powerful assistance to ensuring that the main points of a presentation are remembered. Many of us will still have a “Round Tuit”. Brother Bob Lloyd’s style of object lessons was very memorable, though it is likely not the style many of us would use ourselves. Today the most common tool used to visually enhance a presentation would be PowerPoint. Used well, it can add significantly to a presentation. But like any tool, it can be used poorly, leading to “Death by PowerPoint”.



PowerPoint should not be used as a substitute to speaking notes. You should not read your presentation from a screen — people can read faster than you can speak and your audience will simply read ahead and tune you out. If you are going to make extensive use of PowerPoint, remember that to do it well it will add significantly to your preparation time. A picture tells a thousand words — the best situations to use PowerPoint are when showing a slide will be quicker than explaining something in words. For example:

- The outline of a presentation and the closing summary
- Showing parallels between two or three passages
- Using colour to highlight key words in a passage
- Quickly showing how a Hebrew or Greek word is used elsewhere
- Timelines and chronologies
- Graphs, photographs and maps
- Quotes from other sources that you want to read

7) Improving your presentation skills

“Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all” (1Tim 4:15).

No one starts out a great presenter. All of us have room to improve, and it will require effort and practice to do so. There are several additional ways to improve:

- Seek feedback, before and after your presentation. Even if you have been speaking for decades, when chatting with others after your class seek constructive criticism. If someone tells you it was a great class, seek specifics and ask what you could do to improve it further.
- Listen to a recording of yourself, or even better, watch a video recording. This can be very uncomfortable, but it is a powerful method to help you improve and overcome nervousness. When you do it, try to imagine you are watching someone else and focus on the positives
- Listen to others. Websites like www.livoniatapes.com have a large selection of classes. While you want to develop your own style, it is still helpful to listen to others to see what is effective.

8) Call to action

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice...” (Rom 12:1).

The main reason you are presenting is to encourage, comfort and inspire. Your presentation is not merely to impart information, it should also inspire transformation. All talks should have a practical impact that should help change the lives of those who hear you, something they can take away. You are not there to simply demonstrate how much knowledge you have.

Often in the Bible, when doctrinal truths are expressed, they are coupled with the expected impact on our life. When Jesus was asked which the greatest commandment was, he highlighted that the first principle of God’s oneness requires the complete response of all of our love. The letters of Paul are another

example of this — Paul often concludes a doctrinal section such as Romans 1-11 with a call to action (look at how Paul uses the word “therefore” to introduce these appeals in his letters).

So whenever you are preparing a class, ask yourself the “So What?” question and be sure to provide the practical implications of the passage you are looking at. A good way to do this (especially when preparing an exhortation) is to consider what you yourself need to hear. The conclusion of your presentation should reaffirm these appeals.

9) Am I a teacher?

“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation...” (Rom 12:6-8).

“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

The body is made of many parts (1 Corinthians 12). All roles are important and all are needed. But they are not all the same. Teaching is such a role that we may or may not be equipped for. Sometimes an expectation exists that all brothers should teach, despite the fact we would never expect all our ecclesial members to take on other roles such as playing the organ. As ecclesias we need to be providing opportunities for all our members to discover where their talents lie. But as individuals we also need to be aware of where our strengths are, and devote our service to those, rather than trying to live up to the expectations of others that may frustrate and discourage us.

It’s been said that assigning speaking roles to all is a way to encourage them to study. Not only does this logic contain the implicit assumption that sisters do not need to study much (as they tend to have less opportunities for teaching), it is also my experience that the one of the best encouragements to study for myself comes from hearing a well-prepared presentation from a brother who passionately engaged. I must confess that, a presentation by a brother whose talents are not in public address can actually discourage.

Conclusion

So let us all not put speakers on a pedestal, as if it is the most important role a brother can perform. It is simply one of many serving roles that we can fulfill. Wherever our talents may lie, let us all resolve to devote our selves to developing them with all of our heart and soul, strength and mind, with a focus on edifying our brothers and sisters and helping them on the path to the kingdom.

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Notes:

1. All quotations from New American Standard Bible: 1995 update unless otherwise stated.

The Purpose of Bible Study

Under the knife

Why would you read a book that puts you, the reader, under the surgeon's knife or, even more unsettling, slices through to your blood soaked entrails like a sacrifice on the altar?

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:12-13).

If you read God's living word for all its worth, it's got the power to cut through to the hidden plans and intentions that make up the real you. It exposes the contradiction between your public façade and the inner person. And the result? You become vulnerable to God's critical scrutiny and judgement. Maybe not the kind of book that will feature on your must-read list.

But if we want the *good* news of the gospel first we have to hear the *hard* news of the gospel. Scripture mirrors back to us just how degraded the image of God, formed in us in Eden, has become. We have stopped living in accordance with our maker's instructions. We have failed in our stewardship of His Creation. And the “*word of the truth, the gospel*” (Col 1:15) sets out our predicament in plain sight: we “*are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account*” (Heb 4:13 ESV). The experience of the Jews at Pentecost shows there can be no short cutting this uncomfortable process. First the word hits its mark (“*when they heard this*”): then, stage two, the scalpel's incision to uncover the disease (“*they were cut to the heart*”): only then is a way forward possible:

*“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, **what shall we do?**” (Acts 2:37).*

But why the need to *study* these things? Surely hearing bad news just once is enough?it's because we forget. We walk away from the mirror and blank out of our minds the reflected image of the stains of sin on our cheek. For as James said:

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” (James 1:23-24).

And, as the image of the truth fades, we smuggle back into our hearts the idols of money, sex and power which tell us that they will make us happy. Knowing this is our fatal flaw, we have a genius for self-deception: “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” (Jer 17:9). So God has initiated a protective fix as only He can, if we: “*humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls*” (James 1:21 NLT).

The map for us

Study may sound unappealing. Think more of the child with a book and a torch under the covers entering new worlds of wonder and possibilities: it's God's redemption-story-cum-repair-manual. Through its pages we see the way men and women can escape cold death and how God's right ways win out in the end. And stretching our imaginations we are offered tantalizing glimpses of a future prepared for His children by a loving Father. "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" (1Cor 2:9). And there is a life changing promise for each student-reader; if we give ourselves over to its healing influence and grasp the hope it offers, God will work through His word, to rewire and renew us and save us from ourselves.

The Scriptures do not just set us on the grid map of where we are (sinners, lost in a fog with no compass) but they also point us in the direction of travel (a redeemed cosmos where evil has been eradicated). So we had better be sure we know how to read the map and, crucially, what we should be looking for. The Pharisees believed they were the authoritative travel guides but willfully ignored the directions on the road:

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40 ESV).

The word was not just written down: it became flesh. Just as John the Baptist steered his hearers to Jesus, the Scriptures point beyond themselves. The word is a lamp to guide our feet to the Christ: this must happen, it is non-negotiable and we cannot pay lip service to it. The Scriptures are not just a sourcebook of true propositions about God and His purpose. They do contain such truths but Scripture is not structured that way. Nor is the Scripture just to be looked on as a mine of intertextual links — a puzzle quest — where we are left merely marveling at its intricacy. Study must usher us into the presence of God. And we make a profound mistake if we imagine mastering the Scriptures is the same as reaching our destination. The Scripture points away from itself and towards God. God is the source of truth and His Son speaks the truth he has heard from his father. "...a man [Jesus] who has told you the truth that I heard from God" (John 8:40 ESV).

One of the sweetest truths the Son utters, as he prepares to leave his disciples, is his word about new creation living: "And this is the way to have eternal life — to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent..." (John 17:3 NLT). We cannot content ourselves that our study has merely enabled us to know the truth about the Father and the Son. Such knowledge is vital but it is not connected to eternal life. The connectedness and relational intimacy of 'knowing' the Father and His Son is suggested by Jesus earlier in John's gospel:

*"If anyone loves me, he will **keep my word**, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and **make our home with him**" (John 14:23).*

Loving Jesus means knowing the word and keeping the word, his words in particular, meditating on them, and allowing them to become part of us. But this is a means towards a wondrous end: we look up from our studies knowing that we are bound up in an unbreakable intimate bond of love, and that we have been invited into a home set up for us by the Maker of the World and His Son the Lord of Life. The Bible of the serious student may take a beating, sliding aside or perhaps to the floor, as he suddenly falls to his knees in prayer or in tears or as she springs up spontaneously from her studies to dance with joy.

Our transforming journey

Our Bible study is a journey which moves us on from knowing to becoming, from information to transformation. The Bible answers the knowledge question: who is the Light of the World? It is Jesus. (John 9:5). It positions him at the pinnacle of the Creator God's plan. The narrative tracks God as He works that plan through history, demonstrating His unshaking commitment to His covenant to redeem a world broken by sin through His son. Creation, Fall, Israel, Exodus, Exile, Return, Resurrection, Second Appearing: the great arc of God's plan curves down to Jesus who "*when the fullness of the time was come*" confirmed the "*promises to the Fathers*" as all of those promises "*find their 'Yes' in him.*" And he — the bright and burning light of the world — will one day spread abroad the healing effect of sun soaked righteousness from sea to sea. "*But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings*" (Mal 4:2). So far so clear. But our first answer was incomplete — omitting to address the 'so what'. Yes: Jesus is the Light of the world — but so is the disciple. "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden*" (Matt 5:14). The truth about Jesus must become a truth about us. Knowing the light, we are called to become the light. The first word to the disciples after resurrection is: you have a job to do: flood the world with the gospel of salvation: be ambassadors of the kingdom. "*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you*" (John 20:21). As the Scriptures change our worldview, we recognize that to be loyal to that call will involve a re-alignment that puts us at odds with the workaday attitudes around us, of wanting and getting and spending. The Scriptures depict the high functioning disciple-community as a "*colony of resident aliens*"¹ surrounded by a culture that is hostile to it. To shine as lights the Scriptures appeal to us to stop looking inwards, to stifle our community quarrels and to look outwards, beckoning to the world, offering it something it doesn't know and doesn't have: a way of living, a way of loving and an assurance of peace with each other and with God.

We cannot become part of God's heavenly commune on earth if we have merely a drive-by acquaintance with His word. We are called by the gospel to be the advance guard of the kingdom, the outriders heralding the coming king, and are expected to wear his colors, speak his language and know his laws now. God's agent of change for equipping the "*children of the kingdom*" (Matt 13:38) to respond to this profoundly challenging call is the Spirit in Scripture. The same power that fired up the prophets and inspired the psalmist is just as powerful now in energizing the disciples of today in service of their king. The Bible is weaponized with God's Spirit, and can embolden the disciple to take on the "*desires of the*

flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life” (1John 2:16) and win. When we immerse ourselves in the Scriptures we become co-laborers with God and trigger the power that God has planted there enabling it to play out in our lives — transforming our minds so that we can think more nearly the way God does, be able to identify what is pure, and to wrestle with and overcome what is error. What God is, His word is: what God wills, His word wills.

*“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through **endurance** and through the **encouragement of the Scriptures** we might have hope. May the **God of endurance and encouragement** grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:4-6).*

From despair to hope

The aim of Scriptures is to instruct us so that despair gives way to hope. And the way that they do that is to grant endurance and encouragement to live in a way which honors God. Note how the language describing the power of Scripture to sustain us when we are prone to waver is then used, without change, to describe God’s direct activity.

God and His word are as one. If the Bible is in our head and our hearts, as well as in our hands, Paul’s assurance is that we can have the courage to outface our fears. This is because the full forces of the one true God stand behind His word. And lest we think the aim of Scripture study is ‘all about me’ — how I can escape

Extracts from “Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony”

We also asserted, that North America is one of the toughest mission fields the church has attempted. Most Americans assume that we live in a society that is at least vestigially Christian. North America is a place where people have absorbed just enough Christianity to inoculate them against the contagion by the real thing. We believe that the church can be a major means of conversion, detoxification, and inculcation of the practices required to be Christian in a world that thinks it already is. When asked by the disbelieving world, “Do something missional” (or “political,” “evangelical,” “ethical,” or “useful”), we try to plant and nurture a church. Now, after the Obama administration (whom we thought we were electing to get us out of war in the Near East) has expended billions of dollars and thousands of lives dragging on a war that has produced little but greater Islamic hostility, has deported nearly two and a half million undocumented immigrants, and has pioneered the use of drones thereby making modern warfare even more questionable, is it now time to start attempting to rebuild our church? God has put North American Christians in this world under an allegedly democratic polity in a capitalist economy and with state-run education, a military budget, and gun violence in the streets—as well as with rates of incarceration higher than any country’ in the world. How then should we live now in light of the shock that God has raised crucified Jesus from the dead? That’s the “political” question before us.

death and how I get saved — Paul concludes with a necessary corrective: the aim of God is to create a people who live in harmony with one another and with once voice glorify God. We are saved as part of God’s great plan “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (Rom 1:5).

*“Now I commit you to God and to the **word of his grace**, which can **build** you up and **give** you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32 NIV).* That is what we all want but of course it doesn’t happen by magic. Nothing will happen if the book remains closed. We have to invest the effort of an Ezra who dedicated himself (lit: set his heart) to study and to do. (See Ezra 7:10.) If our study has as its objective to soak ourselves so deeply in God’s words that we cannot but come away changed by them, then this will involve going beyond skimming the surface. Although this article is not concerned with ‘how’ we study but ‘why’, the link is unavoidable:

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh 1:8).

Regular interaction, mulling over, pondering leads to close familiarization (the how). Then follows the changed way of life, the careful practicing of all that is written (careful to do). Finally, and importantly, there is the outcome (good success) in the sight of God.

Our study of Scripture takes its place as one element in the range of activities that the thriving body of Christ-disciples put their hearts and hands to:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

This description of the earliest set of believers gives a balanced portrayal of what the new-born church considered vital for its survival, health and growth. Teaching is but one discipline among others and should not be privileged to the detriment of the balance of the whole. What is striking from all Paul’s letters is his absolute delight in the transformation he had witnessed in the lives of those in the ecclesias. The precise mix of how this has come about — through study, fellowship, the work of the angels, answered prayer — is not something he spends undue time analyzing.

- He delights in the news of the faith of the Ephesians and the Colossians in the Lord Jesus and their love toward all the saints (Eph 1:15).
- We listen as he provides a breath-taking account to the Corinthians of the Macedonians’ generosity towards the poor saints in Jerusalem, describing how they urged him to be given the privilege of contributing even when they had nothing themselves (2Cor 8:1-4).
- And he calls out how the love and faith of Philemon for Jesus brims over in the way he ministers to other disciples (Philemon 5).

What does interest him is ensuring that he reminds his recipients it is the *work of God* among them that has produced these heartening changes:

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him" (1Cor 1:4-5).

Our Bible study fits in to the many part mosaic of the living breathing, praying, good-work-performing life of the church under the good hand of the Lord.

As Paul wraps up his second letter to the Corinthians, in what might seem to us a startling and unexpected move given the sometimes bruising nature of what has gone before, he blithely sums up what he wants from the believers in Corinth:

"Be perfect" (2Cor 13:11)

And why should we not take this as our strap line as the purpose and outcome of Bible study? If you are a new creation then your study of the Scriptures should see you living like a new creation. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2Cor 5:17 ESV).* Be what you are. Forget compromise. This is not about making a go of it — doing your best. Jesus likewise sets the bar high: *"be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48).* Being perfect is what we were presumably designed for. This of course we fail to achieve. We remain sinful people. Selfish. Broken. Defective. We are not perfect.

The Greek word behind Paul's exhortation to be 'perfect' can come through into English with the meaning of 'mending' — in fact it is first used of the disciples mending their nets in Matt 4:21. *"And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them."* It means to make fit for purpose and if necessary repair what is defective so that it can fulfil that purpose: the ESV translates Paul's words *"Aim for restoration"*.

God is not, in Paul's words, demanding we become perfect, so much as issuing a recall. We need to be repaired and he is calling us in for the work to be done. And like any recall, it is the manufacturer's responsibility to repair the defect. And this is what God's Scriptures can do through Christ. They are God's recall notice. They tell us that God doesn't love you just as you are. In fact, He really can't stand you just as you are. That's why Jesus died. Through Christ and through His word, God begins the change from a sinner into a saint. He repairs your defects. The old is gone and the new is made fit for future glory.

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Notes:

1. See "Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony" by S. Hauerwas and W. Willimon.

When exhorting young Timothy, Paul counselled him to *"study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Tim 2:15).* The aim of the study enjoined on Timothy was that he would be *"approved by God"*. His study was concerned with his personal salvation. Paul did not say it would fit him to give powerful exhortations in his ecclesia, though clearly they were needed. *The Christadelphian*, 1996 p 172.

Jesus as the Word of God

The Bible is the Word of God. In that Bible, God has revealed — and continues to reveal to each passing generation — Himself and His purpose for the world. But most especially the LORD God has revealed to us His unique Son Jesus Christ. Since God has made His Son Jesus the greatest embodiment of Himself and His purpose, then it is quite reasonable to speak of that Son as “the Word of God”.

Therefore, if we understand that “the Word of God” is one of the titles of Jesus, then we may come to a better understanding and appreciation of Jesus. To do this, we will focus on the Prologue of John’s Gospel. Particularly, we will start by considering two key ideas which help to define that “Word of God”:

the beginning, and the “creation”.

1. The Beginning

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1).

The word for “beginning” is the Greek “*arche*”, signifying “first in order”. “The beginning” is a characteristic phrase of John referring almost invariably to the beginning of the *new creation* in Christ:

*“Jesus had known from **the beginning** which of them [the disciples] did not believe and who would betray him” (John 6:64).*

*“Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from **the beginning**” (8:25, KJV).*

*“You also must testify, for you have been with me from **the beginning**” (John 15:27).*

*“I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this **at first** [**at the beginning**: KJV] because I was with you” (John 16:4).*

*“That which was from **the beginning**, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1John 1:1).*

That last reference is particularly insightful. Here, in the very first verse of John’s first letter, he speaks of the “Word of life” not as a mere concept but as a man “from the beginning”, physical and tangible, capable of being heard and seen and touched. Surely this is a significant pointer for how we ought to read the first verse of John’s Gospel also. Continuing with John’s first letter:

*“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him [that is] from **the beginning**. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one [better, ‘evil’ as a human characteristic]. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him [that is] from **the beginning**. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you” (1John 2:13,14, KJV).*

Notice in this last passage that the phrase “that is” (twice, and shown in brackets) is italicized in the KJV, indicating the words were added by the translators, supposedly to enhance the meaning. In fact, they are unnecessary. It was not only Jesus who existed from John’s “beginning”, but the “fathers” also — the original disciples, who first heard Jesus speak. These “fathers” were with him “from the beginning”. By contrast, notice that the “young men” and “little children” are not described as having known Jesus “from the beginning”, since they would have become believers later. We see that John’s “from the beginning” is specific, but it is specifically **not** about the Genesis creation.

This special meaning of “*the beginning*” seems to be generally consistent in John’s writings (see also 1John 2:7,24; 3:11; 2John 1:5).

As John uses the phrase in his Gospel and letters, “the beginning” is obviously patterned after “the beginning” of Genesis. As a consequence, there is great similarity of language, and connection of ideas. And undoubtedly John wished his words to be read as alluding to, and echoing, the Genesis creation — but not actually referring to the Genesis creation. By using such language, he implied that the principles by which the LORD God worked at the very beginning — separating light from darkness, love from hate, life from death, Spirit from flesh, and order from chaos — would also be the principles by which He would work in the next stage of His ongoing “creation”. The apostle John’s “beginning” is not the Genesis “beginning” but the beginning of a new, or spiritual, “creation” in Christ.

In the Genesis-beginning, God ordained the Sun in the heavens when He decreed, “Let there be light.” So likewise, “In the (new, spiritual) beginning”, God testified of Christ: “Let there be light” (cp Gen 1:3 with 2Cor 4:6; Matt 4:16,17; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1,2; Acts 10:37), and this time a new spiritual Light came into the world. So God ordained His Son Jesus Christ, and from that “beginning” — from that first act — comes God’s new spiritual creation (Rev 3:14).

It is significant that not only John’s gospel but all four Gospels begin, quite sensibly, with a “beginning”:

*“A record of the **genealogy** [‘generation’: KJV; Greek ‘genesis’] of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1).*

*“The **beginning** [‘arche’] of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).*

*“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from **the first** [‘the beginning’: KJV; ‘arche’] were eyewitnesses and servants of the word... I myself have carefully investigated everything **from the beginning** [‘another’: from the top, or the beginning]” (Luke 1:1-3).*

The beginning of Luke’s Gospel has a wonderful connection with the first verses of John’s Gospel: Luke writes of himself and his companions, who were “from the beginning [Greek ‘arche’] eyewitnesses... of the Word [Greek ‘ho logos’].” This combination of words (“*arche... ho Logos*”) is identical to the very first phrase of John 1:1: “*beginning... the Word.*”

It is useful to note that Luke also puts the “beginning” and “the Word” firmly in New Testament times. For him and his fellow-believers, the beginning was not a nebulous one, or even a very ancient one, long before their births. It was in their own time and place, the first-century Greek and Roman world; there they became eyewitnesses of “the Word of God”, Jesus of Nazareth. And it was at that extraordinary “beginning” that they heard his words and touched him as well. Luke’s words are a perfect match for John’s in 1John 1:1:

*“That which was from **the beginning**, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning **the Word** of life.”*

The “beginning” described by Luke in Luke 1:1-3 and also by John in 1John 1:1-3 offer us pointers for understanding and explaining that “the Word” which was “in the beginning” (John 1:1) refers to Jesus Christ.

None of these “beginnings” have to do with the early part of Genesis, except in that Genesis was a pattern for this new “beginning” in Christ, to which all the New Testament passages allude. Instead, the Genesis references in the Gospels describe the “beginning” of the Father’s new spiritual “creation”, of which the cornerstone is His Son. In short, they are all about Jesus the *man*, and not Jesus the “*pre-existent god*”, or Jesus the “*idea*” or “*purpose*”!

2. “Creation” and the “New Creation” in the New Testament

Many times in the New Testament the Greek “*ktisis*” (creation) signifies, not the material, physical creation of Genesis, but the new spiritual creation in Christ. This is a creation — more specifically, a *new* creation — in and through Christ, by which men and women who bear his name are forgiven and regenerated.

In the New Testament, the “*ktisis*” family of words is found in nine passages where the literal “creation” of Genesis is plainly intended (Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6; 13:19; Rom 1:20,25; 1Cor 11:9; 1Tim 4:3,4; 2Pet 3:4; Rev 8:9; 10:6). While these passages may have far-reaching implications for other matters beyond Genesis, they are statements firmly grounded in the LORD God’s original creation. So we will set these passages to the side as not relevant to this discussion.

However, another fifteen passages in the New Testament just as plainly refer not to a literal creation but to a new or spiritual “creation” of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. This spiritual aspect is blurred by the KJV which sometimes renders the word as “creature”. This spiritual “creation” describes those who have believed and thus become part of God’s ongoing spiritual “creation”, as well as those who have the potential to do so (Mark 16:15; Rom 8:19-22; 2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10; 2:15; 3:9; 4:24; Col 1:15,16; 1:23; 3:10; James 1:18; Rev 3:14; 4:11; 5:13). We shall take a further look at several of these: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new **creation** [‘creature’: KJV]; the old has gone, the new has come!*” (2Cor 5:17).

Paul speaks of God reconciling unto Himself those who had been separated, and thereby beginning to bring order back to a frail, futile world. God does this through Christ in a second “creation” which is patterned after the first. This is clearly shown by the wider context: “*For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of*

darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2Cor 4:6).

Elsewhere, Paul again speaks of God as the Creator, but also points to Christ as Creator too, unique in his own work of creation:

*“For we are God’s workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do... [Christ’s] purpose was to **create** in himself one new man” (Eph 2:10,15).*

The phrase “to do good works” defines the purpose for which we are being created anew in Christ, through belief and baptism.

*“[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all **creation** [every creature]. For by him all things were **created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were **created** by him and for him” (Col 1:15,16).*

Christ is the “image” and the “firstborn” of all *his* creation, because all *believers* are created by him (v 16). This must be the “new creation”, since Christ is “before all” in point of time (Col 1:17), and all are made out of him (v 17). These figurative expressions are explained by the more literal ones of verse 18: “*He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead*” (cp also 1Cor 15:20,23). In these last passages particularly, Jesus himself is the One who “creates” — an act which is only possible in the sense of a new, spiritual “creation” of believers — created in him.

Another five passages might seem to fit in either list, since they refer to a literal creation, but with a strong spiritual element also (Rom 8:39; Heb 4:13; 9:11; 1Pet 2:13,14; 4:19). Referring to Heb 4:13: “*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in **his** sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of **him** with whom we have to do*” (KJV).

The NIV translates a key phrase as “**God’s** sight”, but that is plainly wrong. While it is true that God knows the thoughts and hearts of all people, it is hardly relevant to this passage, because the word *theos* does not occur here. The “his” and “him” refer to Jesus Christ as the antecedent, for he is “the Word of God” who “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb 4:12), especially the hearts of believers.

These last five passages may reinforce the other fifteen listed earlier. This complete listing of “creation” passages gives us only nine passages which are primarily about the literal creation, but at least fifteen and possibly twenty passages which deal to some extent with the spiritual creation. Thus, more than two-thirds of all New Testament “creation” passages are seen to deal, not literally with Genesis, but with the “new creation” in Christ.

Bible “beginnings” are accompanied by “creations”. There could have been no “beginning” in Genesis 1 without the awesome creative activity of the LORD God in and through His angels. And there can be no “beginning” in the New

Testament, i.e., the Gospels, without the even greater and more far-reaching creative work of our heavenly Father in and through His Son.

An understanding of such a “new creation” helps to explain John 1:1-18, as well as a number of other supposed “problem passages” in the New Testament. These passages are alleged to teach that Christ had a literal existence with the Father before his conception and birth (i.e., that he had a “pre-existence”), and/or that Christ was personally responsible for the Genesis creation. But when read properly, such passages are set in the context of a spiritual “creation”, the beginning of which is chronicled in the Gospels.

The man Jesus, who is also “the Word of God”

In the context of such a “beginning” and such a “creation”, “the Word” of John 1:1-18 can scarcely be a vague, philosophical idea. In fact, there is much evidence that “the Word” and “the Word of God” refer to Jesus Christ and are especially appropriate titles for the man who embodied the will of his heavenly Father and communicated that will to the world.

Jesus was a man (Acts 2:22; 1Tim 2:5; Rom 8:3; Heb 2:14) who spoke God’s words (John 7:16; 8:28; 12:48,49). Thus, one of his names is “the Word of God”. In addition to John 1:1 (where it appears three times), the apostle John uses the phrase “the word of God” and “the word” 14 times in his New Testament writings. Of these uses, at least eight are significant for our discussion, since they appear to use the phrase as a title:

“He called them ‘gods’, to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched” (1John 1:1). This we proclaim concerning the Word of life: The “Word of Life” was, according to John, a visible, tangible, physical human being: the Lord Jesus Christ.

“I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you” (1John 2:14). Here “the Word of God” appears to be parallel to “him (who is) from the beginning”, i.e., Jesus Christ. To “know Christ” is equivalent to having “the Word of God” [i.e., Christ’s influence] living in yourself.

“[John] testifies to everything he saw, that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:2).

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 1:9).

“When [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls [or ‘lives’] of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (Rev 6:9).

“I [John] saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God” (Rev 20:4).

Once again, “the Word of God” seems to refer to Christ himself. He was not only “the Word of God made flesh”, but “the flesh of Jesus Christ made God’s Word”. The two were one and the same!

These last four passages from Revelation use “the Word of God” as roughly equivalent either to Jesus Christ or to the saints’ testimony of Jesus Christ. To early believers, “the Word” and “the word of God” were not just literal words, written or spoken. They were a memory — a living, breathing testimony by men and women willing to die for the one great reality in their lives: a living, eternal Son of God who embodied in himself the fullness and perfection of Divine revelation.

“[Jesus Christ] is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God” (Rev 19:13). Here the verse is perfectly plain: Jesus Christ is “the Word of God”!

The use of the “word” (Greek “*logos*”) as a title for Jesus is not restricted to the writings of John. In the remainder of the New Testament, another half dozen passages, at least, may be interpreted in the same way (Luke 1:1,2; Acts 19:20; Rom 10:8; Heb 4:12,13; James 1:18; 1Pet 1:23). Try reading each one as though it refers to Jesus Christ personally by his title, “The Word of God”.

Luke 1:1,2 and Heb 4:12,13 have already been considered earlier, so we will look at each of the other four: **“The Word of the Lord [‘*kyrios*’] spread widely and grew in power” (Acts 19:20).**

When Luke describes this “Word”, he does not mean God’s Truth but especially “the name of the Lord [‘*kyrios*’] Jesus Christ”, which “was held in high honor” (v 17). **“The Word is near you” (Rom 10:8).**

The context here is clear, and distinctive: “The word” Paul describes is Christ, who is “the end, or fulfillment, of the Law” (Rom 10:4). And now, Paul says, this personal “Word” need not be sought by ascending into heaven (that is, to bring Christ down) (v 6), nor in “the deep” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) (v 7), but rather “the Word” is near you, in your mouth and your heart — where the confession is framed that “Jesus is Lord” (vv 8,9).

*“[The Father] chose to give us birth through **the Word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:18).*

*“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring **Word of God**” (1Pet 1:23).*

In the first of these two passages, God’s “new creation” is conceived through the implanted “Word of Truth”, and is born as “a kind of firstfruits”. And in the second, the same believers are “born again” by the imperishable seed of the “Word of God”. The “Seed” of God is Jesus Christ, and his titles include “the Word

of God”, “the Word of Truth”, and the “*Word... made flesh*” (*John 1:14, KJV*). His “precious blood” has been the means of redemption (1Pet 1:19) for those who in faith (v 7) understand his “sufferings” and “the glories that would follow” (v 11), and seek as “obedient children” (v 14) to follow in his footsteps.

Conclusion

All of John’s Prologue may be read as a statement about Christ — the *Logos* or “Word” of God in human form and expression — and the work of a new, spiritual Creation which God is carrying on through Christ. Indeed, this is a “Creation” which is far from finished — but one at which the Father and His Son continue to work to this very day. It will not be finished until every last redeemed one has been gathered into the great multitude standing before the throne of God.

Indeed, so far as we know, it may not be finished even then.

George Booker (Austin Leander, TX)

Notes:

1. Quotations from the NIV unless otherwise stated.

Jesus’ Meat and Drink

Disciples of Jesus put themselves in the position of a wilderness people on the sixth day of the week, preparing for the coming day of rest. This, of course, is exactly our position. We often describe our lives as a wilderness pilgrimage; we have not yet reached the promised land of the Kingdom age; and we yearn for the great Day of rest, release and jubilee.

So we pray to God, “*Give us this day bread for the coming day*”. Prepare us now for life in the Kingdom so that we can rest with the Lord when he returns. That preparation has to be undertaken daily. As our physical bodies crave and need daily sustenance, our spiritual lives also thrive on regular and constant refreshment from the food God provides. Jesus said that it was his meat and drink to do his Father’s will, and he learned what to do from the Word of God. If it was Jesus’ meat and drink, and we wish to be like him, it must be our food too. It will sustain us today, which is wonderful in itself. But more importantly, it is the only thing which will prepare us for the coming day.

This is why it was so important for a portion of manna to be laid up before the Lord: “*Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt*” (*Exod 16:32*). The golden pot of manna was an eloquent witness of incorruptibility. It was placed in the Ark of the Covenant, and nothing that is brought into God’s presence in that fashion can corrupt, for He is the fountain of life. The pot of manna was laid alongside Aaron’s rod that budded and the tables of the covenant (*Heb 9:4*), showing that the fulfilment of God’s covenant with His faithful people will involve resurrection and the gift of immortality.

The Christadelphian, 1998 p 307.

The Proper Use of First Principles

Faith-Ful lives

“That you may become wise unto salvation.” This oft-used phrase is a serious misquote. The full passage (2Tim. 3:15) reads “...wise unto *salvation through faith.*” Salvation is through faith, not knowledge. “Becoming wise” means that we learn that salvation is through our faith in God’s grace; it is not through our knowledge of Scripture.

Bible study and knowledge have the goal of changing our character so that we can lead faithful lives. When we break down Bible knowledge into specific Bible doctrines, then we can connect each teaching into an aspect of faith. When we know something to be true about God’s plan and purpose, then that doctrine should directly affect our way of life.

Two methods of investigation will guide this pursuit: context (or intent), and implication. Context is familiar to us; when we read a passage in context we discern the writer’s intent. For example, no Bible passage can contextually argue against the orthodox triune God, because that would be anachronistic. Therefore, any passage used to argue against Trinitarian teaching, as applicable as it might be in theory, must have an immediate, contextual meaning. There must be something more than using a passage to disprove the erroneous teachings of orthodox Christianity. That “something more” should direct us to the moral intent of the writer.

The second tool for properly applying the teachings of Scripture to our lives is *implication*. Implication tells us what must follow given a certain state of affairs. For instance, if God resurrected Jesus from the dead, that implies that God is greater than Jesus. It would also imply that Jesus was not God, that Jesus was mortal, and that if Jesus is now immortal, that became the case only after God raised him. As for how this applies to our lives, Paul informs us that our belief in this fact leads us to acceptance of our faith, and hence a relationship with God that develops our characters through suffering (Rom 4:23-5:4).

First principles are not given as a set of Scripture; they are selected teachings that define our body. They are a way of saying what’s really important, so important that to not believe them would exclude one from the household of faith. However, does it take much faith to accept them as true? Is it very hard to believe in the unity of God? That seems to be a given of the universe. True, a dead person rising to immortality is totally contrary to our experience, but it is easy to believe given the existence of God, and the implausibility of alternate explanations to the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection. It is relatively easy to believe that God exists and that God raised Jesus from the dead; that takes little faith. It takes much faith to live according to that belief.

If the only function of fundamental teachings is to define who we are (or as it often unfolds, who we *aren’t*), then they are not functioning as principles, but merely truths to be received. A principle is not a principle unless it serves as

a principle, a guiding precept by which we live. Earth's surface is about 70% ocean. That is a fact, but there is no special moral meaning or application in this fact. Likewise, the fact that God is one, or that God raised Jesus from the dead are just facts of the universe if all they are is something to be accepted as true. Bible truths, especially those we elevate to the status of "First Principles," must do more than occupy the "T" column in our minds.

We will investigate three "First Principle" Bible teachings and look for the daily life applications that inhere in these teachings. The three I have chosen for this article are the unity of God, the sinfulness of all humans, and the promises to Abraham.

1. There is ONE God

God is one — not three. That is how this doctrine usually hits the road. We feel comfortable that we can refute the orthodox view on this issue because we have Scripture to back us, and because of the historical development of the doctrine after the New Testament era. However, two problems arise when handling the unity of God as primarily as a negation of Trinitarians. First, every orthodox Christian identifies as a monotheist. Of course they believe in one God, one eternal omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent deity. However, their God is somehow divided into three entities, all of whom comprise one God. If you have ever discussed monotheism with a conventional Christian, you know how futile these dialogues can get. There is no traction in taking a monotheistic stance, because your interlocutor will be right there with you.

The second problem, already noted above, is that no Bible passage can contextually argue against the Trinity because that doctrine considerably post-dates the writing of the New Testament. We can truthfully say that the Bible does not teach the trinity, but it would be anachronistic to say that the Bible argues against it. Anti-Trinitarian argumentation must use Scripture indirectly and build itself systematically from the foundation teachings about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

What then do we do with "there is only one God"? We follow the two leads posted at the beginning of the article: context and implication.

The context of monotheistic passages in Scripture is largely, if not invariably, warnings against idolatry and false gods, the gods that are inventions and projections of humans, gods of limited power. The pagan polytheistic cultures of ancient Near East featured many gods and idols of wood, stone, clay, and metal, idols who have mouths but speak not, who have ears but hear not, eyes but see not, hands but work not, wombs but bear not.

When we read the context of "proof texts," such as Deut 6:4, Isa 44:6, and 1Cor 8:4-6, we get the flavor of monotheism: don't worship made-up false gods, the work of craftsmen, because they are but the creations of humans, whereas *yhwh*, the true God of Israel, created the universe. To worship a false god is folly because it will get you nowhere; these gods are powerless. Worse, they manifest the projections of base human behavior, and thus often invoke human sacrifice,

ritual prostitution, sacrifices to gain favor, and orgies to insure procreative success and a good harvest.

In the New Testament Paul informs us that covetousness (greed, NIV) is idolatry (Col 3:5). This doesn't need any explanation, but it might need some expansion. Any sort of greed, desire, "need," "must have," or whatever it is in this mortal, material realm that we strive for becomes a false god and we thus negate our monotheism. "*You cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matt 6:24) is the clearest New Testament statement about monotheism. The NIV renders these opposing objects of devotion as "God and Money," with a capital "M," to identify the two as the possible masters of our lives, to whom only one we can give our devotion.

Another implication

There exists one obvious yet under-appreciated aspect of monotheism. It's the ellipsis that follows "there is only one God." Stated fully, the doctrine would read, *There is one God, and it's not you*. We lack omniscience, so we will reserve to God alone when and how the kingdom will come about. We do not presume to know things only God, who is eternal, and therefore outside of history, can. Unfortunately, such seems to be the nature of much prophetic exposition.

Also, we do not know the motives of our fellow servants, thus we cannot know who is guilty and who is not, who is a believer and who is not. God looks on the heart; we cannot. This is the basis of "do not judge." To judge is to say you know another's motives. This execrates the doctrine of monotheism.

2. Human Nature is Sinful

This first principle is about us, so it should have an easy time moving into the moral teaching sector. Theologically and conceptually, it complements the doctrine of monotheism. If there is one God, then all other sentient beings are not God; the label for that group is "sinners." This is not necessarily pejorative, rather it is a statement of relationship. There is one perfect, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, omnibenevolent being, the God of the Bible, *yhwh*, and there is every other thinking being. These beings, collectively known as "humanity," are the only other entities in the universe able to relate to God. Unlike God, they have finite time lines, minuscule knowledge and meagre power. Because of these limitations, they have a constricted perspective on their world; add in a few other factors inherent in their biological constitution, and you have a creature given to self-interests, hence, a sinner. We need not look far into human experience to validate the veracity of "all have sinned."

The usual context of proof texts on humanity's sinful nature is salvation by grace and faith, not by works (e.g., Rom 3:23-24, Gal 3:22). These texts place all of us entirely in God's debt, not vice-versa because of our works. This reflects the theological basis of our nature, for if something within our power could effect salvation, then we must have some immanent "goodness." Without going to Calvinistic excess on this matter, we affirm that we are entirely dependent on God's grace for living both now and forever in our Lord's kingdom.

We will look at three implications that follow from this teaching: (1) we're no better or worse than anyone else, (2) we need forgiveness, and (3) we need to grow spiritually. Each of these has two areas of application: our own sinfulness and the sinfulness of others.

The first implication, about belonging to the common group of humanity, forms Bible's teaching on humility. Indeed we do have individual strengths, spiritual capabilities, and virtues, but these attributes cannot remove us from the lot of humanity. We never attain "no further improvement needed" status. Our best virtue is awareness of where we lack virtue. Thus, we always belong in the common pool of "sinners." In short, humility is the demonstration of our belief in this first principle.

How does it work with respect to others? We can humble ourselves by being aware of our limitations, but how do we apply humility to others? One way is to refrain from the adulation we often assign to the leaders of our community. We ought not celebrate, elevate, or idolize our leaders or any outwardly faithful and devoted brother or sister. We hope that inside they are the person they appear to be, but we don't know that, and not being omniscient (see above on monotheism), we *can't* know that. People can do helpful acts and useful service, and we properly thank them for that. However, no one, no matter how well-known they become in our community, is immune to the impulses and weaknesses of our nature. No one is excluded, so don't be surprised when you hear about the lapses of even esteemed members of our community. The teaching "all are sinful" is not merely a theological truth. Sadly, there will be real instances in our midst.

Forgiveness, the second implication, is a major Bible topic. That we need to ask God for forgiveness is a foundation of our faith. Praying for forgiveness implies that we are aware of our sins, and that must mean something beyond the general "be merciful to me a sinner," as true as that is. Praying for forgiveness of specific sins is the first step in overcoming them. The vital practice of forgiveness is a direct outgrowth of a theological first principle. God forgives us, as we forgive those who sin against us. If we are all sinners, we all need forgiveness. We practice the model God shows by forgiving others whose behaviors negatively affect our lives.

Overcoming sin is the third major implication of the doctrine "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom 3:23). Being in a sinful condition is not intractable, as in "I'm a sinner and there's nothing I can do about it." This first principle gives us the starting point from which we begin our spiritual journey. We may never escape our nature or our label, but we don't have to act like sinners, either. This doctrine demands our fullest attention; it summons and challenges us to do better each day, to apply at a personal level what the Bible tells us at a theological level.

What does this imply for living in an ecclesial environment of like individuals? Two Biblical directives derive straight out of this doctrine. One, the admonition to practice patience, tolerance, forbearance, and long-suffering (e.g., Rom 15:1). Remember, we are all working on our individual growth, each with a different

background, capability, desire, intent, and other factors. We're all at a different place in our journey. Two, we have the admonition to help each other (Rom 15:2,14; Gal 6:2) by providing positive support and nurturing help to each of our beloved, but sinful, brothers and sisters. Condemnation, gossip, criticism, and judging do not strengthen a community of sinful people; they weaken and fracture it.

If all humans are sinful, we need to do something about how we live. We practice patience with others, we help them, we strive for ourselves to overcome our specific deficiencies, we seek for forgiveness from God, and we offer forgiveness to anyone who might have caused us harm or distress. So many virtues stem from this fundamental truth.

3. The Promises to Abraham

God promised the patriarch Abraham an inheritance of land and a descendant through whom he, and many others, would inherit that land eternally. These promises are initially stated and developed in Genesis 12-22, and they find further reinforcement frequently throughout the Bible. They are fundamental to Christianity, but how do we derive specific moral teachings from the first principle we call "the Promises to Abraham?"

I chose this doctrine as the third example for this article because it doesn't seem to lend itself to moral application. The Promises are historical, something to be known and believed. How do God's promises to Abraham, made some four millennia ago, affect our lives today? How do we go beyond the practical use of the Promises as an item of catechism, to be recited at a baptismal interview?

Paul nominates Abraham as the icon of faith, writing in Rom 4:9-12 that he received the promise, which antedated his circumcision, because of his faith. Therefore Abraham, the father of the Jewish people and the faithful nation of Spiritual Israel, was an *uncircumcised Gentile* when God counted his faith as righteousness! Just what did he believe? Abraham doubtless believed many things about God, but Romans 4 emphasizes two: forgiveness of sins and life from the dead. Life from the dead is prefigured twice: in Isaac's conception and birth (Rom 4:18-19) and in the figurative offering of Isaac (Gen 22:5, Heb 11:17-19). The Hebrew verb translated "return" in Gen 22:5 is first person plural — *we* will return, indicating Abraham's faith that God would either resurrect Isaac or provide a way out, which did happen with the entangled ram. These providential acts in Abraham's life proved *a fortiori* that God could solve any human problem.

Paul taught Abraham's belief in forgiveness by inserting Psa 32:1-2, concerning God forgiving and justifying the ungodly through faith, into the discussion of Abraham's trust in faith, not works (Rom 4:5-8). This quote implies Abraham himself knew he was forgiven and counted righteous not by his own goodness or deeds, but by his trust in God.

Abraham's paradigmatic faith is representative and exemplary, to be emulated by us (Rom 4:24). Our faith is not based on believing that God made promises to Abraham, but on emulating the faith of Abraham, believing with him that

God forgives sin (the ultimate abstract blessing) and God raises the dead (the ultimate tangible blessing).

It is necessary to believe that God made promises to Abraham, and God reckoned Abraham's belief in those promises as righteousness, because that is a true and fundamental fact. However, believing the fact is not faith. We become heirs of the promise not because we believe *about* Abraham, but because we believe *like* Abraham. Therefore, if our faith is like Abraham's, we always believe that God can forgive us, no matter how badly we might stray, and we always have hope, no matter how dire our situation. That is the faith of Abraham.

Conclusion

The three doctrines treated above certainly have more to offer in this light, and there are many other fundamental doctrines. Think of what you could do with the doctrine of the devil, for instance. No outside tempter means we have no excuses for our behavior, period. We take full responsibility for our actions. What of baptism by immersion, or that the Holy Spirit is God's power, or the Kingdom of God on Earth? What are the real-life implications of these fundamental teachings? If you have a first principles class in your ecclesia and fail to take these teachings to their moral extent, you are teaching facts, not principles.

Finally, please see the big picture here. Our morality is not an add-on to our first principles. We do not have truths to be believed, and then a separate set of virtues, values, and behaviors. We directly derive morals, values, and conduct from the facts that comprise the essentials of Christianity. If we have a document worth calling a Statement of *Faith*, it must comprise the principles through whose application we form our way of life. Effective Bible study always has as its final question, "Now that I have learned this, how do I then live?"

David P. Levin (Baltimore, MD)

When the apostle speaks of leaving first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and pushing on to perfection, he does not imply that when we have secured a mental grasp of these elements they require no further thought. His complaint was against those who were continually discussing, and questioning their foundations, and who, at a time when they ought to have been teachers, had need that one should teach them again the first principles of the Oracles of God.

He desired that they should be grounded and settled on such points, in order that they might gain a knowledge of the deeper and more subtle matters he was prepared to expound to them. Pushing on to perfection also implies a practical application of doctrine in the working out of character, and the ordering of our daily life. It is possible for a man to spend so much mental energy in discussing and re-discussing the simple elements of truth, that he never puts what he has learned into practical effect, and probably this is why some people have drawn a fictitious distinction between matters of morality and what have been called "mere questions of doctrine." (*Islip Collyer*)

Live Like a King

Guidelines

How would you like to live like a King?

God was very clear about His guidelines for being a King in Israel. This was an important position, and you had to lead the people, present a good example for them to follow, and teach them the ways of the Lord.

“You are about to enter the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, you may think, ‘We should select a king to rule over us like the other nations around us.’ If this happens, be sure to select as King the man the Lord your God chooses. You must appoint a fellow Israelite; he may not be a foreigner.... When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel” (Deut 17:14-15, 18-20 NLT).

What better advice for us today?

“Always keep a copy of the Bible with you and read it **DAILY** as long as you live.”

God has three main ways to develop our character in this present life: Prayer, Fellowship and contact with His Word. As we strive to become better servants, it is vital that we develop good habits to input as much of these three items into our daily lives.

Building a vital and healthy prayer life is an important part of any Believer’s life, and frequent Fellowship with like-minded Brethren who challenge, encourage and motivate us is also essential to healthy spiritual growth.

We’d like to talk now about the importance of regular, consistent time with God’s Word. There are not many other things that we can do with our time to help prepare us for a life in Christ more beneficial than systematic Daily Bible Reading. Bible Reading is not like other kinds of reading. It’s not like a self-help manual, or a motivational book.

The Word of God is living and active, and able to break down the calluses that life develops in your heart and pierce through to your true inner thoughts and intentions.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are

wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work (2Tim 3:16-16 NLT).

Brother L.G. Sargent said, “There are almost as many ways of Bible Study as there are Bible students.” (*Exploring the Bible, Page 5.*) What worked for L.G. Sargent, doesn’t necessarily work for me, and what works for me may not be effective for you. The key is to diligently find some plan or procedure that fits in well with your personality, your daily schedule, and your ability.

The classic picture of the family sitting in the living room after dinner with Bibles open doing the Daily Readings is frequently not the case. Life is busy and active for many believers. Dad’s picking his daughter up at Karate and Mom is getting their son from Soccer and picking up take-out for Dinner. (*It has to be take-out, because otherwise we won’t have time to eat and get to Bible Class by 7:30!*)

Realizing and accepting the fact that life is often busy and hectic is an important first step to taking control of it, and not letting it control you.

Don’t feel bad if your family doesn’t fit into the mold of being able to sit in the living room after dinner doing the Daily Readings. But, don’t let that be the end of it! You’re smart. You’re creative. You can find a way to work something out. God’s Word is powerful and impactful at any time of the day! Make time around the Word in the morning. Many women find it helpful to pass the time on the treadmill at the Gym by reading. What an ideal opportunity to get some helpful, Scriptural input! Replace the picture of the gentleman sitting at the breakfast table, drinking his coffee and reading the daily paper, with an opportunity to read something that is going to have much greater lasting value.

Smartphones

68% of Americans now carry a Smartphone, and 45% carry a Tablet. These incredibly helpful devices are great for helping you get the Biblical input that you desperately need in your daily life.



- Got 20 minutes to kill waiting in the Doctor’s Office Waiting Room? Don’t waste it playing Solitaire, fire up your Bible App and catch up on some daily Bible time.
- Sitting in the stands during a 90 minute long baseball practice? What a perfect opportunity to refresh yourself spiritually.
- Stuck in traffic jam? Listen to God’s Word with your MP3 Player or streaming live from the Internet.

Bible Apps are so incredibly helpful, easy to use, and convenient, that many believers are now transitioning so that the App is their main Bible.

Some of the more popular Apps are:

- YouVersion — Highest Rated and most popular — Completely free and as an added bonus it includes the Robert Roberts Daily Bible Planner built in!
- Bible.is — Hands down one of the best “speaking” apps out there — If you plan to listen to the Bible, this is a good option.
- Glo Bible — Great focus on videos, images, maps and study tools — Bro. Leen Ritmeyer’s work is featured well in this App.
- Tecarta NIV Bible — My personal favorite! Great user interface, lots of options for marking verses, highlighting words, adding notes, etc.
- Logos Bible Apps — Requires an internet connection, but it can sync with all of your Logos content that you currently use online and on your PC.
- Blue Letter Bible — Similar to Logos in that it requires an online connection and syncs with your Blue Letter content — Only available on Apple devices.
- Bible Gateway & ESV Crossway — Great options for Android users



Whatever App you choose will do just fine, but feel free to try out a few and see which one best fits your personality and reading habits. Many of them are free, and most cost less than a cup of coffee. One thing to look out for is apps that only work when you have Internet connectivity. If you travel a lot to places without good internet, or don’t want to use up your Data Plan, be sure that the App you choose allows you to download the content to your device, and doesn’t have to be continually connected.

Bible companion

Looking for a good reading plan to follow? You can’t go too far wrong with following the traditional Robert Roberts Bible Reading Companion. Wikipedia refers to the companion when it says, “Christadelphians believe that reading the Bible is very important: they believe that it is ‘essential if one is to discover—and remember—God’s revelation of Himself and His purpose’; citing Bible verses such as Psalm 119:105, they believe the Bible gives moral direction for the life of a Christian — thus the Bible Companion is designed to aid the Christian in their Bible reading to this end.”

- A pdf version of the Bible Companion is available at — www.christadelphia.org/chart.pdf
- If you want more help remembering, you can also get the Roberts plan emailed to you each morning, and it will show up in your Inbox to remind you. Sign up for this online at: www.read.thepostiveword.com/support/dremail.php
- Or, if you just would like the readings automatically added to your calendar you can do that as well at: www.read.thepostiveword.com/support/ical.php

- www.dailybiblereadings.org also lists the readings for the day, and provides some interesting and helpful commentary on them as well!

I enjoy mixing up the traditional plan a bit, and for the past few years have been following a modified plan. It uses the Roberts plan, but does all six days of the first reading on Monday and Tuesday, then all six days of the second reading on Wednesday and Thursday, and then all six days of the third reading on Friday and Saturday. On Sunday you are right back to the beginning, and read all three portions with everyone else at Memorial Service. You can find this planner online at: www.simihills.org/2016-Planner

If you want to stop by a Bible bookstore there are actually some Bibles specifically printed to help you with regular Daily Bible Reading. There is a 365 Bible that evenly breaks the Scriptures up into daily bits, and labels them all by the date. I enjoyed reading a 365 Day Chronological Bible for a few years. This version reworks the order of the Scripture so that everything appears in strict chronological order, and then divides that up into 365 even portions for daily reading.

However you choose to ingest the Word of God, make sure that you get some in! Don't starve yourself from this valuable resource for your spiritual development. Make some time alone, with your spouse, or as a family to see the message that God has prepared for you.



Now comes the hard part... Don't just read it!

The Bible isn't some sort of magic talisman or mystical mantra that can have miraculous effects on you simply by squeezing 15 minutes of Bible reading into your day. You have to bring it into your HEART. You have to pray and ask God to allow His miraculous word to have its wonderful effect upon you. You have to think about how you will change your life because of what you read. You have to think about how you can come to better understand and know God and his son Jesus more fully.

There is a purpose and goal of systematic, regular, consistent Bible daily reading. It is not about checking something off a list and feeling better about yourself as a "Good Christadelphian". It's about opening yourself up to changing the kind of person that you are and becoming the kind of person that God wants you to be. The kind of person that you read about in the Bible.

Jeff Gelineau (Simi Hills, CA)

“Sola Fide”

Saved by Faith Alone...No Need for Baptism

An “elevator speech” in a stairwell

Many years ago I was walking up a stairwell in San Jose, Costa Rica with two of our missionaries when we met a young man coming down the stairs, who our mission brethren had met before. He was a missionary for a mainstream Protestant religion. When the brethren introduced me and told him I was from the Christadelphian Bible Mission committee it immediately became evident that our brethren had had some Biblical discussions with him in the recent past. After a brief hello he said: “Right...you believe you are saved by your works.” I told him: “No, I do not believe my works could save me, but I do believe a lack of works could condemn me.” He obviously believed in “Sola Fide”, salvation by faith alone. Taken to the extreme, and many who hold this doctrine do so, it even eliminates the need to submit to baptism because it is something one does, and is therefore a work.

The background for Sola Fide:

What was the impetus for the idea that we are saved by faith alone? Sola Fide, salvation by faith alone, was born in the Reformation. Martin Luther was the midwife. He was probably the single most important catalyst in the success of the Protestant reformation. Martin Luther was a Catholic priest who split with the Church. It was the Catholic Church’s extreme emphasis on salvation by works that was a prime factor in moving him to nail his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral in 1517. He rightly observed that we are not saved by any works that we can do when they are not motivated by our faith. However he, and his followers down through the ages, have taken this correct concept to a wrong and dangerous extreme.

Interestingly, Jesus had the same complaint about the Jewish establishment that Luther had in his day. The Pharisees had put so much emphasis on the works of the Law of Moses, and superimposed so many of their definitions, qualifications and additional requirements, that they had lost sight of the intent of the Law and were leading the people astray. It is Jesus’ teachings in the New Testament against that error, although taken out of context, which are used to support the idea of salvation by faith alone today.

Catholicism and indulgences

It was the extremes to which the practice of “indulgences” were being used as a fund raiser that became Luther’s main point of focus. Indulgences were written letters guaranteeing forgiveness of any penalty for sins. At one point it was possible to buy an indulgence for future sins not yet committed. Indulgences are still practiced by the Catholic Church today, but not to such extremes. The explanation of “indulgences” that follows is a quotation from “Catholicism”, edited by George Brantl. It has the imprimatur from Francis Cardinal Spellman so it can be relied upon as accurately stating the Catholic position. This excerpt

is taken from the section titled “Indulgences and Satisfaction”: by Jaques Benigne Bossuet:

“Now, when she (the Holy Roman Catholic church) imposes those penances on sinners, and when they humbly submit to them, that is what we call satisfaction. But when in the consideration of the fervor of penitents, **or in consideration of other good works performed by them**, she remits a part of that punishment to them, this is called indulgence.

“The Council of Trent proposes nothing more to our belief upon the subject of indulgences, than **“that the power of granting them, hath been given by Jesus Christ to the church**, and that the use of them is salutary”; adding “that it should be retained; with moderation however, lest ecclesiastical discipline come to be enervated by an excess of mildness,” which shows us that the manner of dispensing indulgences is an affair of mere discipline.” (Emphasis mine.)

It was the Catholic church’s belief that it had (and still has) the power to forgive sins that had degenerated into the practice of selling written letters of forgiveness (indulgences) that Martin Luther fought against. He rightly saw the practice as the defacto teaching that one could be saved by his “works”. In this case the work was the making of a donation to the church.

It was in this context of condemning the Catholic Church’s practice of selling forgiveness of sins (indulgences) that “salvation by faith alone” became a cornerstone in the reform movement. It is a commonly held doctrine in most of mainstream Protestant Christianity today. We will see how this plays out and how this idea works into the framework of Christian thinking today. It is even used as an argument against baptism. Because baptism is something one **does**, and is therefore a “work”: it is eschewed by some as a sign of slipping back into believing that one can be saved by one’s works.

Martin Luther

Luther was a prolific writer and much of his work is still available. The following is a brief excerpt from his writings on Sola Fide:

“...One thing and one thing alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty: and that is the most holy word of God, the gospel of Christ, as he says: *“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me shall not die eternally”* (John 11:25); and also *“If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”* (John 8:36); and *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God”* (Matt 4:4). Hence it is clear that, as the soul needs the word alone for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone **and not by any works**. For if it could be justified by any other means, it would have no need of the word, nor consequently of faith.” (emphasis mine).

Salvation by faith alone taken to the extreme of virtually excluding any actions on the part of the recipient is worked into the Evangelical beliefs as follows. It

should be noted that there are minor variations on some specific points between different branches of the evangelical community.

Sola Fide and the evangelical formula for salvation

If the issue was simply “salvation by faith” alone the subject could be easily addressed. One would think that James 2:14-25 would provide all the Scripture needed to establish that faith and works are both required. In fact James states that faith without works does not really exist. It is dead! *“What good is it my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”* He gives an illustration of someone failing to help someone in need and makes the point that: *“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”* In verse 20 he continues *“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”* He concludes his argument in verse 26: *“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”* One would think James’ writing on this matter would be sufficient to eliminate the idea of “salvation by faith alone” and set forth the need for our lives to be a balanced manifestation of faith and works.

However Sola Fide is not a stand-alone doctrine. It is combined with a number of other verses taken out of context that construct a formula for salvation:

- Faith is given to us by God by His Holy Spirit. *“For by grace are ye saved, through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not by works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9)*. It tends towards predestination because if salvation is entirely a gift from God that requires no “work” response from the recipient, there is nothing anyone can do to put themselves in the way of salvation.
- When we accept Jesus we are saved at that moment. *“And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1John 5:11-12)*. This and similar verses are taken out of the context of Scriptures that state that salvation is neither a present possession or guaranteed in the future. Paul did not feel he was already “saved”. Writing to the Philippians Paul says: *“that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own” (Phil 3:11-12 ESV)*.
- Once saved we are always saved and we cannot lose our salvation. The judgment seat of Christ as it relates to “saved” Christians is relegated to milder forms of punishment and is not a the matter of life or death.
- If someone who claimed to have received Christ subsequently falls away it is believed he must never have truly accepted Jesus in the first case. I’m not aware of any Scripture to support this idea. In fact Hebrews 10 states the opposite.

The problem with the above construct is that it takes Scriptural verses out of context and draws conclusion that are inconsistent with other Scriptures. We recommend “Wrested Scriptures” by Bro. Ron Abel as an excellent source for an in depth look at the arguments and passages in question.

The Scriptures actually present a different picture that is consistent with the overall Biblical teachings.

Faith and works in Scriptural context

The Word of God states that faith must be accompanied by works or it does not exist. *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26)*. James is not contradicting Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2 where Paul says that salvation is the gift of God. There are no works per se which we can do that can earn our salvation. However that does not mean that God does not expect a change in our actions. We are expected to respond with deeds, the first of which is obedience to the command to be baptized. *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16)*. Even brethren in the first century who had already received the Spirit gifts submitted to baptism. *“For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” (Acts 10:46-47)*.

We are expected to employ our minds and reasoning in reading and understanding God’s word. Salvation is the gift of God, but *“faith cometh by hearing” (Rom 10:17)*. Luke praises the brethren in Berea because: *“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 17:11)*.

There is a sense in which we are saved when we believe in Jesus and obey His command to be baptized, but we can change our minds. *“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment” (Heb 10:26-27)*.

Immortal life is not a present possession. It is the blessing we pray to receive when Christ returns. *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1Cor 15:52)*.

And we can lose our salvation. We are no better than Paul or the first century believers described in Hebrews 10: We can decide to reject the gospel at any point in our lives. And sadly some of us do.

Sola Fide is a wrong doctrine

“Once saved always saved” is wrong and human nature being what it is, it could result in a negation of the warnings in the New Testament about the dangers, and the consequences, of disobedience. In this day and age Bible talks emphasizing judgment are not politically acceptable...including in Christadelphia. But a balanced reading of the Scriptures does not support ignoring judgment and punishment. (Could it be that God knows a little more about how to reach us than we think?)

Conclusion

“Text out of context is pretext”. One can prove almost anything from the Bible by taking verses out of the context of the Bible as a whole. We are the readers. We are not the “editors in chief”. We cannot pick and choose. That is why we emphasize reading the whole Bible...not just the pleasant parts. A balanced reading of the Bible teaches that once we have faith, we must manifest our faith in our works. God does not do it all. He has provided us the way of salvation in His Son. That was entirely of His doing. But we must do our part in response. Faith without works is dead.

- 1) We use the word “faith” in two different ways. We might say that someone is “of the Catholic faith”. In that case we mean he subscribes to the Catholic system of beliefs. When we say a person “has faith” we mean he has firm beliefs and convictions that guide his thinking and his actions. (Or should). “Faith” in this sense does not exist in the absence of works. That is James point. “Faith without works is dead”. It does not exist. It would be clearer if we thought in terms of “belief without actions”.
- 2) I say “roughly” because I do not want to encourage the conclusion that this brief treatise on a complicated doctrinal thought process is an exhaustive treatment of Sola Fide and its related conclusions. It is also good to remember: “One has not really heard the other man’s argument until you have heard him make it.”
- 3) When I emphasized the Scriptural verses on judgment to come in a discussion on this subject with a Christian friend of mine who believed in “once saved always saved” he said: “I may be smelling of the smoke but I’ll be there.” He was taking 1Cor. 3:15 out of the context of Hebrews 10.

Ken Somerville (Simi Hills, CA)

Works and Faith

Work ethic

The most compelling religions ever practised by man all had a great work ethic. The most notable of these would easily be the intricate web of involvement within the Catholic Church or within the simple Five Pillars of Islam. You do as you are told, keep the checklist up to date — and you are in....

These religions are especially compelling because they were written and contrived by man and imposed and judged by man. Idolatry, in one form or another, is perfectly imbedded within. Humans love to worship the stuff they make — or write. The better the stuff — the greater the adherence. You essentially talk yourself into redemption by doing and following your own work ethic — your own stuff.

There are many Biblical examples of this. The golden calf model provides one: “*These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt*” (Exod 32:4). Following their recent, miraculous history of the Exodus, this inexplicable event should easily be seen as madness; however, it did happen.

In the time of Christ, there were two major systems with good work ethics: the Jerusalem temple worship regime of the Sadducees, and the Synagogue system of the Pharisees. In relation to how all this was to affect the spread of the Gospel to the Gentile world, the Synagogues would have the most profound effect. The Synagogues were a great asset in the beginning — but they quickly turned into the source of the most crucial opposition to the grace of our Lord.

Peter and Paul

Synagogues were well entrenched by the arrival of Jesus in the first century. Dating back to the Maccabean period, they had become established in most Greek and Roman cities by 30 AD. Later, as Paul and his team moved north and west from Jerusalem, the Synagogue was often the first stop on their journey. Paul had easy access as he was a full card-carrying member. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He knew most everything there was to know about the process and the “Works of the Law.” He had done it all — but had given it all up for Jesus. Now he was nothing but a sinner saved by grace. When the Synagogue folks figured this out, they hated him. But Paul had even bigger trouble than that. He was the Apostle to the Gentiles. However, in Jerusalem there were thousands of Jews who had converted to Christ from Judaism. “Works” and “Law” were part of their DNA.

And then there was Peter — the Apostle to the Jews. He was one of them. But he had spent time with the Lord — and angels. While being commissioned by Jesus to be the apostle to the Jews, his first, official mission was to convert and baptize a Gentile household — that of Roman Centurion, Cornelius. Along the way he was introduced to the new, but old, concept of what God calls clean and unclean. So, things were different now. The Jews had to open their collective minds to the new reality of God’s grace.

This reality finally came to a head in the Roman Province of Galatia among the Galatian Ecclesias. As the Gospel pushed north and west from Damascus and Antioch in Syria (which had a substantial Jewish presence), the mission of Paul and Barnabas took a side trip through Cyprus and ended up lingering among small towns in the region of Galatia: Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. They were received enthusiastically for the most part — until the local Jews realized what was happening. Consequently, they quickly stirred up the townsfolk, resulting in Paul and Barnabas being thrown out of the city of Lystra — but not before stoning Paul and leaving him for dead.

Troubles in Galatia

Happily, in a somewhat lower key, Paul and Barnabas returned to the towns and ministered to the locals which resulted in the formation of ecclesias — the first network of Gentile Ecclesias — the Galatians. With great joy the apostles returned to Antioch sharing the response to the Gospel they had witnessed. Furthermore, the Ecclesias were growing in grace and in the Spirit.

This is when things changed. Delegations of Jewish brethren came down from Jerusalem to provide further instruction for the new converts in the necessities of

the works of Judaism. For starters, circumcision. But, it wasn't just circumcision, it was also "the works of the law" and "observing days and months and years!" A whole checklist of things. What is amazing is that these delegations evidently were sent under the authority of James, the Lord's brother.

Earlier, Paul had gone to great lengths to establish his position in the church and his independence of the Jerusalem "super" apostles. When God was pleased to reveal His Son to Paul, he didn't go up to Jerusalem, but went into Arabia for introspection and returned to the community by way of Damascus. Three years later he went up to Jerusalem to meet with Peter, seeing none of the other apostles with the exception of James, the Lord's brother. Paul was personally unknown to the Churches, which were now praising God because of him (except for his former record of destruction). Undoubtedly they had to have a chat about their various commissions: Peter's to the Jews and Paul's to the Gentiles.

Later, Peter, Paul and James attended the Jerusalem Conference, which was convened because of the dispute over the notion that works (especially circumcision) were necessary for salvation. Paul had to remind the Galatians that these super apostles in Jerusalem had extended the right hand of fellowship to himself and Barnabas, thus supporting their commission to preach to the Gentiles. There was no mention of any specific, essential, righteous works or circumcision in the spiritual contract — but only to abstain from food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, from meat of strangled animals and from blood. Just some common sense stuff, some of which only had relevance to the early Church.

Unfortunately, the interference of Jewish Christians in Galatia was so strong that even Peter buckled to their bullying. Paul had to withstand him face to face. Peter was not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel.

"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (Gal 2:15).

Paul rejoiced that, while he and Peter were brothers in the work of the Gospel, he had died to any legal requirements for redemption. He had been crucified with Christ, so he no longer lived, but Christ lived in him. The life he was now living in the body he lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him. Paul was not going to set aside this grace of God, because if righteousness could be gained in any way through the works of the Law, or any other works, then Christ died for nothing.

Paul then reminded the Galatians of how foolish it was to have accepted Christ, who through the Spirit was clearly portrayed as crucified, and then be sidetracked by another gospel (which was no gospel at all) where salvation could be attained by human effort. Had God given them of His Spirit and worked miracles among them because they began with a regime of observing Jewish laws — or because they believed what they had heard?

Let's not forget, righteousness was achieved by Abraham by believing God. The Gospel — that the Gentiles would be justified by faith — had been announced long before Abraham was circumcised: *“all nations will be blessed through you”*. And, *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise”* (Gal 3:8). Faith was the basis of salvation — pure and simple. What a blessing! How impossible it is to consider salvation being effected by works — especially the shadows of the past. Imagine trying to take Judaism to the Gentiles. No! Now everyone could be “Sons of God.” Everyone could receive full rights through the Father...no longer slaves to the checklists of salvation by works. What a personal pain this was to Paul — that his saints would want to abandon salvation by faith in Christ for a mixed religion of works and faith. Sadder still that the works regime was clearly backed up by politics and personal power. Paul continues, *“They want to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them”* (Gal 4:17 NIV) This had little to do with truth and much to do with human engineering.

Paul's anguish in knowing their current position was equal to his pain in the beginning, *“for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is finally formed in you”* (Gal 4:19).

Hagar or Sarah

However, although the saints now knew that sonship was attainable through the Father, by receiving the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, they needed to decide who their mother was. There was a choice. Hagar or Sarah? Hagar stood for the legal slavery of Mount Sinai and the Judaizing city of Jerusalem, that was quickly passing away. Sarah stood for promise and the New Jerusalem — which is from above. They needed to remember that the child born in “the ordinary way” persecuted the Son of Promise. And, that conflict continues to plague the world today. Natural descendants of Ishmael are causing havoc in our world, including continuing to harass the son of the free woman. The children of Hagar, the legal thinkers within the community of Christ, continue to insist on adherence to human rules and regulations — a sort of half and half religion. It doesn't, of course, have any power to save. Salvation by human action has been and ever will be with us — in constant conflict with truth and salvation by faith.

Consequently, slavery is an ever present, human fall-back position. It is for freedom that Christ sets mankind free — not slavery. And, Paul reminded them in no uncertain terms that if they let themselves be talked into circumcision then the sacrifice of Christ would be of no value at all. If you want to be justified by law (and works), you will be alienated from Christ and will fall away from grace. In Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love.

Paul was indignant. The Galatians were running such a good race. Who cut them off? The Judaizer's doctrine of works was like a corrupting yeast that defiles the whole lump. Salvation by faith and the grace of the Son of God was counter-

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culture. It always has been and it always would be. Paul constantly suffered for it. If circumcision was necessary, the offence of the cross would be abolished. Paul would have it easy. But, Paul was suffering for the cross — and the false brethren’s pernicious teachings. If these agitators were so possessed with their false doctrine, why didn’t they just go all the way and be castrated? This is one of the great lines of sarcasm in Scripture. If they were so marred, they would, of course, be cut off from the temple worship. And, why not? If they continued to preach circumcision, they would be cut off from Christ.

There is always the argument that if we don’t have the burden of the checklist of works to keep us on the straight and narrow — we will claim the freedom to indulge. We could continue in sin and let grace abound. The antidote here is to continue to serve one another in love. When we have the works checklist, we readily use it to judge and compare one with another — because it is our list. This type of thinking and activity causes most of the strife in our Ecclesias. We bite and devour one another and in so doing, we destroy the community of our Lord — instead of building it up in faith and within His saving grace. Flesh and Spirit are diametrically opposed to one another — and therefore, in eternal conflict. It is hard at times to know what we should be doing. But, we must never forget that we need to be led by the Spirit. Praise the Lord, we are not under the works of the law.

There are “works” of course. Works of the flesh. And works (fruits) of the Spirit. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the first and live by the second. We reap what we sow. If we sow to the flesh we will reap destruction. If we sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit, we will reap eternal life. It is our choice. It is all or nothing. We can’t have a bit of both.

We sow to the flesh because we naturally want to make a good impression to the world — and to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Circumcision was the natural identification with Jewry. And, sadly, the works-righteous Judaizers wanted to “boast” about “your” flesh. There is at least a hint of irony here as they were reminded of the women of Israel singing about how many Philistines David had been able to kill or the number of foreskins he was able to bring home to King Saul. Salvation by works is generally a foreskin count in one form or other.

What Paul wanted to boast about was the cross of Christ — through which the world had been crucified to him and he to the world. Works counted for nothing. The only thing that counted for something was a new creation. And, if anyone wanted to “mark” the body, then it should not be circumcision — but the marks of Jesus.

Clyde Snobelen (Victoria, BC)