

TIDINGS

Volume 83, Number 10, November 2020

KEEPING THE FAITH IN THE LAST DAYS

Today, we see nearly instantaneous global accessibility of information. While new, this does not create new issues of faith and temptation. It only spreads their influences over a wider area and much more rapidly.



PHOTOGRAPH BY: **BRO. DAN GAITANIS**
(PETERSBURG, VA)

Location: James River, Richmond, VA

This reminded me of Amos 5:24 which says “But let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream”.

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LET ALL THINGS BE DONE UNTO EDIFYING

By Dave Jennings

WHEN you renovate a home, you must make a choice. “Will I choose to build up, or tear down?” Sometimes it seems easier to remove the old and just start over, accounting that the structure is not sufficient for restoration. That’s our personal decision because it is our own house. However, in the ecclesial house, this is never our decision. We are primarily called on to build up, to restore, to strengthen. Tearing down is rarely an option.

Bro. Dennis Gillet wrote in *The Genius of Discipleship*:

“It is one thing to believe in the principle of love, but to be real it needs a loving relationship with others. That is why the ecclesia is called a family and a commonwealth. The Apostle Paul teaches us that if one member suffers, the tremor is felt through

all the members; if one member rejoices, the ripple spreads to every heart. (1 Cor 12:26). So, it is evident that the individual relationship which a disciple has with God is not just for himself, alone. It has also to do with that individual disciple fitting into the corporate body of believers.”¹

Reading through Paul’s letters to the Corinthian Ecclesia, it is evident how great a struggle he had with that body of believers. They had obvious challenges from leaving a pagan culture to embrace the wholesome principles of the Truth in their thinking and actions. But beyond that, they engaged in constant undermining of Paul’s work. There’s good reason to believe the “*thorn in the flesh*” Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 12:7 was not about a physical malady, but rather the buffeting he constantly received from

such brethren. Paul prayed for relief from their grip three times but was told that the grace of God was sufficient for him to overcome.

Paul was most concerned that while he was away, the negative influences at hand would result in the ecclesia in Corinth becoming a battleground rather than a sanctuary of peace and harmony. He catalogs the behaviors he most feared as *“quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.”* (2 Cor 12:20 ESV). This, along with unrepented sins of uncleanness, fornication and lasciviousness, could put spiritual lives at risk. While they were debating and fighting, the Corinthians winked at the very moral standards of the Truth which were being neglected.

James speaks of the deadly poison that proceeds out of the unruly tongue. Some men would bless God, yet curse men (3:8-9). How can one bless the Father and then curse men who are made in His similitude? James targets the real issue when he says that when we have envy and strife in our hearts, *“there is confusion* (tumult or unquietness in KJV margin) *and every evil work.”* (Jas 3:16).

While Paul was away from Corinth, he earnestly prayed for their restoration. He desired not to use *“sharpness”* (KJV) or *“severity”* (ESV), which he had authority to dispense, but rather that they would repent, so he could build up instead of tearing down.

In ecclesial life, there certainly are occasions when behavior must be addressed. In Corinth, their unwillingness to face up to pressing

moral issues became a significant issue the Apostle had to address. Even the gifts of the Spirit became a source of envy and disruption! Rather than thinking of how to best serve others in the ecclesia, behaviors were disruptive as the focus was more on the individual's desire to demonstrate their own gift than to build up others. We read in Ephesians 4:12 that the very purpose of the Spirit gifts in the ecclesia was for the *“perfecting (NIV—preparing) of the saints, for the work of the ministry (external), the edifying of the body of Christ.”* Instead, brethren were using the gifts for their own purposes, and it was distracting. It is interesting that in the two chapters that specifically deal with the issue of the body and the use of Spirit gifts, there is what appears to be an “out of place” insertion of 1 Corinthians 13. What does love have to do with the disharmony associated with the misuse of Spirit gifts in the ecclesia? Everything! If members had love for one another, it would govern their use of gifts. The focus would move from the right to assert myself to the appropriate thinking of how can I best build up my brethren.

This is the example of our Lord in his final hours before the crucifixion. Despite false witnesses, an illegal trial and terrible physical abuse, he concentrated on saving and helping others. When he himself was deserving of comfort, his focus was on the needs of his disciples and even the criminal on the cross beside him. If we are to learn the lesson of edification, it must start with the mind of our Lord, who in humility counted the needs of others more significant than his own (Phil

2:3-4). A mind of edification does not have one's interests as the focus.

In our quest to be the people of God, we are regularly faced with the limitations of our flesh. We can possess a burning inward desire to have our own way or to ensure everyone knows just how "right" we are. It can feel like a biological response. When we are challenged, we can have an innate desire to strike back or justify ourselves. This comes from deep within our soul. It is quite the opposite of edification. Left unchecked, when not governed by love and building up, we will find great unhappiness in ecclesial life.

However, our Lord offers us a far better way to live together. It is a life of edification. The late Bro. Colin Badger once told me 1 Corinthians 12 is about the "doctrine of the body of Christ." It represents a fundamental teaching we would do well to embrace as a primary doctrine. The body of Christ offers a significant contrast to envy, strife, and disquietness. In 1 Corinthians 12:25-26, Paul writes that the body should have no schism, but mutual care for one another. Further, we should share in the pains of those who suffer and rejoice when a member is honored. In Romans 12, also dealing with Spirit gifts, we are told to "*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*" (v. 15). When one was blessed in Corinth with the gift of prophecy,

a believer had two choices. He could envy that brother for having a greater gift, which almost certainly would lead to strife, or he could celebrate with his brother and rejoice, edifying his brother and strengthening the bonds of peace.

Imagine how elated Paul would have been if he had learned that the Corinthians had elected to live in such harmony!—brothers and sisters demonstrating the love of Christ, the ecclesia a place where believers could shelter from a tumultuous and hateful world in an environment where love and care prevailed.

Today, we have the same choice. We must do what is right, but we must always perform it in love. Even the restoration of one overtaken in a fault is to be done in the "*spirit of meekness.*" (Gal 6:1). When we correct others, let's do it with the full understanding of "*considering thyself*" and recognizing this could just as easily have been us. The Ephesian Ecclesia was described as having fought against false apostles and evil, but in doing so they had left their first love (Rev 2:2-4). Believers have never been defined solely by their doctrinal purity. While principle is essential, it must be matched with love. We do not solely represent doctrinal positions; we are manifestations of the character of our Lord.

Our challenge is to adhere to the principles of the Truth, yet have mercy in how we apply those principles.

A faithful brother recently exhorted in my ecclesia about the balance of rules and the needs of people. It was a fascinating discussion. Clearly, righteous requirements must be adhered to. When God tells us He considers something a sin, it is a sin. When our Lord gives us a process to follow to restore those who are overcome by a sin, it is expected that we will use it. But, the needs of the individual must always be in mind. Our challenge is to adhere to the principles of the Truth, yet have mercy in how we apply those principles. How can I build up my brothers and sisters to overcome? No greater example of this principle can be found than the truth and mercy our God demonstrated in the Garden of Eden. There was a rule, a consequence for sin. Adam would return to the dust of the ground. But, without compromising this truth, God provided mercy, enabled by the victory of the Seed of the Woman (Gen 3:15). We must seek this principle in our ecclesial lives. How can we ensure God's truth is being observed, but also have mercy on one who is struggling to repent? This is the choice of edification—to choose to advocate obedience to God's commands while displaying gentleness and longsuffering.

Bro. Len Richardson had some insightful comments on this topic:

“We acknowledge it was the Lord himself who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: ‘A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench.’ (Isa 42:3; Matt 12:20). Jesus reserved the stern treatment for those who thought they were completely right and whose attitude to others was haughty and contemptuous. Toward the fallen, the weak (tax collectors or prostitutes), he was always encouraging and gentle. He preferred to pour in the oil of tenderness to give revival and make the flame burn brighter.”²

The appeal to our community is that when we see quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder, it is time to come to a full stop and reassess. It is a signal to us that something is fundamentally wrong. The body is not operating as our Lord intended, and we are pursuing our own agenda, not the good of others. None of us wants a community that is a battlefield. Rather we desire a place where we can know our brothers and sisters will care for us just as they would their own body. Let's reaffirm our commitment to edification. “*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*” (Rom 14:19).

Dave Jennings

¹ “*The Genius of Discipleship*,” Dennis Gillet, *The Christadelphian*, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham, UK B28 8SZ, 1984

² “*Sixty Years a Christadelphian: A Worm's Eye View*,” Len Richardson, Detroit Christadelphian Book Supply, Livonia, MI 48154

KEEPING THE FAITH IN THE LAST DAYS

By David Cooper

It has been said that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Regarding matters of faith in God and our ecclesial associations, this certainly seems to be the case. Expressed differently, Solomon wrote there is “*no new thing under the sun.*” (Eccl 1:9).

TAKEN in this vein, this subject is not “new.” The issue of those called who have left their calling is not peculiar to this age, nor to the age of the Apostles or even the children of Israel. It is not even restricted to matters of faith or religion but is common across all aspects of human endeavor. As human beings, we simply have a built-in tendency for shifting interests as time goes on. It is part of our nature.

In this article, we will look only at issues of our beliefs that affect each of us directly and personally. This will be extended to include the indirect effects that we see in our ecclesial associations.

A PROBLEM AS OLD AS MAN

Let us begin by noting that, from a Biblical viewpoint, the condition of falling away or losing interest in God’s ways goes back to the creation of man in the Garden of Eden. These issues are a common problem at any age, which is evident from all that is written in the Scriptures and sung in our hymns.

This is a far-reaching implication that must have been evident to the Father before the command, “*Let us create man in our image,*” (Gen 1:26) was ever given. Thus, all our foibles, strengths and, weaknesses were known and understood by the ones who executed

the divine order to populate the earth on the “sixth day.” This is what we would expect in a well-wrought engineering or business plan. The caveat, of course, is that with man’s limited insight, and no knowledge of the future, his plans often go astray.

What Adam and Eve did in the Garden by choosing to follow the advice of the serpent rather than the word of the LORD, was not therefore an unexpected result, but something planned. The fall of man had to have been anticipated, and consequently, the genius of the entire mode of salvation is that it is foreknown. It is an exhilarating thing to behold.

Incidentally, this must be the basic meaning of John’s statement in John 1:1, *“In the beginning was the word.”* (Greek: *logos*, involving both a spoken word and a plan of action.) The Almighty has always known entirely what He intended to do. James says as much in Acts 15:18 at the Jerusalem Conference: *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”*

These last points are obvious, it seems, yet their power is seen in what they foretell.

ARE THE LAST DAYS DIFFERENT FROM THE PAST?

There is a multitude of warnings about the “last days” and their dangers. But are the “last days” a specific time, and if so, when do they begin to appear? Often it seems we are looking for some sort of political development (or sign) to indicate that time. We are perfectly correct to conclude that Israel must

be in their land for the events foretold in Ezekiel 38-39 for the “last days” to be possible. You cannot be invaded in a land where you are not living. That those times are the “last days” is also clear since they conclude with God’s name and majesty being seen in all the earth, and His work with Israel understood correctly. So yes, from the Bible’s viewpoint, there are last days, and we are living in them.

Israel has now been in their land as a national entity since 1948. We are currently some 72 years past that point, and the Lord has not come, yet. Events in the world at large increasingly point to greater developments to come. But the events unfold more like a game of chess than of a football or soccer game. Quiet, almost inconspicuous movements seem to be leading to a rapid “checkmate” conclusion.

This raises the point of what Jesus meant in the Olivet prophecy, when he said, *“Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”* (Matt 25:13).

And in the Apocalypse, *“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watched and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”* (Rev 16:15).

The fall of man had to have been anticipated, and consequently, the genius of the entire mode of salvation is that it is foreknown. It is an exhilarating thing to behold.

The parable of the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish, shows that the point is preparation, not scrutiny. For while they all waited for the bridegroom, they slumbered and slept (Matt 25:5). It was when the bridegroom appeared, that the lack of preparation of the five foolish virgins was revealed. But by then, they had no time to get prepared. So, the entire point of these parables and warnings is to encourage each disciple to be prepared. Along with the Lord's teachings and those of the Apostles, there are ample cautions about the "last days" and what to expect.

THE LAST DAYS WARNINGS

Political instability will worsen. The Olivet prophecy is recorded in three of the Gospels, Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. In each record, the Lord is quite clear there will be some confusing events, false claims of being "Christ," and general tumult. The phrase *"the powers of the heavens shall be shaken"* occurs in all three prophecies (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:26) and is most likely to be understood nationally or politically (the ruling authorities is referred to as the heavens) rather than an astronomical way. It could well signify that the rulership of government will be shaken if not entirely broken. What we are not told is how long this condition will persist before, or if it is only in response to the sight of *"the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory."* (Matt 24:29-30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27).

A note in Matthew 24:30 tells us that at this time *"then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and then he will send out his angels to gather his elect (clearly the saints) from the four winds, from one*

end of the earth to the other." For those who have been called, but whose lamps are going out, there may not be anyone left from which to buy the oil of faith. As it is said today, it is **"GAME OVER,"** all has been lost. Weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth await. These are very sobering thoughts. The Apostles develop more details about the last days, from an ecclesial perspective.

Good societal influences will weaken dramatically. Paul writes to Timothy, *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith."* (1 Tim 4:1). In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, he further elaborates on a developing form of society that emphasizes man is without moderation and restraint with examples of extreme self-will and a pleasure-bent nature. As it is commonly advertised today, "If you've got it, flaunt it." In verse 5, Paul writes, *"from such turn away."*

The believer should carry on. Timothy was urged to be diligent to preach the word, teach and not to give up, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine,"* but will heap to themselves teachers who will tickle their ears with what they want to hear. They will turn away from the Truth to fables (2 Tim 4:1-5). Timothy was to watch and preach against this and make full proof (that his work was genuine) of his ministry. Given that this letter was written in the mid-60s AD, we can see the falling away was not about a far distant future time but was near at hand. In fact, it was well underway—*"The mystery of iniquity doth already work."* (2 Thess 2:7). The influences undermining the gospel message were already in place and restrained only by the hand of the spirit.

Serious doubts from scoffers are to come. Peter (2 Pet 3:1-4) warns about times in which belief in the return of Jesus will be doubted (v. 4), referring to scoffers who make a pointed comparison to the beliefs of the fathers, who have now died and still the Lord has not come. It takes only a moment to see that this reference can only refer to a time (or times) when this belief was strongly held but was then being doubted. This condition can only strongly impact those who are expecting the Lord to return to the earth. For those in the first century, it would have been a temptation to just give up after the fall of Jerusalem, had the Lord not specifically told them this would happen, and that end would not be yet. For those in our day, who believe in heaven-going at death, this would be a pointless objection. It is only to those who expect a “rapture” or a visible return of Jesus that his Coming matters. So, this seems to be a specific warning to Christadelphians and the steadily declining cadre of others who also look for the Lord’s personal return to the earth.

The Antichrist. If we had any doubt, about our days being in the “last days,” the words of Epistle of 1 John 2:18, “Little children, it is the last time,” eliminates it. The emergence of the “anti-Christ” (literally “against Christ”) movement was first developed by the Jews. As time went on, it included the idea that Jesus had not ever come in bodily form or in flesh and was not therefore returning. It is not a recent concept.

MODERN ECCLESIAL CONDITIONS—SYMPTOMS OF DEEPER PROBLEMS?

A general comment should be made here. The references we have discussed above sketch the conditions of any age, not just the age in which we live.

Since the time of the printing press in the early middle ages, the availability of information has steadily increased. In recent times, the extraordinarily rapid spread of information, good, bad or otherwise, creates a new condition. Today, we see nearly instantaneous global accessibility of information. While new, this does not create new issues of faith and temptation. It only spreads their influences over a wider area and much more rapidly. One can hear and read about good or harmful things, nearly anywhere in the world, as they happen.

Biblical, historical, and scientific information, as well as all the speculation that can surround them, are available from internet sources and can be at our fingertips wherever we are, not just in the local library. But whether we spend our time playing online games, watching TV news, listening to bad or edifying ideas is still our choice. That has not changed at all. In the final analysis, we are both in charge and responsible just as before.

These articles addresses a specific condition or problem the ecclesia and individual believer might face, which might be termed a “falling away from the faith.” This places the author in the uncomfortable position of presenting himself as one who knows not only what the “Faith” is, but also what

“falling away” from it means.

Thankfully, at least part of this responsibility is not difficult to see. The identity of “the Faith” is not something vague but is described as a definite concept, in numerous places in the New Testament. For example, Jude uses the phrase, “*The faith which was once delivered unto the saints,*” (Jude 1:3), which makes it clear to his mind (and the mind of the Spirit), there was a body of knowledge that could be legitimately called “the Faith.”

That there is a real and present danger always of losing sight of this “Faith” is evident from all we have shown so far. We may thus conclude that to teach otherwise and to conduct our ecclesial activities in a way contrary to “the Faith,” constitutes a falling away from “the Faith.”

This is an easy statement to make. But to justify and validate this description is where the going gets more difficult, partly, because we cannot foretell the course of events from any specific activity with the same direct knowledge those with the Spirit guidance of the first century, had. Thus, Jesus could tell the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 directly what he saw, and how their practices needed to change—or else. This is not something we can accomplish, except by following the examples where situations are similar.

David Cooper
(Pomona, CA)

To be continued.



A close-up photograph of two hands, one from the left and one from the right, gently holding a small, solid black heart shape between their fingers. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The heart is positioned in the upper center of the frame, just above the main title.

LIFE APPLICATION

ALL ONE IN CHURCH

By Carmel Page

Loneliness

WHEN I was twenty, I moved into a flat. I loved it! Then, late one Friday night, my train home was canceled. I was about to call my parents to tell them when I realized they didn't even know I'd gone out; no one knew where I was. That night, I spent two hours on an empty railway platform. There was no one I could turn to for help; I began to understand loneliness.

Loneliness is normal. It's one of many emotions we experience, and it is often fleeting. However, there are times it causes intense distress. Marriage becomes a wonderful blessing for the lonely, but it can also produce loneliness. Some people rejoice in being single, but many do not and the assumption that everyone should marry puts an extra burden on the single and can exacerbate their

loneliness. The end of a marriage is also a lonely time—whether by divorce or bereavement, people must adjust to being without a partner. Sadly, some people are lonely within marriage. They may feel uncared for and have no one they can really talk to. For those with an unbelieving spouse, even if the marriage is happy, sitting alone among couples at meeting and events may be difficult.

DO SOMETHING KIND

- Read your list of ecclesial members. How many of them are single or attend alone? Loneliness may be an issue for them. Make a special effort to include them.
- Read your address book, your list of colleagues; think about the neighbors you know. Could

loneliness be a concern for any of them? This year feels like the loneliest ever as the coronavirus has forced us apart. If you have been feeling lonely, be reassured it's not just you.

- Write a list of everyone you know who may be lonely. Can you do one thing for each person?
- Become tech-savvy. Technology has been a huge blessing for our communal spiritual lives, but sometimes we need the closeness of a one-to-one conversation. You can set up your own video chats for private conversations.
- Not being online is even more isolating, but a phone call or card can make a huge difference to someone's day.

TRY SOMETHING NEW

This year we all need to be creative to find solutions, but many of us do have the extra time to give to others. Living in the English countryside, I can meet friends to walk one on each side of quiet country lanes. Someone just

wrote a song for and about me, and I was absolutely delighted. What could you do to make someone on your list feel special?

When our meeting places reopen, numbers may be limited. This might be a positive for people who arrive alone. They will be easier to notice and include. We can make up for reduced numbers by opening more often. Use your time now to plan some appropriate social activities for reopening. People who live near your hall may be pleased to have an event they can attend. Everyone has felt burdened this year, but we can look for ways to *"carry each other's burdens, and in this way, [we] will fulfil the law of Christ."* (Gal 6:2 NIVUK). And if, when you wrote your list of lonely people, you felt your name needed to be on it, then doing all of these things may well be the cure for your loneliness too.

*Carmel Page
(Sheffield, UK)*





EXHORTATION AND CONSOLATION

PETER'S RESCUE FROM PRISON

By Erik Sternad

Do you remember a certain Heinz ketchup ad from the 70s? It was the perfect ad campaign that turned the frustrating wait for the ketchup to finally come out of the bottle into a positive. What a jingle: “Anticipation, anticipation, it’s making me wait.” It captured so well the feeling of wanting something that is just out of reach, waiting, knowing it’s going to be great, but it’s not...quite...ready...yet.

And so here we are brethren, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, in anxious anticipation waiting to be released from our houses, our makeshift prisons, as a result of this most unlikely turn of events on the world stage.

But is it so unlikely? Are we shocked that God would capture the world’s attention with a threatening plague it cannot control? Recall, for example,

the plagues of Egypt that propelled God’s people out of their bondage into the promised land. God warned Israel He would use plagues and sickness as a response to an unfaithful generation (Deut 28). And the future plagues described in Revelation foreshadow the return of our Master and King.

It is so hard to be in that state of anticipation. During a trial, it is challenging for us to step back from our confusion, worry, fear and anxiety to stop and ask ourselves why God is bringing this into our lives? Why now? What is His purpose? What lesson are we to understand? What shift in the dynamics of the world order is God turning under His will, His plan?

Consider the mighty United States of America, our era’s undeniable superpower, the greatest modern military might in the world, the epitome

of human strength—challenged and failing to prevent this illness, and having to virtually shut down its own economy to try to stop it. The last big protector of Israel is challenged in an instant. Why?

I'm not suggesting God is punishing the world with this virus, or that I can understand how God is using this to bring about the return of His Son. We are all trying to understand this. But we are in anticipation, aren't we?

The story of Acts 12 is a great story about anticipation and deliverance, a good frame of mind to be in at a time like today:

"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So, Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." (Acts 12:1-5 NIV).

We can relate in a small way to this event. The lives of the disciples at that time, like ours, had been turned upside down. They were locked in John Mark's house in fear, in sorrow and in anxious anticipation. And they prayed without ceasing—all night in prayer, even. So, we pray without ceasing—for health, for this trial to end. In Acts, the entire ecclesia was in continual prayer

for Peter. God heard their prayer and delivered him.

Peter must have expected to be martyred, being chained between two soldiers—arms outstretched. He knew how his end would come because the Lord had told him! After that poignant and painful three-time questioning of Peter's love for his Master, Jesus had responded with:

"Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" (John 21:17-19 NIV).

So, following the martyrdom of James by Herod, it was only logical Peter would have anticipated this was also his likely end. James's execution had been met with the approval of the Jews. It was the feast time, and Peter knew the populace was anticipating his trial and execution after the Passover (Acts 12:11). The show was all prepared. Peter was next, and most likely in the manner Jesus had predicted.

"The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so.

‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,’ the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.” (Acts 12:6-10 NIV).

If Peter was expecting “someone else would dress you and lead you where you do not want to go,” that didn’t happen. The angel instead told Peter to dress himself, and led him exactly where he wanted to go, out of the iron shackles, out of the prison, through the iron gates and into the night. Peter was freed. His anticipation of the worst did not happen, and he could again rejoin his brethren and celebrate that God is

in control, God is faithful and true. We may not know what God’s plan is for us, but we can trust in it, and we can trust in Him. He keeps his promises and is a God of love and deliverance for those who trust in Him. Herod had his own sure human plan to persecute the early Christian movement to curry favor with the Jewish establishment, and yet he was dead by the end of Acts 12. God’s word and will, not man’s, is supreme and will prevail. Trust it, dear brothers and sisters. The last verse of Acts 12 concludes with the reassurance that the word of God continued to spread and flourish, just as God had planned. So, brethren, can we muster faith in the face of uncertainty, fear, anxiety? Consider:

“My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.

God’s word and will, not man’s, is supreme and will prevail. Trust it, dear brothers and sisters.

Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.” (Prov 3:21-26 NIV).

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.” (Prov 3:5-8 NIV).

Once Peter came to his senses in the dead of night, after the angel left him, he went to his brethren, to the ecclesia at John Mark’s house where he knew they would be. Brethren would be praying together that God will deliver them from their state of worry and anticipation.

What is amazing in this story is that nearly everyone was wrong in what they anticipated: Herod, the Jews, Peter and the disciples (for they did not believe Rhoda). But not Rhoda, the servant girl. She heard Peter’s voice, accepted right away it was him at the door, and kept insisting to the brethren it was really Peter:

“When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door!’ ‘You’re out of your mind,’ they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they

said, ‘It must be his angel.’ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.” (Acts 12:14-16 NIV).

Note that, remarkably, the brothers and sisters were amazed and astonished to see just the thing they had prayed for! And so, the word of God prevailed and expanded. God’s will and purpose cannot be thwarted.

Brethren, we are not alone, even though we may feel that way, trapped in our houses. But we are together in spirit, a body of believers with Christ as our head. We need to remain united especially in these hard times of anxious anticipation. Our faith must be unwavering, trusting that God’s plan for this world is coming to fruition. We don’t know how this will happen, but God has paused the world right now and gathered our attention, if at least for the moment.

Let us prepare for that glorious anticipation that we look for—the coming of our King, who will usher in a time of peace and health, security and justice the world has never seen. Just as Peter surely was reminded, we too know God is in control, and regardless of the seemingly impossible present circumstances, His will is sovereign. He does deliver us from our sin, from the bondage of death, and He will deliver us from our anticipation into His glorious Kingdom.

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UNDERSTANDING AND EMOTION IN OUR SONGS OF WORSHIP

By Caleb Osborne

MUSIC is a God-given tool for our spiritual walk. We can use it to express adoration and thankfulness to God and to draw us closer to Him in reverent and heartfelt communion. Music can motivate, teach, comfort, exhort, remind and inspire. We will consider two key elements that must be present in powerful spiritual music: understanding and emotion.

Effective Spiritual music connects our deepest emotions with clear Biblical understanding to praise God, commune with Him, and inspire us in our walk before Him. This article will establish the Scriptural foundation for this approach, then discuss how both understanding and emotion can be created in the two building blocks of a song: lyrics and music.

SING WITH UNDERSTANDING

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Ecclesia to warn them about the misuse of the Holy Spirit gifts. The Corinthians had become wrapped up in the experience and emotion of the spirit gifts in their worship—at the expense of their **understanding**. Ecclesial meetings were disorderly, loud, self-focused, emotional, and incoherent—an environment not conducive to spiritual development or glorifying God. Paul tells them about the crucial element that they are missing: “*What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*” (1 Cor 14:15). Paul applies the same rule to singing as he does to prayer. Our minds must be engaged in our worship.

But Paul was not the first to give this instruction to sing with understanding—he is echoing a psalm of the sons of Korah. Psalm 47 is a triumphant song of praise written to celebrate the awesome sovereignty and righteous rule of God. Its mood is jubilant and overflowing with passion. In the first verse God's people are instructed to “*clap your hands*” and “*shout to God with the voice of triumph*.” In verse 6 we are told no less than 4 times to “*sing praises*” to our God and King. But even in this exuberant context, we are instructed not to just get caught up in the euphoria of the song: verse 7 reads, “*God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding*.” Even in our most enthusiastic worship, God wants us to be thinking about what we are saying, shouting or singing. He wants the substance of our praise to be meaningful. This should not surprise us—our God is a God who is looking for people who meditate on His word, think upon His name and understand His will and purpose.

SING WITH EMOTION

Is it enough to simply have a correct **understanding** of the subject of our songs? Isaiah 29:13 says, “*this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me*.” We can be singing a carefully worded hymn that is solidly grounded in Scriptural allusions and principles, but if our heart is not engaged in the worship, the “right” words we are singing cannot honor God!

While correct understanding is a foundational prerequisite for effective praise, all our worship must come from the heart. This is a consistently

recurring theme in Scripture, and nowhere more than in the Psalms. Phrases like, “*I will praise Yahweh with my whole heart*,” are repeated over and over again in the Psalms (Psa 9:1; 111:1; 138:1). In Psalm 84:2, the psalmist describes his deep-seated desire to be in the presence of God: “*My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God*.” (ESV). The singing described in this psalm is not merely a mental exercise—it swells up from the believer's heart and soul and demands to be expressed. Yes, God wants us to sing with understanding, but he is also interested in our emotions. He wants our love, our thankfulness and our adoration to be genuine.

THE BALANCE

The two most famous Biblical instructions on spiritual music are found in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. These two passages both list the three main categories of spiritual music: Psalms (the Old Testament psalms), hymns (songs praising or celebrating God), and spiritual songs (songs on spiritual themes). Both epistles emphasize the complementary significance of understanding and emotion in our spiritual music.

Colossians 3:16 says, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.” Spiritual music should be rich in the Word, full of wisdom, able to convey sound doctrine (teach) and encourage a Christ-like life (admonish). All these elements emphasize the importance of understanding what we are singing—the substance is significant! But Paul goes on to describe **how** we are

supposed to be singing: “*with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

Ephesians 5:19 paints an even more vivid picture of how involved our emotions should be: “*singing and making melody in your heart to the LORD.*” The Greek word for “*making melody*” means “to pluck or to cause to vibrate... to touch or strike the chord, to twang the strings” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*). The accompanying instrument in our songs of worship should be our heart! Spiritual music should touch our hearts and resonate in our souls.

We are edified and God is honored when we sing with our head and our heart. The beauty of finding this balance is that the understanding and emotions feed into each other. Understanding the meaning or Scriptural basis for the lyrics enhances the emotional impact of the song, and when we are passionate in the expression of our worship, our technical understanding is imprinted in our hearts.

We’ve established the principles of emotion and understanding in our spiritual music, but how do we apply them to the music we use or create? The rest of this article offers suggestions on how a song can most effectively enhance clear understanding and evoke genuine emotion—first in the lyrics and then in the music.

LYRICS

The lyrics of a song are the most important component. We have the lyrics to over one hundred and fifty songs recorded for us in the Bible, but not a single page of sheet music. When it comes to selecting or writing spiritual

music, the focus of our attention should be on the lyrics. Musical taste is varied and often subjective, but a song of worship stands or falls based on what it says.

- Lyrics should be rich in the Word. This means Biblical quotes, allusions, and language. A great exercise is to go through each line of a hymn or song and try to find the scriptural basis for each phrase. Avoid non-Scriptural metaphors and symbolism.
- Our music should reflect a range of Biblical topics, and reflect our unique understanding.
- Create a context that enhances understanding: choosing hymns that fit the theme of a class or including thoughtful narrations in choral presentations can aid our understanding and appreciation of the music.
- Watch out for doctrinal errors, especially in music from outside the Brotherhood. (For example, there are many beautifully moving songs on the sacrifice of Christ that implicitly or explicitly teach substitutionary atonement: “Such love, paying the debt I owe.”)
- Avoid archaic language or grammatically confusing lyrics that hamper understanding.
- Lyrics need not be dry or lifeless—the Psalms are descriptive, vibrant and full of feeling. Poetic devices such as meter, alliteration, simile, imagery, refrain and rhyming are powerful tools we can use to inject feeling into a set of lyrics. When applied effectively, the elements

that separate poetry from prose can inspire our imagination, create a mood, evoke powerful feelings and imprint on our memory.

- Avoid completely self-absorbed lyrics. Our worship can be personal, but we ought not lose sight of our calling to magnify God.
- Misapplied emotion: Be careful of lyrics that address God or Jesus casually, flippantly, or romantically. (If you can swap out the words “God” or “Jesus” for “girlfriend” “boyfriend” or “baby,” then perhaps it is the wrong kind of love song).

MUSIC

The musical elements of a song—melody, harmony, chord progressions, key changes, tempo, rhythm and dynamics—are the tools that songwriters use to enhance our understanding of the lyrics and evoke an emotional connection and response to them. Pairing effective music with robust lyrics connects powerful feelings to clear Biblical understanding and elevates worship.

- The emotions evoked by the music should match the lyrics. Minor chords can arouse feelings of sadness, pathos or foreboding, while major chords can be happy, triumphant or confident.
- Artful use of dissonant sounds can build feelings of tension, conflict or anticipation which can be resolved into a feeling of release or satisfaction.
- Similarly, a well-placed key change can mark the focal point of a song—the turning point in the story, the answer to the question, the solution to the problem or the culmination

of themes. (For example, a great place for a key change in music based on Psalm 22 would be in the middle of verse 21, where the spirit of Christ shifts from desperate pleas for help to the confident assurance God has heard and will vindicate.)

- Rhythm and timing are musical devices to control where the emphasis in a phrase is placed.
- Changes in dynamics draw attention to contrasting ideas.
- Songs where the beat, instrumentation, or vocalizations are overwhelmingly loud or complex can hamper the ability to hear and understand the words.
- Thoughtful use of melodic structure (pitch, melody, range) can enhance the lyrics. For example, choosing only male or female voices to sing certain verses or phrases can elevate the lyrics of a song and match the meaning. (See “*In Danger’s Hour*” by Bro. Darryl Rose from the Manitoulin Youth Conference Cantata 2010 or 2016 for a great illustration of this.)

CONCLUSION

Whether you write your own music, prepare choral presentations, select hymns for ecclesial meetings, curate personal Christadelphian playlists or just open your hymn book on Sunday morning, engaging your mind and your emotion in spiritual music is absolutely crucial. We are edified and God is honored when our worship is founded in true understanding and flows from our hearts.

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READING WITHIN THE CONTEXT

By Jim Styles

WHEN I was about 15 years old, I discovered a surprising Bible study technique when I began reading from an RSV instead of a KJV. The RSV was organized by paragraphs, not verse by verse. When I started reading the Bible by context, it began to make more sense to me. I found I could better remember Bible verses based on how they fit into the context, knowing who said it and in what circumstance. When we read the Bible by context, this often opens up an understanding of what specific passages were intended to mean, rather than what we would like them to mean. Context is the key to understanding so many Bible passages that could be interpreted in various ways. When Jesus, Peter, Paul or any apostles quoted passages, their use of the passages was always faithful to the context in which they were written. To

truly understand what God intended us to learn from His word, we need to learn to read by context.

It is a common practice in our community to create a class or exhortation by selecting a theme we want to examine and explain, and then looking for Bible verses to support our idea. Sometimes we hear a verse used so many times in a certain way, we never even examine the context to see how well our understanding fits. The danger of this approach is that we might put a spin on Bible passages to support our pre-existing ideas or wishful thinking, rather than studying a section of scripture to find out what God intends us to learn from the entire context. Many times, the understanding turns out the same, but other times a very different meaning is revealed. We have to stay true to context to be “rightly

handling the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:15 ESV). Here are a few examples of how context changed the meaning of passages from what I had previously heard expounded.

FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD

I can’t begin to count the number of times this passage was quoted at young peoples’ gatherings and CYCs to warn the youth not to have any non-Christadelphian friends. It seemed so simple and true: *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”* (Jas 4:4). I still remember how shocked I was when listening to a Bible class one day, and the brother explained the context. I should have read more carefully because it is so clear. James 4 begins:

“What causes quarrels, and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people!” (Jas 4:1-4 ESV).

James isn’t warning anyone about not having friends. Instead, he is reprimanding the believers of all ages to quit quarreling and fighting among themselves because they were judging each other on how well they were living in relation to the Law of Moses. James goes on to exhort:

“Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you

judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?” (Jas 4:11-12 ESV).

These believers were mainly Jews who got caught up in works of the Law and judging one another in keeping the rituals of the Law. This led to arguments and fights, and when they acted like this, they were behaving like the world and had become friends of the world. What a contrast to Abraham, who James mentioned earlier in chapter 2:22-23 because he lived by faith, and his actions were based on his faith, so Abraham was called *“the Friend of God.”* So, James’s use of *“friendship with the world”* isn’t really about who our friends are but how we behave. Are we acting like Abraham, the friend of God, in our dealing with one another, or are we judging, arguing and fighting about ritual procedures like those of this world who have no relationship with God? The most meaningful and faithful exhortations from Bible passages come when we explain the meaning within the context, as God intended.

“I KNOW MY REDEEMER LIVES”

This passage in Job 19 was one of my biggest surprises in Bible study. It’s a great example of lifting a verse out of context and by our wishful thinking, putting a spin on the verse that we would like it to mean, not what it actually means. For years I had listened to Handel’s *Messiah* and heard exhortations and Bible classes that indicated Job was hoping for the day that Messiah, Jesus Christ, would redeem him from all his troubles. This

Job 19 was one of my biggest surprises in Bible study. It's a great example of lifting a verse out of context and by our wishful thinking, putting a spin on the verse that we would like it to mean, not what it actually means.

was such a standard explanation of this verse that it even made it into our green hymn book as #394. But when you study the context, you will be as surprised as I was.

Job had been through grievous trials and continued to suffer without any understanding of why. The only answer his friends had was that God was punishing him for some great sins he had committed, but Job knew this was not true. As his friends pushed him to confess and repent, Job became more defensive and hoped for the day when he would be vindicated. Job became convinced God was wrong to treat him this way and that one day someone, probably an angel, would show God that He had been wrong about Job and treated Job unfairly. Job lamented that no one could arbitrate his case:

"He [God] is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot." (Job 9:32-35 NIV).

As Job became more desperate and confident of his innocence, he declared:

"Though he [God] slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him! Listen carefully to my words; let your ears take in what I say. Now that I have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated. Can anyone bring charges against me? If so, I will be silent and die." (Job 13:15-19 NIV).

As time went by, Job realized that he might not be vindicated in this life, and hoped for the day when his defender, his witness, would plead with God and convince God that He had been wrong about Job.

"O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest! Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend." (Job 16:18-21 NIV).

When we come to Job 19, it is no surprise that Job lets loose his feelings about how God had denied him justice, treated him unfairly, and considered Job His enemy:

"Know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me."

Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice. He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness. He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head. He tears me down on every side till I am gone; he uproots my hope like a tree. His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies. His troops advance in force; they build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent." (Job 19:6-12 NIV).

The context of Job 19 is about how Job feels God has unjustly ruined his life. So, when we come to verse 25, *"I know that my Redeemer lives,"* Job isn't thinking about God's Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who will declare the righteousness of God, but instead, Job thinks his redeemer will justify Job before God and show God how wrong He was about Job! Job probably thought, Job's truth must eventually be revealed by an angel who was aware of his righteousness; God would finally understand Job had been right all along. No wonder Elihu was angry at Job because *"he justified himself rather than God."* (Job 32:2). Elihu challenged Job, *"Do you [Job] say, '[M]y righteousness is more than God's?'"* (Job 35:2). Indeed, in this case, careful reading by context indicates an entirely different meaning to a commonly misused verse. We have to be honest regarding the context by carefully seeking to understand the whole chapter, not just one verse.

"I WILL SEND FISHERMEN AND HUNTERS"

In Jeremiah 16:16, God declared He would send for fishermen to fish Jews

and then hunters to hunt them from every mountain and hills and holes of the rocks. This passage is used by many brethren in Bible prophecy classes and witnessing pamphlets to teach that God would bring the Jews back to Israel in the latter days. Many Bibles that have subtitles through the chapters label verses 14 to the end with something like *"God will restore Israel."* However, when you read all of Jeremiah 16 and fit verse 16 into the context, it has a very different meaning. You find it is all about God casting the Jews out of the land of Israel for their sins, not saving them. God had seen enough from His people and their refusal to respond to His grace, mercy, and kindness. Jeremiah is told not to take a wife and have children in Israel because the mothers and fathers and their children in the land will

"die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, but they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth." (Jer 16:4 NKJV).

In verse 6, *"Both the great and the small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried."* In verse 9, God will *"cause to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride."* All because in verses 11-12,

"Your fathers have forsaken me, says the LORD, they have walked after other gods and have served them and worshiped them, and have forsaken Me and not kept My

law... and you have done worse than your fathers.”

Therefore, God says in verse 13:

“I will cast you out of this land into a land that you do not know, neither you nor your fathers; and there you shall serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor.”

It's clear the context is not about the wonderful re-gathering of Israel in the latter days, but the destruction by the Babylonians in the days of King Zedekiah. God will send fishermen and hunters to find and catch the Jews hiding in the land and take them captive to Babylon. For as God says in verses 17-18,

“My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes. And first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin, because they have defiled My land; they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable idols.”

The only verse in Jeremiah 16 that mentions the Jews will one day return to Israel is verse 15, but that is only to indicate how bad the Babylonian captivity will be; they will no longer talk about the day when they were redeemed from Egypt, but they will remember when God brings them back from:

“the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them. For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers.”

Careful Bible reading by context helps us understand what God intended us to know, which is not always what we would like the passage to teach.

HEAPING COALS OF FIRE ON THEIR HEADS

At the end of Romans 12, in verse 20, Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22, *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”* Many have interpreted the coals of fire as some sort of painful experience that would burn away evil from a sinner by afflicting their conscience. That's a weird form of tough love. The problem with this is that all of Romans 12 is about positive things we can do to show our love to others and help them. In verses 9-10, Paul reminds us to *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love.”* In verse 14, Paul says, *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”* In verse 17, he continues, *“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”* And then in verse 19, Paul exhorts us to *“not*

Romans 12 is about positive things we can do to show our love to others and help them.

avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay' says the Lord." The context of Proverbs 25, in verses 17-20, is all about being kind, considerate, and honest to our neighbors. Nothing in Proverbs 25 or Romans 12 deals with putting our neighbors through some sort of painful experience. So, what are the coals of fire? It seems a way to understand them is in the framework of the method for softening metal by putting coals of fire on the metal until it is soft enough to re-form. Both Proverbs and Paul suggest that by showing kindness, patience, and the love of God to others, we can soften their hard heads and allow God to mold them into the image of Christ.

CRETANS ARE ALWAYS LIARS, EVIL BEASTS, LAZY GLUTTONS

I knew there had to be something wrong with the way I had heard this passage explained. Most expositors suggested Paul was aware of the commonly known characteristics of Cretans, that they were "always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12 ESV). For Paul to tell this to Titus, and then follow it up in verse 13 with "this testimony is true" sounded a lot like what we would call "racism" today, and I knew from the rest of the Bible that God is not racist and shows no partiality. So, what's going on here? Context is the key.

As Paul lays out the suggested qualifications for elders, he warns Titus:

"For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting

whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach." (Titus 1:10-11 ESV).

These believers of the circumcision party were causing trouble in the ecclesias by bad-mouthing some of the Gentile believers so that they would appear better themselves. Paul says, "they must be silenced."

Paul then goes on to identify "one of the Cretans, a prophet of their own" who slandered the Cretan Gentiles claiming they are "always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This "prophet of their own" was one of the circumcision party who was causing trouble among the believers in Crete with his racist claims. When Paul says, "This testimony is true," he is not calling the Cretans liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons, but referring to the circumcision party believer who was spreading this nasty rumor. That's why Paul goes on to say in verse 13, "rebuke them (these unkind circumcision party believers) sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths."

When someone explains a Bible passage, and the explanation does not seem to fit with the character of God or the rest of the Bible, examine the context again to see if there is a better way to understand the passage.

Let's be cautious to always consider our understanding of all Bible passages by carefully placing them in the context that they were written. It takes extra time to study this way, but we can be more confident we are faithfully explaining God's word the way He intended.

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SHEMOT

(PART 2)

By Richard Morgan

LAST month we began looking at the importance of **names** in the book of Exodus, or its Hebrew title Shemot. God is concerned with the names of His people, including those long dead like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He also wants us to know His name too. That name is more than a label; it is His reputation. We continue this month by surveying other passages that speak about the significance of names.

In Exodus 23, in the middle of the list of rules that made up the original Law of Moses, we read, “*make no mention of the names of other gods.*” (v. 13).¹ That doesn’t mean the Hebrews needed to stop saying things like “Ra” or “Osiris,” two of the gods of Egypt they should have left behind. God isn’t telling them that there’s some sort of superstition problem with them uttering their names. What he tells them in this law

is to demote their fame to nothingness. Whatever those gods used to do (in their minds) for them while in Egypt, their reputation was demolished when God sent the ten plagues upon Egypt.

ANGELIC GUIDANCE

In the same chapter, God promised to send his angel (v. 20) to guide His people in the wilderness. Back in chapter 3, one of the things connected with God’s name is what He said to Moses: “*I will be with you.*” (v. 12). The question is, how would God be with His people? The answer is here in chapter 23, where God said of that angel, “*Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.*” (v. 21). Just as Moses was to Pharaoh, the angel was a representative of Yahweh to the people.

THE NAMES OF GOD'S CHILDREN

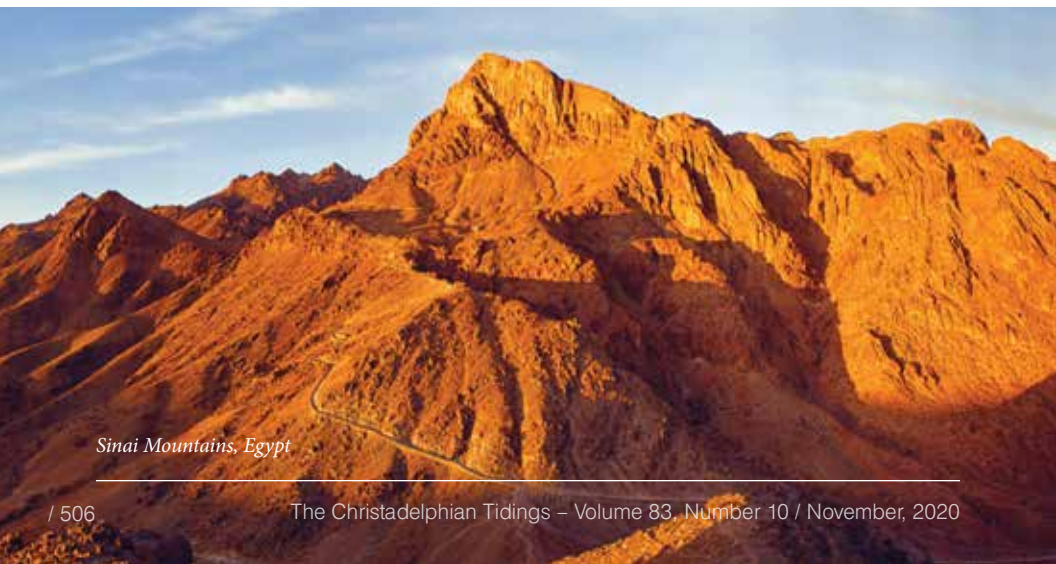
The tabernacle dominates the second half of Exodus, but the theme of “names” continues. In particular, we return to the principle that God cares for His children. He not only knows them by name, as we learn in chapter 1, but the High Priest, who like Moses and the angel was another representative of God, bore the names of the children of Israel. In chapter 28, verses 9-12, 21, and 29, and then again in chapter 39, verses 6 and 14, we learn that the High Priest’s clothing contained stones etched with their names. Those stones were put on his shoulder pieces and breastplate because *“Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance.”* (Exod 28:12). Also, *“Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD.”* (v. 29).

What a beautiful principle that began in the first chapters of Exodus, where God called to mind the names of Jacob. When they cried to Him, He responded

by **remembering** His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now God continues to remember not just the patriarchs but all His children through the work of the priesthood. It all points forward to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ who took the responsibility of saving the faithful on his shoulders and put them on his heart when he died for them.

Two of those children receive special mentions in chapters 31 and 35—Bezalel and Oholiab, the chief builders of the tabernacle. The record says, *“I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.”* (Exod 31:2). Similarly, Oholiab’s name and the name of his father are mentioned in verse 6. The fact God specifically *“called by name”* these two men should strike us as significant. God gave Bezalel and Oholiab the task of building His house, and He memorialized it in their names. Perhaps Yahweh even chose to change their names for the occasion, and that’s what is meant by the phrase “called by name.”

Bezalel means “under the shadow of Yahweh.” The word for “shadow” is



Sinai Mountains, Egypt

often used as a metaphor for protection in Scripture. For instance, its very first occurrence is when Lot said of the angels, he was protecting his home, *“they have come under the shelter of my roof.”* (Gen 19:8). In Psalm 91:1, the same word is used—*“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”* Isn’t that precisely what Bezalel was called upon to build? The tabernacle, God’s house, where He invites His children to dwell with Him. When God told Moses, *“I will be with you,”* memorialized in His name, He meant it. He built a house for them, a place of protection.

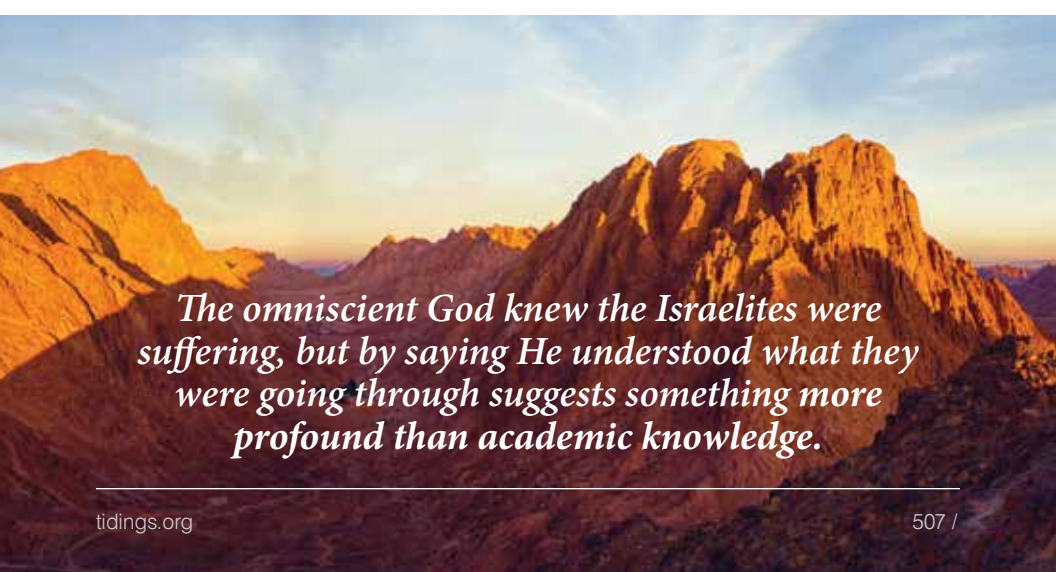
Oholiab means “Father’s tent” and how fitting is that! The word for “tent” or “tabernacle” used throughout Exodus is *ohel*, part of Oholiab’s name. Both men, then, either already had or were given names that were directly to do with their work building God’s house. Their names are inscribed in the pages of Scripture for eternity, reminding us of the privilege they had. The power of names in Scripture rest in the way they’re attached to significant

characteristics or activity associated with the name bearers.

KNOWLEDGE THROUGH EXPERIENCE

We find the last set of occurrences of the word *shem* in Exodus 33-34. But before looking at those chapters, which are about the time when Moses ascended Mount Sinai and conversed with God, it’s worth briefly looking at another theme running through the pages of the book of Exodus, the idea of **knowing** something.

When the children of Israel cried out because of their slavery, *“God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”* (Exod 2:24-25). What did God know? The NET translates that last phrase as *“God understood.”* God was keenly involved in the suffering of His people, and in the next chapter He tells Moses, *“I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings.”* (Exod 3:7). The



The omniscient God knew the Israelites were suffering, but by saying He understood what they were going through suggests something more profound than academic knowledge.

omniscient God knew the Israelites were suffering, but by saying He understood what they were going through suggests something more profound than academic knowledge. The text reads as if God has empathy for His people like we might say to someone who is suffering, “I know what you’re going through.”

Knowledge, in the context of the book of Exodus, is about understanding something through experience. We may not fully appreciate exactly how the Eternal God knows suffering. However, there is still an intimacy of understanding connected with the idea of knowledge, which goes beyond just having had knowledge of a fact.

In verse 19, God tells Moses, “*But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.*” In what sense did God know this? Yes, He has foreknowledge, but there are hints in the context that God knew Pharaoh’s personality, and how he would respond to different situations.

On the other hand, the Pharaohs of Egypt “*did not know Joseph,*” (Exod 1:8), and acknowledged, “*I do not know the LORD.*” (Exod 5:2). They may well have heard of Joseph and Yahweh but didn’t know them by experience. They had no kind of relationship with them.

Earlier, we looked at Exodus 6, where God tells Moses, “*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them.*” (v. 3). The patriarchs did know the name itself—they even used it—but they hadn’t **experienced** its meaning. That is going to change for the descendants of Abraham, and God tells his people, “*I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God.*” (v. 7). Through the experience of God rescuing them from Egyptian slavery, they’re going to get to know who Yahweh is.

The education experience wasn’t just for the children of Israel. Pharaoh might not have known Yahweh up to this point, but that is going to change. God sent the plagues so that “*The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.*” (Exod 7:5). It’s a theme that continues throughout the plagues, for instance, during the plague of hail when Moses told Pharaoh, “*so that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s.*” (Exod 9:29).

To know something academically is one thing; having someone demonstrate a principle for you is far more powerful. God allowed His people to suffer as

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in the land of Egypt for a reason.*

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strangers in the land of Egypt for a reason. Their experience taught them something that couldn't come from reading a book. One of the rules of the Law of Moses brings this out—"You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." (Exod 23:9).

Everything God does in Exodus is for the kind of experiential knowledge His children needed. God designed the tabernacle as an object lesson so that *"they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them."* (Exod 29:46). Keeping the Sabbath was also for obtaining experiential knowledge—"Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you." (Exod 31:13).

THE GLORY OF GOD

The principles of **names** and experiential **knowledge** intersect with another keyword in Exodus 33-34. The idea behind the word "glory" deals with the attributes that make someone famous. The word means "weight" or "heaviness" so we can think of it as describing those things that give weight to someone's reputation. For instance, an athlete's glory might be something like a gold medal or world record to their name. When Moses asked God, *"Please show me your glory,"* (Exod 33:18), he wanted to know about God's fame—what is it exactly that made God who he is. They are ideas that also came together at the Red Sea when what happened was so that *"the Egyptians*

shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." (Exod 14:18). They were going to learn through the dramatic experience at the Red Sea who Yahweh truly is.

What the Egyptians learned through experience is just one side of the God of heaven. While His power was on display at the Red Sea, Moses's experience on Mount Sinai gets to the depth of God's glory. Ultimately, while the omnipotence of Yahweh is an essential element of His deity, He wants to be known for His character. The great displays of power in the plagues and at the Red Sea were to attract everyone's attention. God wants a deeper and more meaningful relationship.

Look at the conversation between Yahweh and Moses on Mount Sinai, an example of when God would *"speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."* (Exod 33:11). The first thing Moses says is, *"See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me."* (Exod 33:12). Curiously, Moses says he doesn't know who God will send with him. Remember, at the burning bush, God said, *"I will be with you,"* (Exod 3:12), and it seems Moses now invokes that promise. However, earlier in chapter 33, God did tell Moses, *"I will send an angel before you."* (v. 2). Has Moses already forgotten? Or do we see another example of the principle of experiential knowledge? Maybe Moses is saying, "I don't know who the angel is" in the sense that he had no relationship—no experiential knowledge—with him.

Moses' appeal continues: "*Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'*" (v. 12). It's as if Moses is telling God, "We have a relationship, so why aren't you going with us? Why are you sending this angel?" God knowing Moses by name is more than God knowing he was called Moses. Of course, God knew that—He is the omnipotent Creator of the Universe! Moses is appealing to the experiential knowledge that had built their relationship. God understood Moses.

He finishes his initial appeal with the words, "*Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.*" (v. 13). First, Moses recognizes that there is something deeper to Yahweh than just displays of power. He, and the children of Israel, had seen His mighty works, but Moses wants to know His **ways**. It is this that leads to him asking to see God's glory a few verses later.

Moses also reminded God that the nation of Israel was His people. He's appealing to the relationship God had declared way back when He heard their cry because of the slavery in Egypt. God's answer is reassuring—"*My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest,*" (v. 14) and then later, "*This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.*" (v. 17).

It wasn't just that Yahweh and Moses knew each other on a first-name basis. They **understood** each other.

And that's the kind of relationship God wants with His people.

THE NAMELESS ONES

With all this emphasis on the importance of names in the book of Exodus, there are a couple of glaring omissions. In the first half of the book, especially during the plagues, Pharaoh and the magicians of Egypt are some of the main characters. Yet the text does not identify them by name, not even once. We know their titles but have no idea what their names are.

This detail is significant because the book of Exodus is not about the fame of Pharaoh and his magicians. God is concerned with His people, not the superpower of the day. They do end up with a semblance of glory, but it's all negative. Pharaoh's hard heart and the magicians' defeat are the epitaphs on their part in the story.

THE BOOK OF SHEMOT

When we understand the importance of names in Exodus, it provides a framework for us to read and understand the entire book. The latter half of Exodus is all about building God's house because He wants a relationship with His people. He cares about them; He knows them by name. And He wants us to know Him too.

Richard Morgan
(Simi Hills, CA)

*God wants a relationship with His people.
He cares about them; He knows them by name.*



EXPOSITION

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN HAVE NAMES

By George Booker

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP? (CONCLUSION)

WE are at the end of this series, and I would be remiss if I did not say the following, very clearly and simply. No matter how it may sound to you, the readers, I am by no means a paragon of virtue. I am certainly not saying that I have done anything like all the good deeds which our Lord tells us we should do—in fact, I have done very few of them. I want this to be more than a cliché, more than a perfunctory disclaimer when I tell you that I am exhorting myself first and foremost before I ever think of exhorting anyone else.

THE PEOPLE WHO ARE KIND

There is a beautiful thought that has been pointed out by various writers, Christadelphian and otherwise. The

early name given to believers in Christ, “*christianos*” (Acts 11:26), sounded so much like another word that it could have been easily mistaken for that other word—the difference being only one vowel. That other word was “*chrestianos*,” meaning “the people who are kind, good and benevolent.” Harry Whittaker, for one, suggests this was no accident, but a name deliberately chosen to advertise the One Faith in the first century. He writes:

“In popular speech ‘*Christianoi*’ [i.e., Christians] readily became ‘*Chrestiano*’, the kindly folk. This confusion between ‘*Christos*’ and ‘*chrestos*’ was recognized by the apostles, and even encouraged by them:

‘His kindness (chrestotes) towards us through Christ [Christos] Jesus.’
(Eph 2:7)

*'Be ye kind (chrestos) one to another... even as God for Christ's (Christos) sake.' (Eph 4:32)."*¹

It is a fact, remarked upon by various historians, that the early church or ecclesia had such a tremendous impact on the Roman world because the church was a group of men and women who acted out of love and kindness toward all mankind. The Roman world was a harsh and even brutal place where charity, philanthropy, unselfish love or even simple kindness were little known, except perhaps toward one's immediate family or friends. In such an environment, the early "Christians" could easily come to be called "the people (indeed, almost the **only** people!) who are kind," and their reputation could gain a hearing for their beliefs from those in the Empire who benefited from that kindness.

All of which gives us one more reason to be kind to others, to everyone, all the time, and no matter the circumstances:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,

it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (1 Cor 13:4-8).

As if we needed another reason!

The brothers and sisters in Romans 16 surely went about doing good to strangers, helping wherever they could. Even as they engaged in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, they also did what they could to feed the hungry, care for the sick and comfort the suffering. What good does it do to preach about a coming kingdom of righteousness, peace and plenty if we pass by those in need right now—without being touched by them and without touching them in turn?

So, we take it for granted that, as those commended Romans helped Paul and his fellow preachers and teachers, they also helped those to whom Paul was preaching. To tell a mother with a starving child about the Savior who multiplied loaves and fishes means very little if we don't share our food with them:

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (Jas 2:15-16, KJV).

So, what can we do to help? There are so many different ways, some of which Paul has pointed out for us in his commendations of the brothers and sisters in Romans 16:



Example(s)	How Did They Help?	Verse in Romans 16
Phoebe	By going out of her way to receive and then deliver a very important message for Paul, and by generously giving of her time and money to help and support others, especially travelers and visitors.	1 & 2
Priscilla and Acquila	By providing an example of full cooperation as a missionary team, shown in their own marriage between a Gentile believer and a Jewish believer. By helping, supporting and working alongside Paul in his preaching. By willingly relocating from place to place so as to preach more widely. By tactfully instructing the gifted Apollos, so as to improve his witness to others. By making their home, wherever they were, a center of fellowship and service. And by risking martyrdom for Paul and the cause of the Truth.	3 & 4
Epenitus	By encouraging others, by the simple act of believing and being baptized, thus pointing the way for others to follow his example.	5
Mary	By working, without ceasing, to help others in any way possible.	6
Andronicus and Junia	By their companionship in support of Paul when they were his fellow-prisoners.	7
Ampliatius	By returning the great love which his friend Paul shown him, even if the kind of help which he offered is unknown to us.	8
Urbanus	By working alongside Paul in the service of Christ.	9
Stachys	By being Paul's dear friend and confidant, in rejoicing and weeping alike.	9
Apelles	By being tested under great stress and persecution, and coming through it successfully with his faith intact, thus setting an example for others whose faith would be tested.	10
Herodion	By continuing in his faith, if for no other reason. Being a believer in Christ in the first century was never an easy task.	11
Tryphena and Tryphosa	By working very hard in the Lord to help Paul and others.	12
Rufus	By distinguishing himself in such a way as to be especially chosen and consecrated for an important service in the Lord. Possibly by taking a leading role of service, which would make him a target of the enemies of the Truth.	13
Rufus' mother	By realizing that, from time to time, Paul needed something which she could provide, that is, a warm and loving family, with a mother figure.	13
All those in small house churches	By working very hard, and perhaps doing much more than those in larger ecclesias, to strengthen and build up even the smallest ecclesias.	14 & 15

Paul also conveys greetings to the brothers and sisters in Rome from other believers who are with him in Corinth, while especially singling out some of them for their service to himself and others:

Example(s)	How Did They Help?	Verse in Romans 16
Timothy	By working alongside Paul in his gospel proclamation, and by remaining behind to continue his instruction, and to guide and counsel new converts.	21
Tertius	By acting as Paul's secretary, helping to spread his message to others, and at the same time freeing the apostle for other significant work.	22
Gaius	By cheerfully making available his house and all he had to provide shelter and care to those who were preaching and teaching. By also making his house available for the regular meetings of the brothers and sisters in Corinth.	23

CONCLUSION

The men and women named and listed in Romans 16 were people whom the Apostle Paul loved. They were also men and women whom Jesus Christ loved, and whom his Father in heaven loved as well. They were loved not just because they believed and were baptized, but also because, for their part, they loved to the extent that they were willing to go the extra mile, to make the extra sacrifice, of time and money and comfort, to further the preaching of the gospel while also helping others. They remind us once again of what we should know already: that love is not an emotion—it is an action. We show love by doing something, for someone else, even at times for someone we do not know and will probably never meet, or never meet again. They remind us of one more thing which we should already know: that faith without works is dead. We must keep our faith alive by doing good and kind things for others, not just our brothers and sisters (although that is surely a good place to start), but also by doing good and kind

things for neighbors and friends and acquaintances and strangers.

Those in Romans 16 were Paul's friends, as well as believers he may never have met, but of whom he had heard good reports. He wanted to know their names, he wanted to remember those names, and presumably, he wanted us to know those names also—although he had no hope of meeting any of us before the Kingdom. Surely, he wanted all who read his words in the Letter to the Romans to know one more thing:

If we would like our name inscribed in a similar letter or book, we have only to be thankful for the blessings we have received, both spiritual and temporal, and to return the favors conferred upon us by bestowing blessings upon others—blessings of faith and hope which come through the preaching of God's Word and blessings of love which come through simple, heartfelt acts of generosity which need no words at all.

Profound words convey wonderful news, while small actions convey the wonderful reality of love—whether it be a cup of cold water, a visit to a friend

who is ill, a coat when a child is cold, or comfort when a neighbor mourns. Paul wanted us to follow Christ even as he followed him, teaching his words while living out the spirit of those words every day. He wanted us to be peacemakers and not troublemakers, to show mercy for the seventy-seventh time and more, to refrain from anger and bitter words, to seek reconciliation and not division, to go the extra mile, to bear the extra burden, to do what King David did—and give to God something that is not easy to give but rather costs us dearly! He wanted us to turn the other cheek, to love the people who persecute us, and also to pray for them. He wanted us to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect—and if we can't do that (and it is breathtakingly obvious that we cannot!), then he wanted us at least to try!

But most of all, at the end of everything else, Paul wanted our names to be written “in the book of life” (Phil 4:3), and never to be blotted out (Rev 3:5), because that book of life is the property of the Lamb of God who was slain for us (Rev 13:8). And he wanted us all to enter that glorious city which is the New Jerusalem:

“On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Rev 21:25-27).

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1. *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, Harry Whittaker, p. 168.

***Editor’s Note: We would like to thank
Bro. George for this very helpful study.***



FIRST PRINCIPLES

THE RICH MAN, LAZARUS AND ABRAHAM¹

By Stephen Cox

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes in the Bible it is obvious when a parable is a parable and when real events are real events. Sometimes the reader can easily distinguish between things to be taken literally and things to be taken figuratively.

But this is not always so simple. Many times when Jesus spoke in parables, people misunderstood and took him literally. For example, Jesus once said, when visiting the temple in Jerusalem, *“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”* Those listening all thought he was speaking literally about the real temple and objected, *“It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?”* Yet the Gospel writer notes, *“But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”* (John 2:20).² In other words,

he was talking figuratively, in a kind of parable.

Even Jesus’ own disciples were often confused by his figurative speech and parables. For example, on another occasion he told his disciples to *“be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees”* and they misunderstood, thinking that he was reproaching them for having forgotten to buy bread. Then he explained to them he was talking figuratively; the yeast was the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 16:6-7, 11-12).

It is easy to smile at these mistakes by the people of Jesus’ day, and forget that we are reading the account including the explanation! Without the explanation, we would probably be just as confused as those to whom Jesus first spoke the words.

A UNIQUE STORY

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is one of the best known in the Bible because it is unique in several ways:

1. Firstly, it is unique because, although its style resembles a parable, and it comes immediately after a series of four other parables (parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, prodigal son, dishonest manager), it certainly is not a usual parable. The parables of Jesus normally concern nature, everyday life, customs and society, not startling visions of the underworld, complete with fire and chasms.
2. Secondly, this parable, if we can properly call it a parable, is the only one in which real people (i.e., Abraham, Lazarus) are named.
3. Thirdly, it is unique because the teachings in this story clearly contradict the rest of the Bible's teaching about what happens after death. For example, no other support can be found anywhere in the Bible for the idea that "souls" live on after death, or that the "souls" of good and wicked go to different places. Or that Abraham is waiting to welcome the dead. Some popular ideas about souls going to heaven or hell, and so on, are not taught in the Bible. In fact, they are repeatedly denied in both the Old and New Testaments. We read elsewhere in the Bible, *"the dead know nothing."* (More on this subject in a moment.)
4. Finally, Jesus uses various phrases (such as "the Bosom of Abraham") and images (such as the chasm

separating the underworld in two) which are only found outside the Bible. In fact, these terms are only found in First Century Jewish mythology. (More on this subject in a future article in this series.)

BIBLE TEACHING ON DEATH

Before looking at Luke 16:19-31 in detail, it is probably necessary to support the assertion made above that the Bible teaches that *"the dead know nothing."*

That phrase is actually a quote from the Bible (Eccl 9:5). Similar comments can be found in Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 and 9:10. These verses are so clear and so plainly contradict popular church teaching about the "immortal soul" (a phrase never found in the Bible), that many modern

Christians reject the book of Ecclesiastes as being "the work of a man without faith."

This is extremely short-sighted as it is not only Ecclesiastes but almost every book in the Bible that contains this teaching. If someone rejects Ecclesiastes, because they find its teaching unpalatable, they will eventually have to do so with the entire Old Testament and then the New Testament as well.

It is not going to be possible to cover the entire subject of life, death, and the nature of man in a few lines. However, the main points of Bible teaching are as

...many modern Christians reject the book of Ecclesiastes as being "the work of a man without faith."

follows:

Man's "soul" is made up of two parts: dust and breath. *"Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."* (Gen 2:7).³ *"So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit."* (1 Cor 15:45).

When man dies, the breath returns to God who gave it, and man returns to dust. God pronounced judgment on Adam: *"By the sweat of your brow you shall eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return."* (Gen 3:19). This principle is echoed by the Psalmist: *"When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust."* (Psa 104:29). *"When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing."* (Psa 146:4). And by the Teacher: *"Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return."* (Eccl 3:19-20). *"And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."* (Eccl 12:7).

Those who have known God "sleep in the dust," meaning they rest unconscious until Christ returns. God promised King David: *"And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom."*

(2 Sam 7:12 KJV).⁴ The difference between the sleep of death and natural sleep is explained in the Gospel of John: *"After he [Jesus] had said this, he went on to tell them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.' His disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.' Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep."* (John 11:11-13). In a chapter all about resurrection, Paul wrote: *"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed."* (1 Cor 15:51).

Furthermore, the dead cannot praise the LORD: *"Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from the grave?"* (Psa 6:5). *"Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death."* (Psa 13:3). *"Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?"* (Psa 88:10-11). *"It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to the place of silence."* (Psa 115:7). *"For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness."* (Isa 38:8).

Only then will man rise from the dust to be judged, and, if accepted, live forever in Christ's Kingdom on earth. *"But your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy—your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead."* (Isa 26:19). *"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."* (Dan 12:2). Jesus explained to the Sadducees, who did

not believe in the resurrection:

“But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.” (Luke 20:35-38).

There are some complications to the simple explanation above because of the way that Bible translations sometimes reflect church traditions rather than the literal text. So, a phrase which conflicts with traditional beliefs such as “*must not go near a dead **soul*** [Hebrew: *nephesh*]” is translated as “*must not go near a dead **body***.” (Num 6:6 NIV, and most English translations). When Joshua “*struck all the **souls*** [Hebrew: *nephesh*] *with the edge of the sword,*” the same Hebrew word is instead translated “*everyone*” (Joshua 10:28, 30, 32, 37, 39). And so on.

One solution to this problem is to use a concordance. Alternatively,

some readers use two or more Bible translations for checking difficult passages.⁵ Either way, it is worth noting the literal meaning of the text in the margin of one’s Bible so it can be remembered the next time it is read.

BACK TO LUKE 16

So the picture of the afterlife given in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus contradicts all the Bible verses given above.

Something that is even stranger, given the popularity of Luke 16 in mainstream churches as a proof text about heaven and hell, is that it also contradicts church traditions. If Abraham is really in a place where one can communicate across a chasm with the wicked, burning in another part of the underworld, then he is not in heaven. Luke 16:22-26 clearly has nothing to do with the popular picture of heaven.

Some churches have attempted to get around this by saying that the “Bosom of Abraham” was under the earth when Jesus spoke but is in heaven now. Apart from the lack of any Bible support for such an idea, what exactly does it achieve?

*Stephen Cox
(Leicester Westleigh, UK)*

To be continued.

¹ This series of articles is based on a pamphlet by Bro. Stephen that is available online at: http://www.christadelphia.org/pamphlet/p_lazarus.php.

See also the related article by Bro. Steven: “Not Giving Heed to Jewish Fables (2): Abraham and the Underworld,” *Tidings*, July, 2000, pp. 256-260.

² Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

³ The phrase “living being” is the same in Hebrew as “living creatures” in Genesis 1:21, 24; 9:10, 12, 15, 16.

⁴ Compare Acts 2:29, 24; 13:36, which emphasize that David was dead and buried, and that he had not ascended to heaven.

⁵ For those with access to the internet, see www.biblegateway.com, for example, which has many translations.



TAKE A MARGINAL NOTE

HE SHALL BEGIN TO DELIVER ISRAEL

By Dave Jennings

THE pronouncement of Samson's birth to Manoah's wife included important information about the work of Samson. Not only was he to be a Nazarite, but he was to *"begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."* (Judg 13:5). His work, while critically important, was not to end the oppression of the Philistines, or to see the finality of their grip. He was to be a beginning. God had set the bounds of Samson's work and prepared the way for him to have a dramatic impact in Israel.

We are humbled when we see the foreknowledge of God. He knows us and how we fit into His plan. He has prepared work for us to do. The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 2:10, where he says, *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God hath prepared in advance for us to do."* (NIV). This is an awesome look at our lives in the truth. God's Master Plan includes work that He has prepared in advance for us to do. He knows the scope of the work planned and the limits.

Our challenge is to be open to accept the work He has planned and to have sufficient faith to execute the work.

Our contribution may not always be to finalize a work, but rather to get it started, or to nurture its progress. Sometimes we plant, other times we water, and only occasionally are we the harvesters. It is all the Lord's work. We will not likely be called on to fight against oppressive nations, however our Divinely appointed work is important and will make a difference in our lives and the lives of others. The very study of Scripture, Paul says, is *"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness."* To what end? *"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* (2 Tim 3:16-17).

This may alter our perspective of the challenges along life's way. We should view our trials as preparations for the work ahead. Endured hardship may put us in a far better position to help another who is in desperate need of assistance. In the end, Samson's greatest victory was when he placed his hands on the pillars in Gaza and called on the LORD God to remember him and strengthen him to do this last work. May we too acknowledge our need and have the courage to do His work.

Dave Jennings

COVID-19 IMPACT IN MISSION COUNTRIES

By Jan Berneau

As you might expect, many of the planned preaching activities in Latin America and the Caribbean have been modified significantly during the pandemic. Here's a brief report on continuing activities to preach the Gospel and how ecclesias are continuing to fellowship.

MEXICO

(Link Brothers, David Jennings and David Lloyd)

We've been keeping in close touch with Mexico. There are no known infections for the brothers and sisters and their families yet, for which we are very grateful. The brothers and sisters in Guadalajara continue to meet in the hall for Memorial Service. The brothers and sisters in Santa Cruz el Grande have been meeting online for Memorial Service and classes. Additionally, there is a rapidly growing number of Bible classes being given online from Santa Cruz el Grande for the public. These new students are being generated from Google advertising across Mexico.

ST. LUCIA

(Link Brother, Mike LeDuke)

St. Lucia implemented very strict controls, very early on, for the pandemic. Consequently, the disease acquired only a minimal foothold on the island. All of the brothers and sisters are doing well, but they are still not able to meet together. I try to speak to as

many as possible via phone, WhatsApp and Skype to maintain contact. I am looking forward to returning to St. Lucia, probably towards the end of the year... sooner, if possible!

GUYANA

(Link Couple, Mark and Liz Carr)

Generally, there has been some amount of contraction in the economy, but essential businesses are still in operation: shops, groceries, markets, most factories, and government services. All are subject to social distancing and other protective measures. Curfew spans last from 9:00pm to 5:00am (honored mostly in the breach!). Barbershops, drinking bars, and other entertainment venues, including parks, have been shut down altogether, under severe penalty for breaches.

The ecclesias use web conferencing and the support from the brotherhood on the communication and speaking front has been exceptional. This has been a real blessing in helping them not feel cut off from us all.

GUATEMALA

(Link Brother, Dan Robinson)

The brothers and sisters in Guatemala are holding up well under the circumstances. As of the middle of August, there remained many restrictions in the country. There is a curfew in place each day, from 9:00pm until 4:00am. During that time, all non-essential personnel are to remain in their place of residence. Public transportation is back running but only at 50% capacity. Individuals are required to wear masks and maintain social distancing in all public areas. As a result, the brethren continue to meet online on Sunday mornings through web conferencing, hosted by the LA Hispanic Ecclesia. They also are taking advantage of a Sunday morning connection with the brothers and sisters in Costa Rica, as well as midweek classes with the ecclesias in El Salvador. They hope to return to meeting in person, at their rented hall, in the near future.

JAMAICA

(Link Couple, Nate and Antonia Giordano)

The members in Jamaica greatly appreciate the CBMC response to the hardship brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds were well received. There is still no report of any of our members contracting the disease; however, the island is currently experiencing a surge in new infections. Despite this, masks and social distancing are decreasing, which exposes our members to increased risks. We pray the good Lord will continue to bless us with his protection.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

(Link Brother, Brad Butts)

T & T has done well in combating the COVID-19 outbreak, with restrictions being put in place early on. To my knowledge, no brothers or sisters have been affected directly by the illness. Until recently, virtual meetings were taking place on both islands. The Mt. Grace (Tobago) and Marabella Ecclesias are now meeting in their halls, with Erin and Arima still meeting virtually. Recently, there has been some uptick in COVID-19 cases, so as a result, primary schools have been closed since reopening last month. Virtual Bible classes on Tuesday nights are joined by the Erin, Arima, and Tobago Ecclesias.

EL SALVADOR, ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA, BRAZIL, HONDURAS, SOUTHEAST MEXICO AND PERU

(Link Couple, Jim and Jean Hunter)

When the COVID-19 virus hit last March, I was in Carmen, Campeche, Mexico, where I had the privilege of baptizing Silvia Hernández into Jesus and the hope of our faith. I felt blessed in being able to get back into the US before travel restrictions began. By the next Sunday, the brethren and sisters had organized Memorial Service via web conferencing. It seemed to be a marvel. Many members and friends tuned in from all over Latin America, so that, in the beginning, we had up to 80 attendees.

The web conferencing phenomenon has so prospered that the international Hispanic Christadelphian community now has a choice of many different types of weekly Bible classes, hosted

by several different ecclesias. Members and friends in remote areas are now able to develop friendships and share fellowship. Even when ecclesias are able once again to meet in person, many international activities will undoubtedly continue by popular demand.

BOLIVIA

(In-Country Missionaries, Isaiah and Rosie Tunnell)

Here in La Paz, Bolivia we are just now beginning to return to a form of normality. Since mid-March, there have been strict quarantines. Before now, people would only be able to leave the house once a week, on a specific day corresponding to their national identification. The elections have greatly augmented the issues here as there is some political unrest! This led at one point to all the roads in La Paz being blockaded by protesters, which did not allow food into the city for two weeks. Thanks to God that issue has been resolved for now. Smaller organized crowds are being allowed to meet now.

Thankfully, no one in the ecclesia has been physically affected by the virus. Currently, we are only able to hold the meeting online, as weekends are a complete quarantine. We do the same for the midweek class, which is a great blessing. God willing, we will be able to meet again soon.

A blessing that was perhaps unseen beforehand is that the members here can visit with other brothers and sisters throughout Central and South America. This is a

huge encouragement for all involved, as travel, the ability to visit our wider family in Christ, is much more difficult here. In La Paz, we have been able to have a brother from Argentina who lives in isolation join and help by participating in our ecclesial functions regularly.

PANAMA

(Link Brother, Don Luff)

Both the Colon and Panama City Ecclesias have been unable to meet in person, but are thankfully able to meet online. Most brethren have been able to participate, though some have not. Thankfully, none of the members have been afflicted with the virus.

The area is still under a mandatory quarantine on weekends, with no one being allowed to leave home. The government has provided subsidies for the unemployed, and there are currently no concerns about the food supply in the country.

While in-person fellowship has been limited, members have been able to attend Memorial Services remotely, reminding us of the blessings our world-wide fellowship provides.

*Submitted by Sis. Jan Berneau,
CBMA/C Publicity*



NEWS & UPDATES

MISSISSAUGA WEST, ONT

We warmly welcome Bro. Reuben Westley as a new member of our ecclesia by transfer from the Nottingham South, UK Ecclesia. We commend Bro. Lloyd and Sis. Janice Cooper by transfer to the love and care of the Manitoulin Island, ON Ecclesia. We are grateful for the love and support they provided during their time here.

In March 2020, we rejoiced to witness the baptism of MADELINE FISH, daughter of Bro. Jason and Sis. Jessica Fish. We pray for our heavenly Father's blessing on our new sister as we journey together to the kingdom and age to come.

Joel Thorp

SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA, CA

We were encouraged on June 24, 2020, when six of us gathered at the hall for the baptism of MARTHA FRISBY. Her son, Robert Frisby, is a member of the Lombard, IL Ecclesia. It marked the culmination of an earnest and comprehensive search for understanding of the one true gospel. We rejoice to have her as our sister in Christ. Our widowed Bro. Jim Seagoe quietly joined in marriage to Sis. Rhonda Vaughn (San Diego County, CA) on September 16, 2020.

Dolores Sleeper

TORONTO WEST, ON

It is with great joy that we announce the baptisms two brothers in the flesh, sons of Benoit and Leah Mukendi, and now also brothers in Christ: KADIMA MUKENDI, on July 26, 2020; and DANIEL MUKENDI, on August 2, 2020.

Brian Carrick

Thoughts on the Way

Where Has My Beloved Gone?

IT is the darkest time of the night, just before the sun's rays begin to creep over the horizon. The city streets are quiet. Out of the shadows, a young woman emerges. She is disheveled, as though she has just left her bed. She is weeping and trembling. She is walking from one street to another and frantically looking in every direction.

She approaches two men, the only people in the streets. They are the watchmen, just finishing their night patrol: "Have you seen my lover? He must have come this way. Where could he be?" They tell her to go home and stay out of trouble, but she ignores them and plunges on, still looking everywhere for... someone—but whom?

It is the stuff of a lurid novel or a movie, we might be embarrassed to watch. And yet, this scene can be found, of all places, in the Bible—**twice!**

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT...

From the Song of Songs, we read the following:

"My lover spoke and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me'... Until the day breaks and the shadows flee... I will look for the one my heart loves. I looked and looked for him, but I did not find him. He had left me—he was gone. I called him, but he did not answer.

"The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. 'Have you seen the one my heart loves?'

But they had no answer for me... They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak.

"Scarcely had I gotten away from them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him, and I would not let him go!" (Song 2:10,17; 3:1,3,4; 5:6,7).

...AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Here we may put faces to the two primary characters. The young woman is Mary Magdalene, and her Beloved is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. From John 20 we read:

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So, she came running to Peter and the other disciple, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

"Soon thereafter, Mary returned to the tomb. There she stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.'

"She turned around and saw Jesus

standing there, but she did not realize it was Jesus. 'Woman,' he said, 'why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out... 'Rabboni!'... Jesus said, 'Do not keep holding me, for I must go to the Father'... Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!'" (John 20:1,2,11-18).

So much might be said about these parallel passages. They deserve a thorough study; but for now, just a few thoughts:

1. The phrase in Song of Songs 5:7 describes city watchmen beating the young woman. The counterpart in John 20 has angelic watchmen greeting Mary Magdalene. As believers in Christ, we can receive both during our lives of faith: occasional tribulations interspersed with messages of promise and hope (cp. Matt 28:6,7; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6: "He has risen").
2. In the Song of Songs, the young woman clings to her Beloved and will not let him go (3:4). In John 20, Mary seems to have clung to her beloved Jesus in the same way, even though the narrative omits that point. The KJV reads, "**Touch** me not." (v. 17), but the better translation would be, "Do not keep holding me."

A FINAL THOUGHT

In the Song of Songs, the believer's fervent desire for Christ to return is likened to a young woman longing to see her sweetheart again. In the Gospels, Mary Magdalene personifies this same desire.

However, the woman in the Song of Songs expresses such intense love for her chosen one that we may shy away from reading parts of this book. The imagery of the Song of Songs is more sensual than any other part of Scripture. In the inspired writings of the Old Testament, the love of a man for a woman (or the love of a woman for a man) is described by the same Hebrew word ("*ahava*") as the love for family, the love for neighbors, and even the love for strangers—as well as the believer's love for God! Such a profound love as this last one appears to be the same kind of love as all the others, but at the same time a step up to a higher plane.

Our problem with this element in the Song of Songs is that we have been culturally conditioned to avoid such open expressions of erotic love. But if we can appreciate that other cultures, in the Middle East, for example, embraced such poems as valid expressions of both sensual love and divine love, then we can find real spiritual value in the Song of Songs.

*George Booker
(Austin Leander, TX)*

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