


SPECIAL ISSUE

TIDINGS

Volume 84, Number 9, October 2021

WHEN WE DISAGREE

ENSURING
LOVE PREVAILS

A close-up photograph of three cicadas on a large green leaf. The cicadas have black bodies with red markings on their heads and thoraxes, and transparent wings with prominent veins. They are positioned around the leaf, which has some yellow spots. The background is blurred.

Jeff Gelineau (Simi Hills, CA)

Brood X Cicadas, Annandale, Virginia

Every 17 years the largest brood of Cicadas invades the eastern United States, bringing with them images of the plagues of Egypt.

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

is published monthly, except bimonthly in July-August, by The **Christadelphian Tidings**,

567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941.

FIRST CLASS POSTAGE PAID at Simi Valley, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Christadelphian Tidings, 567 Astorian Dr., Simi Valley, CA 93065.

Christadelphian Tidings Publishing

Committee: Alan Markwith (Chairman), Joe Hill, John Bilello, Peter Bilello, Linda Beckerson, Randy Davenport, Ruth Link, Clive Drepaul, Kevin Flatley, Jeff Gelineau, William Link, and Ken Sommerville.

Christadelphian Tidings Editorial Committee:

Dave Jennings (Editor), Section Editors: Chuck Link (Life Application), Duncan Kenzie (Exhortation and Consolation), Jessica Gelineau (Music and Praise), Richard Morgan (Exposition), Joe Hill (First Principles), Dave Jennings (Teaching and Preaching), Jan Berneau (CBMA/C), George Booker, (Thoughts on the Way, Q&A), John Bilello (Letters to the Editor), Lori Cusenza (News and Notices), Jeff Gelineau (Subscriptions), Melinda Flatley (Writer Recruitment and Final Copy), and Ethel Archard (Books).

Subscriptions: The Tidings Magazine is provided **FREE** for any who would like to read it. The Magazine is available in PDF Format online at tidings.org. If you would like to order a printed subscription to **The Tidings** you may do so simply by making a donation to cover the printing costs. The Suggested Donation for printing and shipping is **USD \$50.00**; (we ask for a Minimum Donation of USD \$25.00 for a printed subscription.)

All subscription information is available online at www.tidings.org. You may subscribe online and make donations online or by mail to the above address. Information on how to subscribe in other countries is also available online at www.tidings.org/subscribe.

The Christadelphian Tidings is published on the 15th of the month for the month following. Items for publication must be received by the 1st of the month. Correspondence to the editor, Dave Jennings at editor@tidings.org. Publication of articles does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine as set forth in the BASF. Letters to the editor will only be accepted via e-mail to letters@tidings.org. Please include your name, address, e-mail address, and contact phone numbers. Submissions under 300 words are encouraged — the magazine reserves the right to edit all submissions for length and clarity.

TIDINGS

Volume 84, Number 9 / October, 2021



OCTOBER 2021 SPECIAL ISSUE

Introduction, <i>Dave Jennings</i>	440
Godly Disagreement: A Biblical Case Study, <i>William Link</i>	442
Ode to a Mudlark, <i>Melinda Flatley</i>	449
Seeking Truth, <i>William Link</i>	453
Discussing Controversial Issues, <i>Joe Hill</i>	459
Godly Solutions to Worldly Issues, <i>Sam Taylor</i>	467
Scriptural Principles Concerning Controversy, <i>Islip Collyer</i>	471
Passing Judgment on Doubtful Matters, <i>George Booker</i>	476
Culture and Tradition, <i>Dave Jennings</i>	484
Revisiting Jamaica, <i>Cassie Giordano</i>	491
Letter to the Editor, <i>Ted Sleeper</i>	495
Letter to the Editor, <i>Doug Finlay</i>	496
Ecclesial News and Updates	498



SPECIAL ISSUE

INTRODUCTION

By Dave Jennings

THE TIDINGS October 2021 issue is dedicated to identifying and appreciating the Scriptural principles of godly disagreement.

There is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon declared. Disagreement and quarrels between those who believed in God are well documented throughout the Scriptures. Indeed, few people disagree and argue about things that they don't care about. As we write this special edition, we acknowledge that in our community, we are blessed by brothers and sisters who **truly** care. They have not delegated their exploration and wresting of Scripture

to any central body or authority, and each person willingly owns their understanding of God's principles.

Having dissent is, of itself, not problematic. Even as we organized this special issue, our team encountered areas of disagreement, which we worked through after a number of discussions. Having disagreement over areas that are not first principles may actually enrich us as believers. We see new perspectives, which we can decide to agree with, disagree with, or be undecided about. Debate becomes a problem when we pursue it to such a point that we are willing to sacrifice our

commitment to being godly people, reflections of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in debates that really matter, how we interact with each other may be as or more important than the issue at hand. The Ephesian ecclesia was commended for their diligence in facing the wrong teachings that were being exposed in the ecclesia (Rev 2:2-4), but they were also exhorted by the Lord himself that they had in the process neglected their first love.

Being accurate on first principles is essential. But it is how we interact with those who test the first principles, and especially other topics that are not first principles, that identifies what is truly in our hearts and our commitment to the entirety of the teachings of Jesus.

We live in such a polarized world in 2021. The divide over political views, health practices and personal freedoms has led some to vilify those who believe differently. It has become a world where one can no longer have a reasonable, civil debate and walk away in common decency. While this may be descriptive of the external world around us, we cannot allow this to be descriptive of the body of Christ. The shepherds in our ecclesias must be held accountable for pursuing truth **and** peace. All members must be committed to love and to prefer one another (Rom 12:10). We are not of this world, and we don't use the norms of our secular culture to govern how

we behave. We are part of a Heavenly Kingdom, embracing righteous precepts. The way conflict is resolved by our community looks nothing at all like the norm in the world we live in.

In these articles, we will attempt to provide insights into several critical aspects of godly disagreement. Can we commit to understanding each other's perspectives? Can we differentiate between what is essential and what is uncertain? Are we able to avoid all envy and strife so that we can, as a united body, have sown in us the fruit of righteousness (Jas 3:16-18)?

The answers to these questions may very well determine the future of our community. Will we stand together, watching and waiting for the Lord, or will we fracture into micro-identities?

We greatly desire to hear your thoughts on these issues, and would encourage you to use our social media sites (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) to share your comments and insights.

I am most thankful for a dedicated team of Tidings committee members who labored with the concept of this special edition and wrote and collected the enclosed articles. Special thanks to Bro. William Link, (Baltimore, MD) who was the project leader for this issue.

Dave Jennings

We greatly desire to hear your thoughts on these issues.

Please share your comments on our Facebook page. We value your insights!

www.facebook.com/thetidings



GODLY DISAGREEMENT

A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY

By William Link

THE EXCELLENT IDEAL OF UNITY

THE apostle Paul exhorts us to be of one mind, perfectly joined together:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor 1:10).

It is a wonderful ideal, captured poetically by King David, a man after God's own heart.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is, For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of

Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore. (Psa 133:1-3).

Perhaps in writing this, David reflected on his own experience of fellowship and love with his best friend, Jonathan. How blessed we are when we experience such unity; we fervently hope that each of us has a Jonathan in our life. Beyond that, it is also hoped that such a spirit can characterize our ecclesial lives.

It is a delightful and attainable ideal—that is, if we have a clear view of what it means to be “*of one mind, perfectly joined together.*” Some would argue that unity means absolute conformity of thought, in every detail. Bro. Robert Roberts recounts being “called upon by a man in dead earnest who contended there were no such things as ‘first principles,’ and that every detail of truth, down even to the date of the expiry of the Papal 1260, should be

insisted on as a condition of fellowship,” a view that Bro. Roberts described as an “outrageous extravagance.”¹

Being of one mind does not and cannot mean agreeing on everything. On the surface, the proverb about “*iron sharpening iron*” (Prov 27:17) has at its heart the image of friction and sparks flying. Nevertheless, the proverb is about friends who desire mutual edification and growth. It is iron sharpening iron, that is, equal partners improving each other. The proverb isn’t about a whetstone sharpening iron and generating uncontrollable heat, strife and friction to the detriment of a healthy relationship.

There will inevitably be disagreements among us, even about how to live a godly life. There are two challenges for us in dealing with disagreement. The first is to discern how important the issue is. Scripture tells us to have no fellowship with darkness, and we must be able to discern whether a wrong view of the issue at hand constitutes being in darkness in the Scriptural sense. If it does, we must take a stand (2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:11).²

On the other hand, it is intriguing and instructive to hear Paul’s warning to Timothy to “*avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*” (2 Tim

2:23). Some issues matter and others don’t, and Paul expected Timothy to know the difference. The shame is that needless strife results from disagreement about things that don’t matter, simply because we refuse to acknowledge they don’t matter. Folks will jump through all sorts of hoops, turning intellectual backsprings and somersaults to insist that the right view of an issue (their view) MATTERS. I can’t recall someone saying: “This is a foolish and unimportant topic, but let’s fight over it anyway.”

But there are gray areas or topics where it might be genuinely unclear how strongly we should insist on a

...there are gray areas or topics where it might be genuinely unclear how strongly we should insist on a right understanding.



right understanding. Here is where the second challenge arises: we must know how to conduct ourselves in disagreement. This is the topic of the present article. There is plenty of guidance for us in the Scriptures, in general terms, but we can't find much better than Romans 14:1-15:7 for instruction about handling disagreement.

A CASE STUDY IN UNITY

Romans 14:1-15:7 is a case study in how to think, and how to conduct ourselves when disagreements challenge the brotherhood. Paul mentions two issues of controversy: one having to do with dietary restrictions arising from conscience (14:2-3) and one having to do with the observance of Jewish holy days (14:5-6).

For most of us, these two issues are far enough away from our personal experience that we can approach them dispassionately; we could likely argue either side of each issue. We could imagine ourselves as former idolaters that had turned away from the hedonism of cultic worship. Then we would think with horror of the evil associations of eating meat offered to idols and shudder at the atrocities of that past way of life. It would all seem pretty obvious to us! We'd want nothing to do with meat offered to idols and would cite Paul's warning to *"abstain from every form of evil."* (1 Thess 5:22

ESV).³ We might look down our nose at those that couldn't see something so obvious.

On the other hand, we could imagine ourselves arguing that *"an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one."* (1 Cor 8:4 NKJV). This view would be especially appealing if we had never worshipped idols. Why should we impose unnecessary constraints on ourselves? It would all seem pretty obvious to us! We would argue rationally and conclude with Paul that every food *"is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."* (1 Tim 4:4-6 NKJV). We might look down our nose at those that couldn't see something so obvious.

What is the correct perspective on these issues? What is the solution to the controversy?

PAUL'S GUIDANCE

Paul's response might surprise us. First, he says *"Let each be fully convinced in his own mind."* (Rom 14:5). It was essential that brothers and sisters had the matter well thought out in

It was essential that
brothers and sisters had
the matter well thought
out in their minds.
Indifference was not
the solution. Nor was
a hasty taking of sides
driven by or based on
personalities.

their minds. Indifference was not the solution. Nor was a hasty taking of sides driven by or based on personalities.⁴ The Apostle Paul reminds us that the primary outcome is to present ourselves as *"a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God,"* which is our *"reasonable service,"*

meaning our reasoned service. (Rom 12:1 KJV).⁵ Our Lord teaches us to love the Father with all our heart, soul, **mind** and strength.

So, the believers were to think through the issues carefully, and to be fully convinced in their own minds. Paul says that he himself had firm convictions on these matters: “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus.” (v. 14).

If we have all carefully, prayerfully, and Scripturally reasoned through things, we will all reach the same conclusion, right? No, apparently not! Paul anticipated that there would be contradictory conclusions:

Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him

who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him... One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. (Rom 14:3-6).

Brothers and sisters fully convinced in their own minds might reach different conclusions. But what mattered was that their convictions were acted on “to the Lord,” in his service. Let him who “observed the day” do so to the Lord;

Brothers and sisters fully convinced in their own minds might reach different conclusions. But what mattered was that their convictions were acted on “to the Lord,” in his service.



for the one that refrained, let his non-observance be “to the Lord.” So also, with regard to dietary scruples: let him who eats, eat to the Lord, giving God thanks; and let him who does not eat, refrain for the sake of the Lord, and give God thanks.

Paul himself was convinced that there was nothing wrong in itself of eating meat offered to idols: “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.” (Rom 14:14 NKJV). It wasn’t merely personal conviction; it was conviction received from the Lord Jesus himself. But the matter did not stop there with an assertion of intellectual rectitude and personal rights. It goes further.

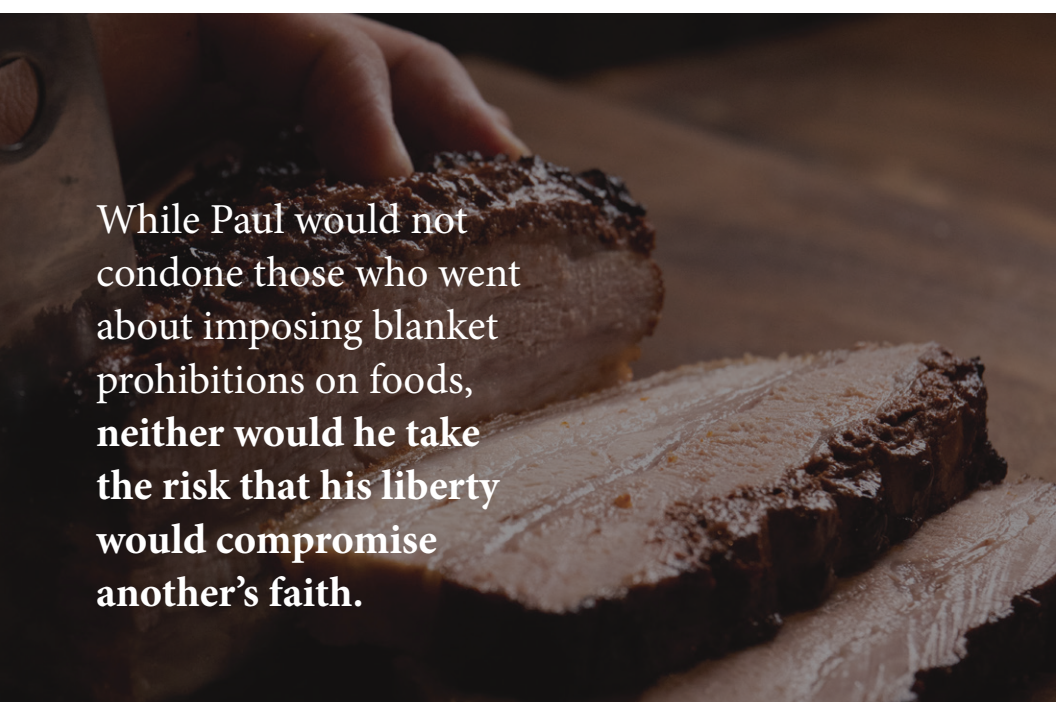
BEING FULLY CONVINCED— WHAT NEXT?

Despite his absolute conviction that

there was no defilement in eating meats offered to idols, Paul wouldn’t eat, if in so doing he might cause his brother to stumble.

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way. I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. (Rom 14:13-15 NKJV).

While Paul would not condone those who went about imposing blanket prohibitions on foods (1Tim 4:1-3),



While Paul would not condone those who went about imposing blanket prohibitions on foods, neither would he take the risk that his liberty would compromise another’s faith.

neither would he take the risk that his liberty would compromise another's faith.

Leviticus 19:14 says *"You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD."* (NKJV). This commandment comes as the law reaches its most sublime instruction about godly treatment of others: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (v. 18 NKJV). Just as Paul wouldn't put a stumbling block in the path of a literally blind man, neither would he risk putting a stumbling block before the man blinded by his scruples.⁶ Paul would deal with him in love. He would sacrifice his own rights for him, dealing with him in the spirit of Christ, treasuring him as *"one for whom Christ died."*⁷

STRONG AND WEAK

Paul refers to the brethren with unnecessary scruples as *"the weak"* (14:1-2). I would bet they thought of themselves as *"the strong,"* and of those that disagreed with them as *"the weak."* The grating sanctimony of some that would paint themselves as *"the strong"* because of their unnecessary legalistic scruples may antagonize us and lead us to misbehave. Perhaps we should step back and reconsider, mercifully and sympathetically, whether that *"strong brother"* is in fact, weak; to *"receive him"* and avoid *"disputes over doubtful things."* (14:1).

Regarding those "weak" brethren, Paul says,

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let

each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." (Rom 15:1-3 NKJV).

Notice the verb *"please"* in there, three times. There's no getting around what it means: it is perfectly translated *"please,"* and consistently so among all but the most interpretive modern translations. It is the word used repeatedly in passages about our duty to please God (among others, Rom 8:8 and 1 Thess 4:1). It is the word used of a soldier's responsibility to his commander (2 Tim 2:4), and of a married man to his wife (1 Cor 7:33). Our goal in dealing with our brethren should be pleasantness *"for his good, leading to edification."* That spirit and godly principle should govern our conduct in disagreement.

CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions can we draw from this case study?

Let each be convinced. Solomon said, *"He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him."* (Prov 18:13). Integrity calls on us to gather and carefully weigh facts and to prayerfully compare Scripture with Scripture. It won't do to take positions based on traditions, the opinions of others or personal prejudices. There is an adage which implores people to *"first seek to understand before you are understood."* Even Jesus told his opponents, *"Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?"* (John 7:51 ESV).

It is possible for reasoned thinking to lead to distinct conclusions. We can disagree and still be of one mind. In such cases, our attitude ought to be one of tolerance and patience, self-sacrifice with the goal of edification. We ought to do our best to understand and applaud whatever good principles are embraced by those with whom we disagree.

We began with Paul's exhortation that we all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among us, that we be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Clearly this cannot mean that we are in 100% agreement on every topic, or that there are no gray areas where the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. Rather, unity of mind means having the mind of Christ. *"Let this mind be in you...a mind full of love, lowliness, devoid of self-interest, humble*

and self-sacrificing, the mind of Christ." (Phil 2:1-8).

Such are Paul's thoughts as in Romans 15:5-7. He concludes his instruction on handling disagreement. His lovely benediction hearkens back to 14:1,3 about "receiving" our brethren and being "received" by God:

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. (Rom 15:5-7).

William Link,
(Baltimore, MD)

1 Bro. Robert Roberts, True Principles and Uncertain Details, or The Danger of Going Too Far in Our Demands on Fellow-Believers. May 1898 issue of *The Christadelphian Magazine*

2 Note that each of these is directly linked to behavior, rather than opinion.

3 In the KJV, 1Thessalonians 5:22 says *"abstain from every appearance of evil"* – not just evil things, in various forms, but even things that "appear" evil. Most modern versions, substitute *"kind"* for appearance, some arguing that worrying about appearances falls into the category of *"doing our works to be seen of men."* Nonetheless, the KJV reading cannot be lightly dismissed. Cambridge Bible Commentary says, "It is difficult, however, for the Greek scholar to justify the reading of evil in this sentence as a substantive, and the rendering of the governing noun by kind instead of appearance (rendered form, fashion, shape, in Luke 3:22; 9:29 and John 5:37)."

4 1 Corinthians 1:12-13; 3:4-6. In these passages, Paul argues against the tendency for believers to follow respected leaders, quoting some as saying *"I am of Paul"* and others *"I am of Apollos."* Reading on to 4:6, it appears that the parties weren't followers of Paul and Apollos themselves; Paul has substituted his name and that of Apollos to illustrate the folly of such partisanship, while delicately refraining from naming names.

5 Some modern versions render *"reasonable"* (Gk. *logikos*) as *"spiritual."* Strong arguments can be presented in favor of the KJV translation. But even if *"spiritual"* is correct, Paul urges this sacrifice saying *"I beseech thee therefore..."* Self-sacrifice is encouraged as a reasoned consequence of the preceding doctrinal arguments.

6 Romans 14:13. The Greek for *"cause to fall"* (NKJV) is the same word as *"stumbling block"* in the Septuagint (LXX) of Leviticus 19:14.

7 1 Corinthians 8 is familiar as dealing with the issue of meat offered to idols. It is noteworthy that 1 Corinthians 10:27-33 concludes with comments on the same topic, suggesting that the intervening arguments be read as relevant to the topic. Thus, Paul's decisions to support himself financially, and to remain unmarried are examples of "rights" (sw 8:9; 9:4,5,6,12,18) foregone for love of the brethren.



ODE TO A MUDLARK

THE JOY OF INQUIRY

By Melinda Flatley

MY two young grandchildren love to go “mudlarking.” This hobby—scavenging bits of history from river shores—is most famously done on the River Thames in London, England. But here in Pittsburgh (USA), we have the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers, where access is limited, the shores nontidal and history young. Nevertheless, there are places and times to mudlark here—and finds to be made! Their father, who is a trained archeologist, guides them to a likely spot and equips them with the proper gear: spade, bucket and, yes, boots! It’s mud-larking, after all. He teaches them to keep their eyes open for unusual shapes and colors. They eagerly approach the outing with the question: “I wonder what we’ll find today?”

Occasionally one or the other takes off ahead and then circles back with a “find” to show the rest. Sometimes it’s a wedge of pottery or a shard of blue glass. Sometimes it’s a piece of coal (so ordinary in the Pittsburgh area) or a

chunk of brick. These are tossed back in the river. Inevitably someone slips and slides into the river’s shallow edge. It’s a messy business.

Back home, the sorting and organizing begin. Collections of similar items are organized and displayed. We put our heads together to see what we’ve found. Maybe more can be learned by looking it up in a reference work? Maybe we can get clues about activities that went on here in days past? Perhaps we can guess what items were unvalued and tossed away?

THE METAPHOR

The thought occurs that mudlarking is a bit like Bible study, a metaphor if you will.² It’s an unusual hobby—not everyone we know does it. It’s hard work, but it’s also addicting and fun! While some avenues of research lead to ordinary ends, others reveal treasures, just waiting to be shared. Sometimes we slip and end up “all wet.”

We ask: Where are the special places to look and what are the proper tools?

How do I approach the subject with an open mind? What will I find today? What have I overlooked? What research tools do I need? Who can help? How do I organize and share my finds?

Mudlarking is a pursuit anyone can do. So, too, is Bible study. In fact, it's imperative that we all participate. In some Christadelphian communities, it's often only the brothers who have the obligation and opportunity to share the results of the Scriptural treasures they unearth. As a result, sisters, young people and the newly baptized sometimes get the idea they can forgo the pursuit, thinking it's unnecessary or too difficult. On the contrary, there are no gender or age restrictions spoken of in these and other passages:

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Rom 15:4 NASB).³

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil. (Heb 5:12-14).

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15).

MESSY BUSINESS

As for the “messy business” part, at times when you dig into a subject thoroughly, you might come to a startling conclusion that does not align with what you were taught. What do you do with these revelations? How do you validate your conclusions? How do you share them and display them? What do you do when you encounter someone who disparages your find, based on the notion that your new ideas go against our community's traditional positions? Is it “heresy” to have a different opinion?

The word translated “heresy” comes from the Greek *haeresis*, its original meaning being “choice.” It is a neutral word referring to a “sect,” without judgment about its character; a heretic is one who makes a choice. In the early Christian church, it came to be used negatively to depict false doctrines contrary to religion's established rules. We might agree with the latter sense when we're considering a first principle subject. It's a slippery slope, however, to apply this concept to topics no human being could possibly be certain about. There are so many Bible areas where choice is appropriate. If we think otherwise, we might rightly be called a “stick-in-the-mud.”

When it comes to examining both sides of a divisive topic, we actually already have a tried-and-true template. It's our method of showing an outsider the tenets of our faith...

We Christadelphians like to describe ourselves as “The People of The Book.” We take satisfaction in using the whole Bible to validate our beliefs. We are told in I Thessalonians 5:20-21, “*Do not reject prophecies, but examine everything; hold firmly to that which is good.*” When it comes to examining both sides of a divisive topic, we actually already have a tried-and-true template. It’s our method of showing an outsider the tenets of our faith:

1. Agree to have an open mind and temporary suspension of pre-fixed belief.
2. Find common ground between the two sides.
3. Avoid negative or derogatory characterizations of the other’s convictions.
4. Use the entire Bible to establish the predominant message on the topic.
5. Make a thorough study of the outlier passages to explain why they appear to differ.

We are grateful to our pioneers for their diligent pursuit of truth. Dr. Thomas in *Elpis Israel* exclaims,

“O that [one] could be induced now to devote themselves to the study of the scriptures without regard to articles, creeds, confessions and traditions! These things are mere rubbish...If they could be persuaded to ‘search the scriptures daily’ for the truth as for hid treasure, they would soon...rejoice in the liberty of that truth which alone can make them ‘free indeed.’”⁴

And yet, even our pioneers’ understanding and appreciation of

truth developed over time. Should we expect less from ourselves? At the judgment seat, would we be surprised to have Jesus say to us, “*You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures or the power of God*”? (Matt 22:29).

WHY AND HOW

Bible study is essential to living the Truth. It is not optional. We need it to transform our mind and behavior; to teach others; to express love for God and His Son; to know God’s purpose for the earth; to determine for ourselves what is true, rather than merely relying on others or tradition to tell us what to believe. We are called upon to be active, not passive, receivers of Bible precepts.

With these thoughts in mind, here’s a Baker’s Dozen approach to Bible study:

1. **Just do it.** Set aside a time and special place with all your tools at hand. Eagerly undertake to search the Scriptures daily.
2. **Pray for help and enlightenment.** The Father will reward your quest.
3. **Vary the type of Bible study you do.** Biographical, topical, chronological, cultural, words, geographical, one book of the Bible in-depth are all different approaches.
4. **Find out the who, what, where, why, how and “So what?”** Look up names and places, cross-references, historical setting, author and intended audience. Interrogate the Scriptures to establish context.
5. **Build a library of study aids.** Concordances, atlas, Bible dictionary, lexicons, chronologies, commentaries, Christadelphian books and magazines—all useful in their own way.

6. Always be on the hunt for books.

Pick up finds from Bible School and secondhand bookstores and Christadelphian publishers such as Tidings. Christian bookstores are great sources for Bible versions and language references but avoid books on theological interpretations.

7. Develop an ear for Bible echoes.

Where have you heard this before? Remember, there is no limit to the types, shadows, analogies, echoes in Scriptures. Follow names, places, words, concepts. Collections can reveal a bigger picture.

8. Know that there are no idle words in the Bible.

They are all there for God's purpose. It's up to us to excavate their intent. This task even includes repetitive sequences, genealogies and little words.

9. Write down your questions in your Bible.

Sooner or later, the answer will surface in your reading or a talk you hear. Jotting it down may even inspire you to dig into doing a deeper study.

10. Develop a Bible marking system.

Curate your finds. Document them in handy retrievable places, such as Bible margins or notebooks. Have Bible marking tools ready: pencils, eraser, ruler. Mark key verses on first-principle doctrines.

11. Remember, the Bible is inspired.

Time and again, the Bible is backed up with the discoveries of archeology, new manuscripts, and

word studies. Seek out these fresh findings.

12. Iron sharpens iron.

Find your go-to people to sound out developing ideas on. Collaborative thinking can change something of limited value into a precious treasure.

13. Pursue opportunities to share your Bible gems.

Don't hide your treasures under a bushel basket. Pass them on to others. Get yourself a job teaching Sunday School or a Bible class.⁵ Tidings is always looking to publish thoughtful and well-researched articles.

It's essential for our salvation that we approach the Bible with the excitement of two mudlarking kids searching for treasures by the river's edge. The process is hard work, but they don't mind that. Nor do they mind the mess. They have an open mind and eyes peeled. Their discoveries bring great joy and happiness. And so, we too are reminded that *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field [river shore?], which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."* (Matt 13:44).

Melinda Flatley,
(Pittsburgh, PA)

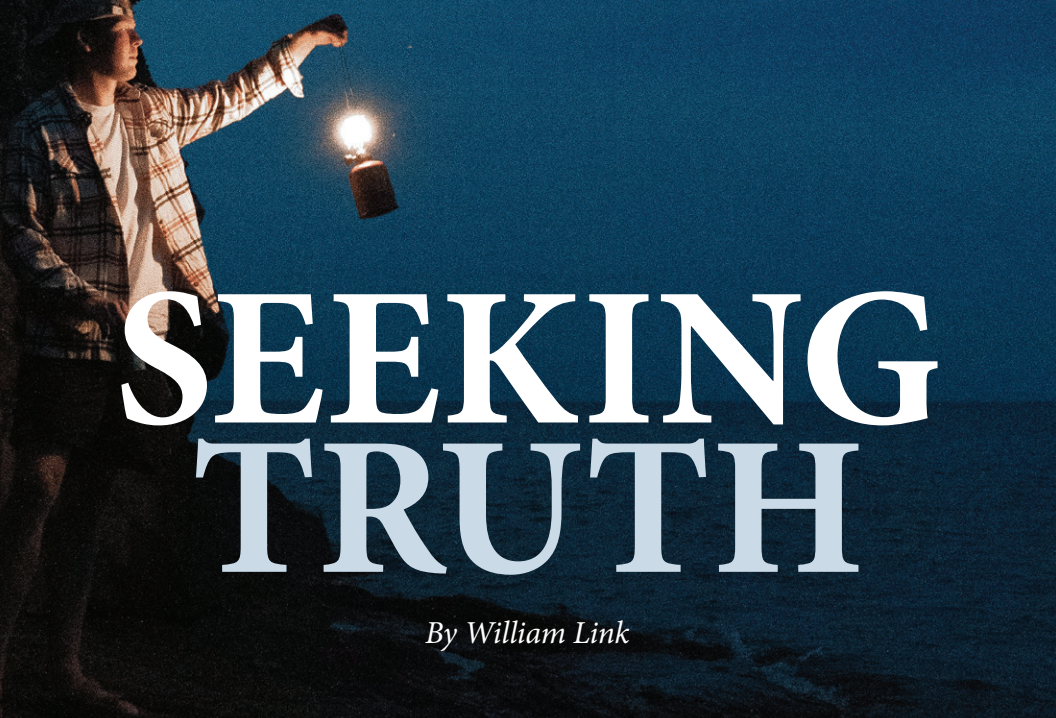
TITLE With apologies to Percy Bysshe Shelly. To a Skylark, 1820.

² "A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that isn't literally true but helps explain an idea or make a comparison." <https://www.grammarly.com/blog/metaphor/>

³ All references are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

⁴ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel*, 14th edition, The Christadelphian Office, 1973, pp 198-9.

⁵ See Harry Whitaker, *Exploring the Bible*, The Christadelphian Office, 1965, p22.



SEEKING TRUTH

By William Link

A long time back, I remember a young brother telling me that as Christadelphians, we are not “Seekers of Truth,” but “Preservers of Truth.” It sounded like something he’d gotten second-hand, one of those comfortable sorts of maxims that gets taken on board without too much thought. There was something jarring about it, and the memory of the conversation has stuck with me.

On one hand, I know what he meant. We are blessed to have a clear view of the Bible’s message, unencumbered by the traditions of men. We’ve met brothers and sisters who learned the Truth and expressed such relief to know that there is no fallen angel devil insidiously tempting us to do evil. We’ve met brothers and sisters who were so grateful to no longer have to reconcile the notion of eternal torments with that of a merciful God. All of us are grateful to know that the

“distress of nations, with perplexity” will end (Luke 21:25); that the evils of sin in all its manifestations will come to an end; that oppression, pollution, war and godlessness will end when *“the earth [is] filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”* (Hab 2:14). These are truths to be treasured, kept and shared. We are and must be preservers of such truth.

On the other hand, there was something about that saying that didn’t sit quite right with me. Perhaps a bit of smugness, the sort that can lead to laziness. More importantly, there seemed to be something rather limiting to the expression. There’s a difference between “little-t” truths (1+1=2, Wellington is the capital of New Zealand) and the “big-T” Truth: *“You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:32). We wouldn’t claim to know all of the “little-t” truth (American readers: Is

Wellington really the capital of New Zealand?), so might it not be a bit presumptuous to assert that we've got the "big-T" Truth all tidily tucked away?

A bit more about "seeking truth." In Jeremiah 5, God challenges the prophet and his audience to "*run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem*" looking for even one person "*who does justice and seeks truth.*"

(v. 1 ESV). Abraham had asked God if Sodom could be spared if 50 righteous could be found; then, if 45, 40, 30, 20, or even 10. Righteous Lot was there, but the city was not spared. In Jeremiah's time, the search wasn't for 10, but for a single person, and the indication was that none could be found. What would it mean for them to "*seek truth*"? God said, "*though they say, 'The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.'*" (v. 2). Seeking truth was more than mouthing the right words. Jeremiah says, "*O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth?*" (v. 3). As with Jesus' saying, so with Jeremiah's: there's more to truth than factual correctness.

SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue of the *Tidings* magazine focuses on our attitude toward truth and on the way we deal with sensitive topics. Without mentioning specifics, the topics we are thinking of are matters not covered by our Statement of Faith, or by our "Doctrines to be Rejected."¹ They may, nevertheless, be very important:

**A mind trained
in godly thinking
is a natural
consequence of
Moses' ordinance.
Our service to
God is a reasoned
service based on
a transformed
mind**

our views on them may influence our outreach, and they may affect the quality of our worship. They may be matters where society's standards and practices have changed over time, perhaps moving away from godly standards. Or they may be challenges to cultural and traditional practices with which we are comfortable, but which really don't matter in the eyes of God. How we deal with these things is significant because we want to see things from God's perspective so that we may honor Him. We also must be aware of their bearing on our relations with our brothers and sisters. These two reasons comprise "*the first and great commandment*" and the "*second [which] is like it.*" (Matt 22:38-39).

The first and greatest commandment, said Jesus, is to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" (Matt 22:37-38; Mark 12:29-30). Note that Jesus adds "*mind*" to "*heart, soul, and strength*" in Deuteronomy 6:5. A mind trained in godly thinking is a natural consequence of Moses' ordinance. Our service to God is a **reasoned** service based on a transformed mind (Rom 12:1-2).²

The way we think is an important manifestation of our love of The Lord God and our desire to obtain His favor. Wisdom cries out to us in Proverbs, concluding with this appeal:

Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the LORD; But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death. (Prov 8:34-36).

Seeking wisdom and understanding can mean asking uncomfortable questions, risking disagreement. Disagreement can lead to disunity. Biblical calls for unity among believers are so numerous that we must surely take them seriously, or risk hearing the Master say, “*Have ye not read?*” Yet there is something in our nature—in our flesh, that is—which makes us willing to neglect unity over quibbles. Paul addressed this explicitly in his Pastoral Epistles, warning us to “*avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*” (2 Tim 2:23, see context 2:14-26; also 1 Tim 6:3-5, Titus 3:8-11). How we deal with disagreement is crucial for the social well-being of our community, its unity, and reflects on the second great commandment, that we love one another as we love ourselves.

Our motivation in presenting this special edition of the *Tidings* magazine is to encourage earnest and careful watching for Wisdom, seeking Truth in the sense of Jesus’ and Jeremiah’s words. It is crucial that we seek Truth, and that we do so in the right spirit, carefully discerning things that matter more from things that matter less.

STUMBLING BLOCKS

Paradoxically, one of the challenges we face in discussing sensitive topics has to do with our love of the truth. As a

community, we value understanding. We are deeply grateful to understand God’s purpose with the earth, to understand the sacrifice of Christ. The Truth is beautiful, and we are grateful. We admire the Apostle Paul, who described himself as imprisoned “*for the defense of the gospel.*” (Phil 1:16-17). We want to “defend the Truth,” and that spirit can somehow, sometimes, make us unwilling to admit uncertainty or to challenge our thinking.

This is no new phenomenon. In 1898 Robert Roberts wrote:

“There are general principles as to which there can be no compromise: but there are also unrevealed applications of these principles in detail which cannot be determined with certainty, and which every man must be allowed to judge for himself without any challenge of his right to fellowship. To insist on uniformity of opinion on those uncertain details is an excess of zeal which may be forgiven, but which meanwhile inflicts harm and distress without just cause.”³

Our goal in these articles is to promote understanding, to promote good and critical thinking—even on difficult or sensitive topics—unencumbered thinking, guided solely by the Word of God and its principles.


Already in this article, I have used the phrase “the Truth” in a way that is almost a Christadelphian colloquialism. Surely it is a lovely thing to describe our brothers and sisters as “in the Truth,” if by this we mean that they are in Christ, in the Way of Life. But there is some

drift in the meaning of “in the Truth” in our usage—it becomes a shorthand for being a Christadelphian in good standing.⁴

The truth embodied in our Statement of Faith is precious and not to be compromised. But the Truth that is in Christ is more profound. We may have a thorough knowledge of basic Christadelphian teachings but still ought to have the humility to see ourselves as seekers of Truth.

Consider the humility of spirit evidenced by the Apostle Paul in his quest to know Jesus:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already

A photograph of three men sitting around a wooden table in a room with a brick wall. The man on the left is wearing a blue shirt and looking towards the other two. The man in the center is seen from the back, wearing a dark shirt. The man on the right is wearing a maroon shirt and is gesturing with his right hand while speaking. There are some items on the table, including what looks like a glass and some papers.

We might regard expressions of uncertainty as weakness. The result might be to seize on wrong explanations, perhaps because they’ve been offered confidently by someone respected. ...indeed, if we cannot accept uncertainty, we cannot learn.

attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:8-14).

We need to ask ourselves if we are seekers of truth, and we need to keep on asking.

These were not the words of a new convert, doubting his understanding of facts. When he wrote Philippians, Paul was ready and willing to face death for his faith (Phil 1:20-23). He was not expressing uncertainty about whether he would be in the resurrection, but about whether he has been conformed to the “likeness of his resurrection.” (Rom 6:5ff). His life was dedicated to seeking the knowledge of Christ, “that I may know Him.” Our hope in presenting this new feature is that we will stir up such eager desire to grow in Christ.

OVERCOMING DANGERS AND CHALLENGES

We need to ask ourselves if we are seekers of truth, and we need to keep on asking. There are dangers to be faced and challenges to overcome.

Fear or embarrassment over uncertainty. We might regard expressions of uncertainty as weakness. The result might be to seize on wrong explanations, perhaps because they’ve

been offered confidently by someone respected. Uncertainty is okay as long as it’s not an excuse for a lazy mind; indeed, if we cannot accept uncertainty, we cannot learn. At the end of an essay on distinguishing “the certain, the probable, and the possible” in expositions of prophecy, Brother A. D. Norris wrote this:

“In any case, if anyone is disposed to be superior about the weakness of saying, ‘I do not yet know,’ it is well to look back on the records of those who thought they did know, and to a greater or lesser degree have been proved to be wrong. Jesus did not return in the mid-1800s as the Millerites thought he would; he did not return in 1914, as the Russellites thought he would. He has not returned in any of the times when our own associates, and perhaps we ourselves (?) thought he would. Current events have not conformed precisely with the detailed predictions of any interpreter we know. This is not a reason for refusing to try to find the solution of the problem ourselves: it is very good reason for not being over-confident that we are right, and for asking for kindly treatment when we are wrong!”⁵

Potted thinking. The first danger to be confronted is complacency. The phrase “potted thinking” seems to have been coined by a British philosopher, L. Susan Stebbing (1885-1943), in her

1939 book on purposeful thinking (“potted” is an old fashioned and primarily British description for what we would call “canned,” like canned soup or sardines):

“Few true statements about a complicated state of affairs can be expressed in a single sentence. Our need to have definite beliefs to hold on to is great; the difficulty in mastering the evidence upon which such beliefs ought to be based is burdensome; consequently, we easily fall into the habit of accepting compressed statements which save us from the trouble of thinking. Thus arises what I shall call ‘Potted Thinking.’ This metaphor seems to me to be appropriate, because potted thinking is easily accepted, is concentrated in form, and has lost the vitamins essential to mental nourishment.”⁶

Pontius Pilate syndrome. Jesus said, *“For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”* (John 18:37 NKJV). Pontius Pilate replied with the facile and lazy

response *“What is truth?”* (v. 38). We may have heard friends and associates make similar statements, excusing themselves from inquiry, because “truth is beyond us, so why bother trying.” We experience societal pressure to be broad-minded, to the point where we may be reluctant to seek convictions.

Certainty creep. Ideas put forward as possibilities sometimes morph into probabilities, then later into certainties, simply because they’ve aged and been oft repeated. We need to fact-check that “note in my Bible’s margin” occasionally.

These are but a few of the obstacles we face to clear thinking and being seekers after Truth. Can the reader supply more? We hope that this special issue will stir us up to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

William Link (Baltimore, MD)

¹ This is not to suggest that the documents defining our community need to be further expanded.

² The Greek word used for our “reasonable” service (Rom 12:1) occurs in only one other New Testament passage. This is in 1 Peter 2:2 where we are exhorted to desire the “sincere” (reasonable) milk of the Word. The word of God nourishes our minds, and our actions reflect a changed mind.

³ “True Principles and Uncertain Details or The Danger of Going Too Far in Our Demands on Fellow-Believers.” *The Christadelphian*, May 1898.

⁴ It should give us pause to reflect that Jehovah’s Witnesses use the phrase “in the Truth” in precisely this manner.

⁵ A.D. Norris (1981). *Apocalypse for Everyman*. Chapter 6, excursus 6.

⁶ L.S. Stebbing (1939). *Thinking to Some Purpose*. Chapter 6. Penguin Books, NY.



DISCUSSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

By Joe Hill

CONTROVERSIAL subjects are proliferating among us. It is becoming ever more common for certain brothers and sisters to escalate these speculative issues into tests of fellowship. These topics are not in our Statement of Faith, and for most of them, we have traditionally allowed flexibility of thought without fear of withdrawal. In contrast, today these issues are sometimes made the basis of withdrawal of fellowship from individual members, or from whole ecclesias, or even from large segments of the community.

This article identifies nine behaviors we must maintain as we discuss controversial subjects:

1. Be Christ-like in all our interactions
2. Stay calm
3. Assume good motives
4. Be quick to listen, slow to speak
5. Be prepared to give an answer
6. Be trustworthy
7. Avoid gaslighting and gaslighters (see definition below)
8. Build up our brothers and sisters
9. Agree to disagree on non-essentials

1. BE CHRIST-LIKE IN ALL OUR INTERACTIONS

All considerations of how we should behave must start with the golden rule, to treat each other as we want to be treated; and the new commandment,

to love one another as Christ loved us; and the fruit of the spirit, to be peaceful, kind, gentle, and faithful; and the new clothing we have in Christ, to be compassionate, humble, and patient, forgiving and forbearing one another:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. (Matt 7:12).¹

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-35).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Gal 5:22-26).

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col 3:12-14).

2. STAY CALM

Staying calm in the heat of the battle is perhaps the most difficult challenge, but it is essential:

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger... A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel. (Prov 15:1, 18).

The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered. (Prov 17:27).

Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end. (Prov 29:11).

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. (Eph 4:26).

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be... slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. (Jas 1:19-20).

3. ASSUME GOOD MOTIVES

Bro. Bill Link recently published an exhortation in the *Tidings* on dealing with conflict within our spiritual family.² His words are based on the exhortation to Sisters Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4:1-8, which he recaps:

"If we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, let us remember our brothers and sisters for good, focusing on their strengths and virtues. So then, the next time we find ourselves feeling some discord with a brother or sister, let's try to think of Paul's seven-step solution. 1) Get help; 2) 'Rejoice in the Lord'; 3) 'Be gentle'; 4) Remember 'the Lord is at hand'; 5) Don't worry; 6) Pray, with supplication and thanksgiving;

and 7) Think on praiseworthy things. It's hard to be in conflict with someone we admire." (p. 280).

Step 7 summarizes Paul's words:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Phil 4:8).

As Bro. Harry Whittaker pointed out in *Exploring the Bible*, the Greek word translated "think" is translated "impute" and "reckon" in Romans 4. In other words, Paul is encouraging us to attribute things that are noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy to brothers and sisters we are at odds with. This is easy to say, but hard to do.

4. BE QUICK TO LISTEN, SLOW TO SPEAK

One common theme of all advice about how to have fruitful discussions is the importance of listening.³ You must listen first before you speak. Ask questions and listen carefully to the answers. Listen to learn and understand, not merely to reply. Reflect on the answers and give them full consideration before responding. And this goes for both parties. Effective dialog requires two-way communication with both sides listening to the other. Understanding the other person's point of view is critical for any response you might offer

to have any relevance to the discussion. James and Proverbs emphasize this point:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (James 1:19).

Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues. (Prov 10:19).

The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil. (Prov 15:28).

Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions. (Prov 18:2).

To answer before listening—that is folly and shame. (Prov 18:13). *Answering before listening is both stupid and rude.* (Prov 18:13 MSG).

Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them. (Prov 29:20).

5. BE PREPARED TO GIVE AN ANSWER

Once you've heard the other person so that you understand their position and could defend it with the best defense possible, then you can start to prepare your answers to their questions. Give this effort your full due diligence. You are to educate the other person on your perspective. You need to be prepared to make the case for your viewpoint. You can't assume they know it already. They need you to help them understand it.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Pet 3:15).

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Col 4:5-6).

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim 2:24-26).

In addition, we must routinely challenge our own viewpoint. We must maintain our intellectual integrity, searching out and acknowledging the weaknesses in our own case. It is easy for us to become isolated in an information bubble that we think represents the whole Christadelphian world. We can unwittingly suffer from constant confirmation bias, never

hearing any other opinions, so having no doubts about our own views. This can lead us to a false assumption that everyone agrees with us and that if anyone disagrees then they shouldn't be in fellowship. Enlarging our circle of connections and making sure it has a wide range of diverse views can mitigate such a situation.

6. BE TRUSTWORTHY

I often hear that brothers and sisters need to trust each other more, that this is the main reason there are divisions between us. No doubt lack of trust is a major issue, but it is likely the consequence of a bigger issue, the lack of trustworthiness. We need to be faithful to each other. We need to keep our word and avoid saying one thing and doing another. We need to be honest and reliable.

British philosopher Onora O'Neill (1941-) gave an excellent TED talk on our misunderstanding of trust.⁴ She identifies three commonly held views about trust:

1. A claim: there has been a great decline in trust.
2. An aim: we should have more trust.
3. A task: we should rebuild trust.



It is easy for us to become isolated in an information bubble that we think represents the whole Christadelphian world. We can unwittingly suffer from constant confirmation bias, never hearing any other opinions, so having no doubts about our own views.

Then she debunks these three clichés, emphasizing that trust should be a judgment based on trustworthiness. We should trust those who are trustworthy but not those who are not. Being trustworthy involves being competent, honest, and reliable. Trust is a response based on a judgment of the other person's trustworthiness. We can't rebuild trust, because it is a response over which we have no direct control. Instead, we should work to rebuild our trustworthiness (1) by being trustworthy and (2) by providing evidence that we are trustworthy. Making ourselves vulnerable to others is a key to communicating our trustworthiness.

O'Neill's general comments are particularly germane to our interactions with one another in our community of faith. If we want to be trusted, we must be trustworthy in our behaviors. Scripturally, by default we ought to trust our brothers and sisters, but such trust can be eroded if either side demonstrates a lack of trustworthiness. Failing to be trustworthy can undermine the basis of trust and cause deterioration of the relationship. So, we all need to work on becoming more trustworthy and on providing sufficient evidence of our trustworthiness so that others can trust us. Increased trustworthiness prompting increased

trust will certainly improve our ability to have fruitful dialogs on controversial topics.

One concrete example are the frequent misrepresentations of Bro. Harry Whittaker's views of prophecy. Various brothers routinely report that he was a "preterist", meaning that he thought that Revelation was entirely fulfilled in AD 70. The fact is he argued for three fulfillments, with AD 70 being the first, the standard continuous historic view being the second, and a future fulfillment in the last days leading up to the second coming of Christ being the third.⁵ Anyone who has read his book would know this, so either these brothers are not competent (because they haven't made the effort to know what they need to know to talk intelligently about Bro. Whittaker's views), or they are not honest (because they do know and are intentionally misrepresenting the facts). In either case, these brothers are not reliable sources of information on this topic.

7. AVOID GASLIGHTING AND GASLIGHTERS

Dr. Alison Cook has written several excellent blog articles on spiritual gaslighting,⁶ which she defines as follows:

"Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse in which

your reality or experience is systematically and intentionally invalidated. It is when a person or group questions your experience or your perception or reality in order to keep their power...

Their goal is not to help; it's to make you feel crazy, weak, or dependent... Spiritual gaslighting is when a person or faith community uses spiritual tools, such as God-language or the Bible, to cause you to question your own reality in order to retain power over you. This is spiritual abuse."

She gives several real-life examples of spiritual gaslighting. Here's one to make the idea more concrete: "You confide in the members of your small group that you are struggling with feeling lonely. The response you hear in return is: 'You aren't really lonely. You're simply not trusting God enough.'" See how the person's experience is invalidated as if they have a spiritual problem.

We must avoid gaslighting others, even unintentionally. For example, we must not distort our brothers and sisters whose views we disagree with by asserting they are being driven by humanism or feminism when in reality they are sincerely trying to determine and follow the teachings of Scripture. As another example, we must not spread inaccurate rumors about the things said at reunion meetings.

We must not distort
our brothers and
sisters whose views
we disagree with by
asserting they are being
driven by humanism
or feminism when in
reality they are sincerely
trying to determine and
follow the teachings of
Scripture.

Such behavior would be particularly egregious if you were intentionally misrepresenting the views of those whose opinions you oppose, even if you think you are justified in doing

so: "I know what you meant even though you said the opposite." Such misinformation often causes those who don't know better to misunderstand the actual situation. It can also cause those who are being misrepresented to question whether they actually said what they know they said.

Dr. Cook argues that the Bible's word for those who gaslight others is "fool". Here are some of the verses she quotes of the many warnings against foolishness (all

from *The Message*):

Liars secretly hoard hatred; fools openly spread slander. (Prov 10:18).

The wise watch their steps and avoid evil; fools are headstrong and reckless. (Prov 14:16).

Fools care nothing for thoughtful discourse; all they do is run off at the mouth. (Prov 18:2).

The words of a fool start fights. (Prov 18:6).

Fools are undone by their mouths; their souls are crushed by their words. (Prov 18:7).

A fool lets it all hang out; a sage quietly mulls it over. (Prov 29:11).

She quotes Proverbs' advice on how

to respond to gaslighters (from *The Message*):

Escape quickly from the company of fools; they're a waste of your time, a waste of your words. (Prov 14:7).

Don't bother talking sense to fools; they'll only poke fun at your words. (Prov 23:9).

Don't respond to the stupidity of a fool; you'll only look foolish yourself. Answer a fool in simple terms so he doesn't get a swelled head. (Prov 26:4-5).

She summarizes how we should handle gaslighting fools:

- Limit your words and interactions.
- Let the foolish person suffer his/her own consequences.
- Stay anchored in your own integrity.
- Surround yourself with wise people.
- Trust in God's justice.

8. BUILD UP YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The first century ecclesias faced a major controversy over the keeping of the Jewish dietary laws. Paul's comments on this issue provide relevant exhortations for how we should deal with the controversies we face today; in particular, we must not cause our brothers or sisters to fall, instead we must build them up in love;

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or

to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall. (Rom 14:19-21).

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that 'We all possess knowledge.' But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. (1 Cor 8:1).

The same exhortation applies more generally to our dialog with one another:

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work... Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Eph 4:16, 29).

9. AGREE TO DISAGREE ON NON-ESSENTIALS

No matter how important our “hobby horses” or personal preoccupations are to us, most of them are not essential to salvation and should not be made tests of fellowship. This includes most of the controversial topics we face today, including:

- Reconciling the Bible and science, with topics like the age of the earth, the detailed mechanisms of creation, the scope of the flood, etc.
- Different approaches to the interpretation of Bible prophecy.
- How to harmonize Bible history with archeology.
- Ecclesial differences on handling divorce and remarriage cases.
- Gender roles in ecclesial worship services.

No matter how important our “hobby horses” or personal preoccupations are to us, most of them are not essential to salvation and should not be made tests of fellowship.

- Different opinions on intricate nuances concerning the doctrine of atonement.
- Fellowship practice and ecclesial autonomy.
- God’s spirit in the lives of believers today.

Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1b-3).

In such things, we must not insist that others accept our opinion, no matter how strongly we hold it. We must strive to discuss these controversial subjects in a Christ-like manner.

Joe Hill
(Austin Leander, TX)

1 Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV, 2011).

2 William Link, Jr., “Dealing with a Difficult Brother or Sister—Paul’s Seven Step Solution,” *The Christadelphian Tidings*, June 2021, 278-280.

3 See, for example, Celeste Headlee, “10 ways to have a better conversation,” TEDxCreativeCoast, May, 2015 (https://www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation); and Megan Phelps-Roper, “I grew up in the Westboro Baptist Church. Here’s why I left”, TEDNYC, February, 2017 (https://www.ted.com/talks/megan_phelps_roper_i_grew_up_in_the_westboro_baptist_church_here_s_why_i_left). Megan).

4 Onora O’Neill, “What we don’t understand about trust”, TEDxHousesOfParliament, June 2013 (https://www.ted.com/talks/onora_o_neill_what_we_dont_understand_about_trust).

5 Harry Whittaker, *Revelation: A Biblical Approach*, Ch. 11, “It is now time to consider the Seals in detail. It is important always to have in mind the triple fulfilment of this part of Revelation, which has been argued for in the two preceding chapters:

- a. A.D. 70. The Fall of Jerusalem.
- b. The ‘continuous-historic’ application (‘Eureka’).
- c. The Last Days and the Coming of the Lord.

“In what follows the second of these will be omitted. It has already been excellently done elsewhere. (For those without the time to give detailed consideration to the three large volumes of *Eureka*, *Notes on the Apocalypse* by C.C.W. will be found most valuable. It is an admirable digest of the bigger work.)”

6 Alison Cook: “Should I Turn the Other Cheek?” (<https://www.alisoncookphd.com/should-you-turn-the-other-cheek/>); “Gaslighting and the Importance of a Good B.S. Detector” (<https://www.alisoncookphd.com/gaslighting-and-the-importance-of-a-good-b-s-detector/>); “Gaslighting and the Bible: How to Respond When Someone is Manipulating You” (<https://www.alisoncookphd.com/gaslighting-in-the-bible/>). The concept of “gaslighting” has skyrocketed in our current culture. The term comes from the play that was made into the 1944 movie “Gaslight” starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman.



GODLY SOLUTIONS TO WORLDLY ISSUES

IMAGINE you're a ruler engaging in diplomatic relations with a nearby ruler. You're each standing on opposite ends of a drawbridge, with you in the gates of your castle and them standing where the bridge meets the ground. Now let's say they said something that you interpreted as them threatening you. As a ruler in the gates of your castle, what would you do? If I had to guess, the first thing you'd do is raise the drawbridge right away to prevent them from getting any closer. After that, you'd likely retreat into the inner walls of the castle and muster your troops to defend the castle at all costs. Your swordsmen would line up in formation

at the gates and your archers would take position along the wall and in the tower. While you've protected yourself from potential harm, it cost you both the opportunity to pursue peace. It might seem like a fanciful scenario, but it's rooted in common problems that happen today. This is what people do subconsciously to protect themselves from ideas that directly challenge how they perceive themselves and the world around them. Solomon made this very observation.

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle.
(Prov 18:19)

I want to be upfront with you about why I had you imagine that scenario. I messed up. I messed up in a way that makes me feel especially foolish. I got into a heated debate on a divisive subject over social media. I thought I had objective truth on my side. I thought that by presenting enough supporting evidence I could convince them to walk back their inflammatory remarks. What I failed to remember was that attacking views tied to a person's identity can trigger the "fight-or-flight" instinct. In normal conversation a person is generally open to dialogue and can process new ideas, even if they disagree with them. When ideas that directly challenge identity trigger this response, information bypasses the rational brain and is instead rerouted to the instinctive portions of the brain that ensure self-preservation.

As I reflected on this proverb after the argument I got into, I found rebuke for my behavior in verse 2 of that same chapter in Proverbs, which says:

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

I thought I was sharing wisdom. I thought I was defending the Gospel message. In reality, I was a fool that only cared about my thoughts being heard. I failed to consider this person was also a member of God's family that also derived their core values from

**Because we've been
born into a world
where people value
certain things and
behave certain ways,
we tend to believe
that whatever is
important and
divisive now will
always be that way.**

the Bible. All I saw in the heat of the moment was the outcome of their words--my personal frustration and pain. I had no interest in learning about the intent of their words, and so I treated them as a false teacher to be reprimanded instead of a disciple that could be appealed to. Judgment won over mercy in my heart that day.

But thanks be to God that His mercies are new every morning--even when mercy hasn't yet conquered my heart and mind. I can't undo my past mistakes. And I certainly can't control when others will frustrate me in the future. But I can control how I react when that happens, which means I needed to know: What does the Bible say about how Jesus's disciples are to handle controversy? Paul had some wisdom to offer a young man named Timothy.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. (2 Tim 2:15-18).

Does that sound familiar to you? It's pretty much a normal day on Facebook now, right?

The phrase "*irreverent babble*" comes from a single Greek word meaning "*empty discussion*." That phrase can

help us focus on our true priorities as disciples. Because we've been born into a world where people value certain things and behave certain ways, we tend to believe that whatever is important and divisive now will always be that way. But that just isn't the case. As Paul wrote,

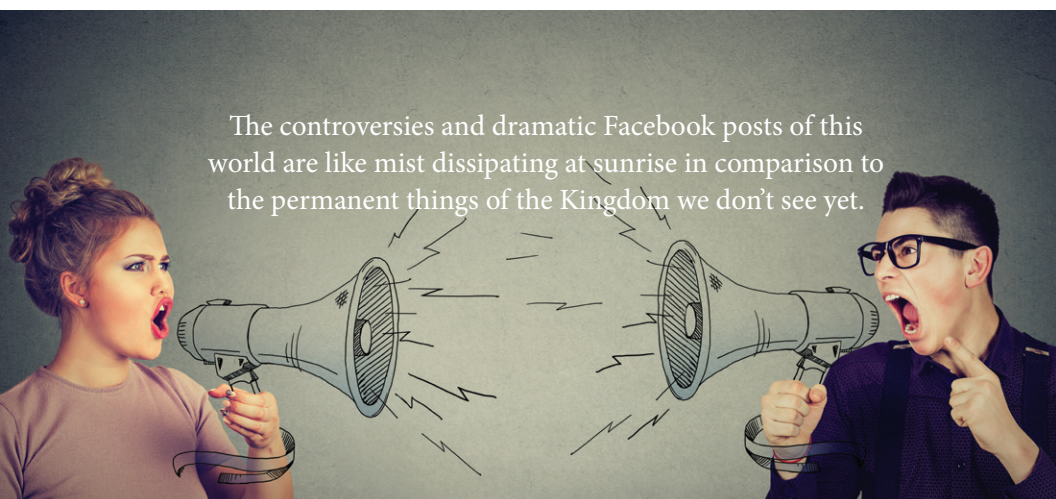
For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:17-18).

The controversies and dramatic Facebook posts of this world are like mist dissipating at sunrise in comparison to the permanent things of the Kingdom we don't see yet. But this doesn't mean we become apathetic to today's challenges, especially if they impact how we serve God and care for our brothers and sisters in Christ. It's crucial to recognize that if we want to be citizens of God's Kingdom when it's

established, we need to allow God to rule our hearts and minds today. But how do we allow that mentality to reign in us today? Paul further encouraged Timothy.

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:22-26).

It's easy to hear or read someone say something ignorant and/or hateful and go into attack mode against that argument. But that will nearly always lead to the same predictable



The controversies and dramatic Facebook posts of this world are like mist dissipating at sunrise in comparison to the permanent things of the Kingdom we don't see yet.

scenario: the person you're attacking will raise their drawbridge, defend their position more passionately, and the conversation will devolve into a polarizing popularity contest with no chance at changing anyone's hearts and minds. That causes issues to act like gangrene which consumes the body until it's destroyed.

So, what's the Biblical solution? The Biblical solution is not to attack the idea, but to gently and patiently appeal to the person. Flawed ideas can't be saved, but flawed people--flawed people, that's all there are—they can be saved all the time. If we want to avoid that tired scenario that seems to show up on social media, we need to stop challenging people in a way that triggers that "fight-or-flight" instinct. Don't try to prove your point right or their point wrong. Seek to prove God right with a good example. You can start with one simple step: slow down when you read something controversial. James 1:19-20 tells us: *"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to*

anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." Get your hands off your device and place them together in prayer. I promise that post will still be there afterwards. Once you submit to God's will, you will be open to learning what God has to teach you in that moment. And if you're open to learning you'll ask questions in an effort to understand, instead of firing off accusations that lead to nowhere but a closed drawbridge and a closed heart.

Please—learn from my mistakes. Choose compassion. Not because it's easy—because it's REALLY hard. But choose compassion because what you show others is what you'll receive when the Lord returns. As James wrote, For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas 2:13).

Choose mercy.

Sam Taylor,
(Paris Avenue, OH)

Originally a blog post in July 12, 2020 from "Pause to Consider"
and also published by the WCF



SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING CONTROVERSY

By Islip Collyer

IT seems clear that man is by nature a fighting animal. Wars recur between nations as soon as the people have recovered sufficient strength, and have had time partly to forget the horrors of the last struggle. The men who succeed in business are the men who love the fight of it. Politicians turn their disagreements into fights with as much unfairness and injustice as in actual warfare. Even games are all struggles, and most men cannot understand the pure pleasures of artistic achievement without any contest as to who wins.

This being the natural tendency of the flesh it is not surprising that the same fighting spirit is found in connection with religion. It need occasion no

surprise if men who do not fight either with guns or fists, and who take no part in the struggles of politicians, are apt to be especially violent. It is certainly true that religious disputes have often resulted in a bitterness and uncharitableness more sinful than the errors which caused the strife to begin.

It is important therefore for us to remember the principles laid down in scripture for our guidance in these matters. If brethren could saturate their minds with the perfectly clear principles stated and reiterated in the Word, it might put an end to nearly all the destructive disputing, merely by the removal of all unnecessary provocation.

The first point to emphasize is the fact that strife and debate are treated as essentially evil things. Thus in writing to the Corinthians the apostle took the fact that there was envying, strife and division in the Church, as clear evidence that the members were still carnal minded:

For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying and strife and division are ye not carnal and walk as men? (1 Cor 3:3).

In writing to the Galatians the same apostle includes strife in a list of evil things summarizing the works of the flesh:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like, of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21).

Truly the word “*strife*” appears here in a terrible list of evils with a terrible penalty threatened. We do well to make a very critical examination of our own conduct to make sure that any variance, wrath and strife existing in the ecclesias now, shall not be aggravated by any wrong action or wrong words of ours.

In writing to Timothy, the Apostle Paul again denounces strife. He refers to the evils which come from strife of words and perverse disputings (1 Tim 6:3-5). Then in the second letter he gives this positive instruction:

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid knowing that they do gender strifes; and the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves. (2 Tim 2:23-25).

If anyone should raise the question how we can avoid strife in view of the wrong attitude taken by others, we surely have the answer in this positive instruction. If we are convinced that those who oppose us are doing wrong and that in faithfulness to the Truth we must contend with them, we have ready to hand a splendid test of our discipleship. We have an opportunity to be gentle, patient and meek in instructing those who oppose themselves. If these qualities could be cultivated all round it might soon be found that there was no need for any further argument. Wrongdoing would accept the necessary reproof and wrong thinking would be corrected. The apostolic method would remove all the fuel that feeds the destructive fire. The railing, striving and impatient disputing, the personal hits and retorts of the carnal mind, continuously add fuel to the fires of wrath until even some who try to obey the teaching of the Word may perish in the flames.

The Apostle Paul gave us example as well as precept. After the position of the Gentiles had been determined there was still much prejudice among the Jews, causing difficulty for disciples who feared the criticism of men. The apostle Peter was at fault in withdrawing himself from some of the Gentile believers apparently as a concession to the prejudices of certain

Jews who had recently come to him. The Apostle Paul “withstood him to the face.” Fortunately we are told what he said:

If thou being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal 2:14)

Here was the essence of the argument forcibly but gently expressed. It truly showed an aptitude for teaching and meekly instructing, and it had the right effect.

It would have been possible to have brought a formidable indictment against the apostle Peter if one had cared to use carnal methods. He might have been reminded that he at one time had spoken against the idea of Christ dying at all, and had called forth a rebuke from the Master. At a later period he used the sword and had to be reprov'd again. Later still he forsook the Lord and denied him even with an oath. If in addition to the undoubted facts of Peter's weakness all derogatory reports regarding him and his associations had been collected, it might have seemed to the fleshly mind a crushing blow to the influence of Peter and all his connections.

We simply cannot imagine the Apostle Paul using such methods. He was ever ready to remember his own dark past but not that of others. When it was necessary to reprove the brethren he did so with gentleness and patience. Though he had authority such as none of us possess, he “besought them by the mercies of God.” (Rom 12:1). He “besought them” to follow him (1 Cor. 4:16). He besought them by the

meekness and gentleness of Christ (2 Cor 10:1). He said: “*I will very gladly spend and be spent for you though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved.*” (2 Cor 12:15).

This was in writing to an ecclesia which was very faulty, and against which a very formidable accusation might have been made.

The whole tenor of the apostle's teaching is as outlined in the fifth and sixth chapters of the letter to the Galatians. We must overcome the flesh and all its works; we must bring forth the fruits of the spirit; but we must at the same time remember that we are all sinners who can only be saved through grace. Those who are spiritually-minded must thus be ready to restore offenders, “*in the spirit of meekness considering themselves lest they also be tempted. Bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ.*” (Gal 6:1-2).

There is further instruction regarding necessary controversy in the writing of the Apostle Peter:

Finally be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing. (1 Pet 3:8-9).

Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. (v. 15).

All of you be subject one to another and be clothed with humility. (5:5).

Such instructions require emphasis in time of controversy for then it is that we

are in the greatest danger of forgetting them. We may be stung by an unfair criticism and we think of a crushing reply. The flesh would call it a righteous reproof, but Scripture calls it rendering railing for railing.

We are perhaps in a position to quote from a past utterance of an opponent, a cutting criticism of one of his present supporters. The quotation would not help or guide anyone a fraction of a degree in the right direction; but it might tend to cause division among those who do not agree with us. The flesh would call such a quotation skillful tactics; Scripture calls it sowing discord among brethren.

It is easy for men to deceive themselves into thinking that unrighteous and unjust extremes are simply the evidence of their zeal for truth. Even a readiness to listen to the accused is regarded as weakness. Such extremists cry shame on the very effort to be fair, and in their determination to have no compromise with error they sometimes exaggerate faults, and so grossly misrepresent the objects of their attack that they become guilty of offences worse than all the error against which they are trying to fight.

We must not fall into the mistake of taking an extreme view even of the extremist. God has been merciful to such men in the past and we must be merciful now even in our thoughts. We may state most emphatically, however, that it is wrong to exaggerate the faults of anyone or to find ugly and

misleading names with which to label those who do not quite see eye to eye with us. It is quite possible to be valiant for the Truth and zealous for the Lord without being unfair even to those who are mistaken, and it is always wrong to be unfair. In faithfulness we must point out the danger that in great zeal for the jots and titles of the law men may lose sight of the foundation principles. All their faith and works may become valueless through lack of charity.

We must not fall into the mistake of taking an extreme view even of the extremist. God has been merciful to such men in the past and we must be merciful now even in our thoughts.

The need for a clear perception of the scriptural principles governing controversy is shown by the tendency toward unrighteous exaggeration even on the part of those from whom better things would be expected. A few days ago a copy of a new magazine was sent to us. It bears the name of one who has usually shown a sense of responsibility in the use of words. Yet

it contains exaggerations which tend to foster strife, without the slightest suggestion as to the restoration of offenders. It states: "The belittling of the commandments of Christ by those from whom we have separated has become an open sin."

This is a very definite and severe judgment, which presumably includes the present writer in its sweeping condemnation. What does it mean? Is there any effort or desire to restore us "in the spirit of meekness," or are we too evil for that? If we "belittle the commandments of Christ" to the point of "open sin," what hope can we have of

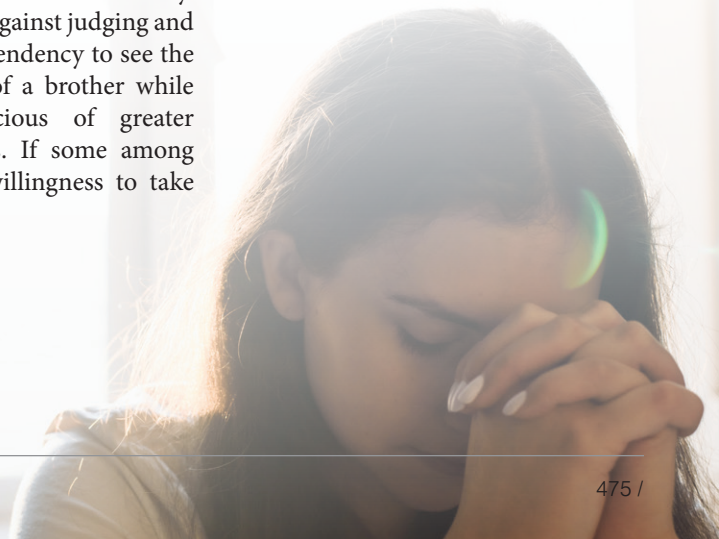
forgiveness unless we can be restored? I have just recently been through the four Gospel records in an attempt to classify all the commandments of the Lord Jesus and apply them to present experience. It is easy to find commands which are very imperfectly observed. The repeated command to love one another even as he has loved us (John 13:34) has been repeatedly broken. The commands not to lay up treasure on earth and not to seek the riches of the Gentiles are so foreign to the spirit of our age that we only grasp them with great difficulty, and so far no one has been found to rend the ecclesias on this issue. It is quite certain that our critic does not mean these matters. He probably refers to the vexed question of a decision as to where to draw the line between reproving, rebuking or withdrawing from an offender. Is there anything in the commands of Christ to suggest that one who takes too lenient a view of his brother's offences is to be condemned and repudiated? I know of no such command. There are plenty of warnings that those who take too severe a view of a brother's offences will themselves be dealt with severely. There are warnings against judging and against the natural tendency to see the defects in the eye of a brother while remaining unconscious of greater defects in ourselves. If some among us err in their unwillingness to take

the most severe of all measures against offenders, if they carry too far the commands to be patient and to restore offenders in the spirit of meekness, it cannot in fairness be described as "belittling the commandments of Christ."

The use of this expression is to be explained in the same way as the many far worse attempts at argument which we should not care to quote. It is a natural emanation from strife and debate.

It is not fair, it is not true; but it has the doubtful merit of being severe, and therefore it is made to serve. It is so easy to be led into the use of such expressions and we must not make any man an offender for a word, but we do well to sound a warning. Be pitiful, be courteous, be gentle, be meek, be honest. Cultivate charity and love and remember that for every idle word that you speak you shall give account in the day of judgment.

Principles and Proverbs,
Islip Collyer, 1966,
The Christadelphian,
Chapter 11, pages 82-89





PASSING JUDGMENT ON DOUBTFUL MATTERS

By George Booker

IN Romans 14:1-12 Paul instructs the believers that they should refrain from judging one another in doubtful (or disputable: NIV) matters. This is a particular temptation for those brothers and sisters whom Paul calls "weak". They believe that everyone should refrain from certain practices which they believe to be displeasing to God, but which other brothers and sisters feel to be legitimate. In the first century, these doubtful matters often involved Jewish traditions and customs. These customs arose from the Law of Moses, and especially focused on dietary and ritual laws which were no longer applicable for Jewish Christians. Nevertheless, all serious Jews felt the extremely powerful force of long-held

national traditions and practices. They may have known in their intellects that such practices were no longer of the first importance, but in their emotions and their subconscious they found it terribly difficult to make the break. The examples specifically given in Romans and 1 Corinthians included:

- Eating foods previously unclean under the Law;
- Eating meats that had been offered to idols; and
- Observing and/or disregarding special days according to the Mosaic calendar.

The lesson for us today is that we should refrain from judging our brethren in similarly doubtful matters, and we

should not treat such doubtful matters as though they had "first principle" implications.

ACCEPTING WEAKNESS

The apostle Paul's advice is:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. (Rom 14:1 NIV).

The Greek for "accept" is *proslambano*. It means to take, receive or accept into one's company. More specifically, it means to take another aside, to hold him close and to confide in him. It is a warm, inviting and comforting word, and conveys a sense of fullness of fellowship and wholeheartedness in sharing. The verb here is in the middle voice, and continuous: "to go on receiving." The RSV is even more gracious: "Welcome him." Here is no grudging, grumbling acceptance, but an open-hearted and open-armed full fellowship. It has a positive meaning: "to welcome into a circle of friends, or coworkers." We, who may feel ourselves to be "strong," must accept him who is weak in his faith, because God has accepted him (Rom 14:3). It is the business of the "strong" to go the extra mile in receiving and helping, not looking down upon, the "weak" (Rom 15:1, 2). And again, Paul exhorts:

Accept (proslambano) one another, then, just as Christ accepted (the

same word) you, in order to bring praise to God. (Rom 15:7).

"Him whose faith is weak" (NIV) is definitely not "him who is weak in *the* faith" (KJV, NET), as though he did not understand the first principles of the faith. Rather, the meaning should be "weak in faith" (ASV, RSV), or "in his faith" (NEB), i.e., in his own personal faith. That is, his faith is not strong enough to enable him to perceive the full liberty he should enjoy in Christ. More specifically here, he is not troubled by questions of doctrine, but by doubt as to whether it is right for him to eat some foods (cf. v. 23).

"Weak," both here and in the next verse, is the Greek *astheneo*, referring to one who is without strength, or even one who is sick or ill (cp. Phil 2:26, 27; 2 Tim 4:20). The brother or sister who is "weak" is sick and perhaps unable to care for himself; he is not wicked. James uses the same word when he writes:

Is any one of you sick (astheneo)? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14).

The one who is "weak" should be able to expect care and comfort, not judgment and contempt (cf. 1Cor 8:11,12). The "weak" (*astheneo*) should, if possible, be "healed" (Matt 10:8; Mark 6:56; Luke 4:40) and cared for (Matt 25:36, 39).

The Greek for "accept" is *proslambano*. It means to take, receive or accept into one's company. More specifically, it means to take another aside, to hold him close and to confide in him. It is a warm, inviting and comforting word, and conveys a sense of fullness of fellowship and wholeheartedness in sharing.

Paul catches the spirit of this perfectly when he writes about his care for all the ecclesias: "*Who is weak (astheneo), and I do not feel weak (astheneo)?*" (2 Cor 11:29).

Without passing judgment on disputable matters. (Rom 14:1).

The NIV word "*disputable*" in this phrase is the Greek *dialogismos*; it suggests dialogs or debates, involving doubts, arguments and disputes.

Neither the ecclesia, nor any member, should attempt to take any "doubtful matter" and elevate it to the status of a "first principle" question.

The ecclesia, and each individual, ought to welcome, warmly and lovingly, those whose faith is weak, without trying to decide between their changing opinions, or about their questionable scruples. They should be welcomed as equals in the family of believers, without condemning or censuring them, even in thought, much less publicly.

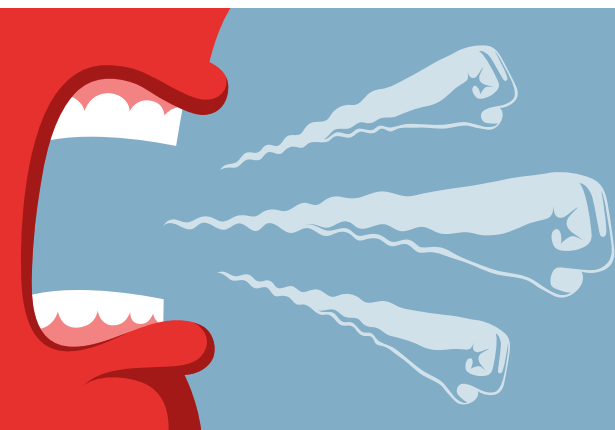
Bro. Harry Whittaker puts this quite well, while writing of the "weak" brother who may be troubled by somewhat peculiar ideas, which are not

particularly founded upon Scripture:

"It is easy to see why Paul so advises. As long as the weak brother with (slightly) off-beat ideas continues in the fellowship of sounder brethren there is some hope that by degrees he will achieve a more balanced point of view. Such things have been known to happen. But the necessary condition must be observed: 'Not to doubtful disputations.' If such a problem individual is to continue to share the blessings of the community, he must be prepared to cease all forms of propagation of the ideas he has espoused. Only on these eminently reasonable terms can his membership in the family of Christ be tolerated."¹

When Harry Whittaker refers to "a problem individual" who "propagates" his personal ideas, he is plainly referring to the brother or sister who is always dabbling in what Paul called "doubtful matters."

This is the sort of member who occasionally decides, on a whim, that since their family never observed Christmas when they were growing



The one who is
"weak" should
be able to expect
care and comfort,
not judgment and
contempt

up, then everyone else in the ecclesia should also swear off celebrating the holiday! Or since they don't have a television in their home, then all their brothers and sisters should also get rid of their televisions.

Plainly, "problem individuals" are entitled to their own opinions, but they have no right to burden others with those opinions. Instead, brothers and sisters should be instructed as to the significant difference between a "first principle" and a "doubtful matter."

One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.
(v. 2)

Paul did not say why the weaker brother chose not to eat meat. This brother's reasons were immaterial to Paul. The point is that for some reason this Christian believed that he would please God more by not eating meat than by eating it. He was wrong, since God has not forbidden Christians to eat any food (1 Tim 4:3, 4).

AT A COMMUNAL MEAL

The concern about which foods were acceptable would be much more than a matter of personal or family preference in the first century, because communities of believers would all be expected to share meals together. Even if some were Jews and others Gentiles, and even if some were scrupulous about which foods were acceptable while others were not, they were all supposed to come together to share a meal and to remember together their Saviour. The very heart of their worship, the memorial meeting itself, was generally part of a communal meal. Paul's daily

dietary differences and scruples about foods would impact much of Christian fellowship. This is unlike today, where believers may share small portions of bread and wine at a memorial meeting, but not necessarily have regular meals together around the same table.

The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. (v. 3)

The person who eats should not view himself as superior even though he feels he is right. Nor should he look down on his extremely sensitive brother with contempt or a condescending attitude, because God **has** accepted the sensitive one. On the other hand, the weaker brother, who is overly scrupulous, should not judge the more liberal or open-minded believer as unacceptable to God either, because God **has** accepted the less fastidious one too!

The Greek word *exoutheneo* means to look down upon, to despise, or to treat with contempt or even ridicule. Its usage in the New Testament conforms to this:

- Christ is the object of contempt in Mark 9:12, and the despised (*exoutheneo*) "stone" in Acts 4:11 (citing Psa 118:22). Herod and his soldiers "ridiculed" (*exoutheneo*) Jesus (Luke 23:11).
- Christ told the parable of the publican and the sinner in the temple because some were confident of their own righteousness and "looked down on (*exoutheneo*) everybody else." (Luke 18:9).

- God has chosen the lowly and the despised (*exoutheneo*) things of this world, to nullify the things that are (1 Cor 1:28).

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Rom 14:4).

"Servant" here is not the more common *doulos*, which is sometimes translated "slave", but rather is *oiketes* (Luke 16:13; Acts 10:7; 1 Pet 2:18): a "house-servant," a domestic or personal servant, and thus one who is closer to the master and his family. Sometimes this same word may refer to an actual member of the family, even a child of the master.

The weaker brother needs to remember to whom the stronger brother is responsible, and then he needs to leave the judgment of that brother to God. Paul assured the weaker brother that the stronger brother would stand approved by God because God approves his liberty.

JUDGING ONE ANOTHER?

The Lord is exemplified by the twin characteristics of righteousness and mercy. The ecclesia, if it is to reflect His divine image, must balance these two qualities also. While being available to show mercy where there is proper repentance, the ecclesia must also demonstrate that it can discern between righteousness and unrighteousness in the first place. Yet even when they must sometimes make such judgments, believers must remember that they each stand under God's scrutiny also. To be blind to one's own faults while putting the alleged faults of others under a microscope is wrong. To think

that we are exempt from the same faults that trouble others is to become self-righteous.

When judgment is necessary, then there are safeguards against going too far in our demands upon others. The first safeguard is, as above, to look at oneself at least as severely as one looks at the supposed sinner. The second is to keep always in mind that there ought to be a clear distinction between:

- matters of essential doctrines, on one hand, and
- non-essential matters where no such issues are at stake.

These non-essential matters are what Paul calls "*disputable matters*," i.e., doubtful points or differing opinions (Rom 14:1).

Also, in the category of "*doubtful matters*", in which we should not "*judge*", is the motives of others. A man's actions are almost always subject to more than one interpretation. Those who expect to have good motives attributed to themselves (as surely we all do) must be ready, even eager, to give others the benefit of the doubt, and attribute the best possible motives to them (Matt 6:14,15; 7:1,2).

We need to remember to give the benefit of the doubt, also, when we do not know all the facts of a case. It is often all too easy to know part of a story, and then make what might be called "educated guesses" to fill in what is not known. It can be too easy to portray another person in the worst possible light, if we have already decided to discredit him or her. We may be right in putting the worst interpretation on the story, but we may also be wrong. When our Lord was confronted with a woman allegedly taken in the act of

adultery, he asked for other witnesses, and when they did not come forward, he concluded the matter with, "*Neither do I condemn you.*" (John 8:11). The woman may very well have been guilty as alleged, but the Lord would not join in a rush to judgment.

FOOD AND HOLIDAYS

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. (Rom 14:5).

He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. (v. 6).

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind: In this case it is the weaker brother who actively does something, while the stronger brother is passive and does nothing in this regard. This is the opposite of the situation pictured by Paul in the previous example, where the strong brother was active, and the weak was restrained.

The reason the weaker brother observes the day is immaterial. The point is that he does observe it. When Paul wrote, observing the Sabbaths and Jewish feast days was a matter of disagreement among Christians. Some Jewish believers chose to continue observing these while the Gentile believers did not.

The observance of special days such as the Sabbath is a matter of indifference, or personal preference. No one should impose the keeping of days on another as a condition of salvation, or even of shared fellowship (Col 2:13-17, Gal

4:10,11, 5:1-4):

It really does not matter if one follows the Law of Moses or not, so long as one understands that doing so provides no righteousness. The Law was (and is) a valid lifestyle choice. However, the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ has put the Law to the side as a possible means of salvation. Therefore, if one keeps the Law with the hope of gaining salvation, he is sorely mistaken and ought to be taught otherwise. Nevertheless, if one does so as a matter of preference, then it matters no more in the eternal sphere than choosing to be a vegetarian, or not, or observing some days differently than others, or not.

One can keep any manner of laws, both personal or divine, or follow various practices, or not, without being legalistic. But it is reliance on the Law for salvation that is the problem. Legalism is declaring one's own righteousness through ceremonially following the Law of Moses, or any law. If this is what a person is doing, then he or she is simply wrong.

BE CONVINCED IN YOUR OWN MIND

"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (KJV). The same word, "*plerophoreo*," with its cognate forms, occurs in Romans 4:21 ("*being fully persuaded*"); it can mean to realize full satisfaction, be fully assured, be filled or fulfilled, or believe fully, i.e., to be certain of (cp. also Luke 1:1; 2 Tim 4:5; Rom 15:13; Col 2:2; 4:12; Heb 6:11; 10:22).

One person should not be forced to act according to another person's

conscience, but that everyone should be satisfied in his own mind and be careful not to do what he considers wrong.

He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. (v. 6).

Any two believers may well choose divergent lifestyles, and even philosophies, as regards non-essential, doubtful matters, as mentioned in verses 1 and 2. Which course of life one chooses, or which other choices one makes, the key factor for any and all (when dealing with uncertain details of the faith) is this: It is important to recognize the LORD God and His Son in all aspects of one's life, give them thanks for whatever comes, and trust in them for the future. Then, whether one chooses one path or another, he may still hope in the promise that God works in all things for the good of His elect (Rom 8:28).

The constraint in this matter is obvious. One man eats any food, and another man eats only vegetables. But if each man can in his own conscience truly thank God for what he eats, then it is evident that each man is acting according to his own conscience and not by coercion. And in doubtful matters, that is acceptable for each.

Comparing three different verses, we have these three equally true ideas:

- In essential things, the church or ecclesia ought to be characterized by unity (Phil 1:27).
- In doubtful things, the ecclesia ought to be characterized by liberty (Rom 14:6).

- In all things, it ought to be characterized by love (1 Cor 13).

PLEASE THE LORD

The giving of thanks, especially for the bread and the wine, with a reverent understanding of everything symbolized by those elements, is not an incidental or optional matter. According to Paul, it is a uniquely definitive activity of true believers. *"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone."* (Rom 14:7).

Paul meant that no believer should live to please himself alone, but rather should live to please the Lord. The context makes this clear by the repetition of *"to the Lord."* (vv. 6, 8).

The believer's desire to please the Lord will continue beyond the grave, so Paul could also say that we do not die for ourselves. Our whole existence, both now and in the age to come, should express our commitment to please the Lord:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39, see also 1 Thess 5:10, 2 Cor 5:15, Phil 2:10).

It is possible that dying here may also be Paul's symbolic way of referring to dying to the *"flesh"* or putting to death the ways of this world (see v. 8 below, note) This may be the more appropriate counterpart to *"living to Christ"*, mentioned earlier in the verse.

If we live, we live to the Lord; and

if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (Rom 14:8).

In the context here, "live" could mean: to enjoy, or indulge oneself (i.e., to eat everything: v. 2; to live to oneself: v. 7), and "die" could mean: to deny oneself (to eat only vegetables: v. 2; to die to oneself: v. 7).

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. (v. 9).

Jesus Christ also lived, died, and lives again, now and forever. Consequently, he is Lord both of those who have died and those who are still alive. Paul's point, simply put, is that Jesus is the Judge. The obvious corollary is that we are not.

In some sense it was always true that the Son of God was Lord, but the title has become particularly and uniquely appropriate after his resurrection and glorification. As one example, "Lord Jesus" occurs only a couple of times in the Gospels, but more than 100 times in the letters.

Christ "returned to life" in that he was raised from the dead because he was sinless, and "it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." (Acts 2:24). God designed this, in His mercy, for our justification (Rom 4:25). Thus, Jesus received the preeminence (supremacy: NIV) (Col 1:15, 18) as the "Lord" (Acts 2:36), upon whom the

Father has conferred supreme power over the living and the dead (1 Thess 5:10).

You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. (Rom 14:10)

Both the critical weaker brother and the scornful stronger brother, even as they see things from very different perspectives, may be guilty of the same offense, i.e., judging prematurely and on improper grounds.

To "look down on" (Greek "exoutheneo") is translated "despise" (RSV, NET, Diaglott, Rotherham). It can also mean: to treat with contempt, scorn or ridicule. The KJV and ASV have "set at naught." The same word is used in Romans 14:3:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (Also see 2 Cor 5:10; cp. 1 Cor 3:10-15; 4:5; 1 Pet 5:4).

All judgment has been entrusted to the Son by the Father (John 5:22). The Father has appointed a day when He will judge the world with Justice, by this man whom he has appointed (Acts 17:31; cp. also Matt 16:27; 25:31).

George Booker,
(Austin Leander, TX)

¹ Harry Whittaker, "Block Disfellowship (2)", *Testimony*, vol. 43, p. 344.

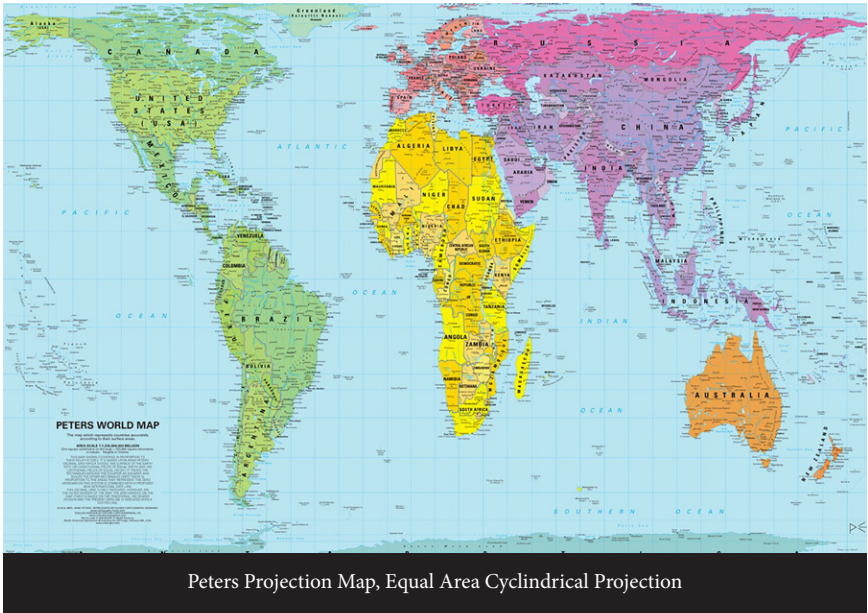
CULTURE & TRADITION

By Dave Jennings

WE'VE all grown up with a geographic worldview, based on a version of the Mercator map of 1569. It is on our atlases and school walls. Gerardus Mercator (1512-1594), a Flemish cartographer, created a

map which was primarily designed to enable the proliferation of ship navigation. He straightened the lines of longitude and latitude, but as he did so, he made conscious distortions of the size of land masses near the poles.





Peters Projection Map, Equal Area Cylindrical Projection

The further from the equator, which he moved further south than it is, the more stretched the landmass was on his map. Greenland, which appears much larger on his map than South America, is eight times smaller. Alaska, which appears much larger than Mexico, is smaller. Europe and North America, through Mercator's projections, appear larger and more prominent than they really are.

Several more accurate maps have been released in modern times. Arno Peters (1916-2002), a German historian, released a map in 1974 that he believed reflected a more correct view of the relative size of landmasses. As a historian, his motivation was to create a map that had a greater accuracy of the proportion of size, which he believed was important for creating a more precise worldview. He believed that land size was the first

criteria people often use to determine the relative importance of a country. Having an accurate size, he believed, was connected to fairness and equality for all people. The Mercator map, as Peters saw it, was not only inaccurate in its dimensions, but it had aided the perceived superiority of Europe and North America at the expense of other continents and nations.

When you first see the Peter's Projection (similar to the James Gall Projection of 1885), it is a bit shocking. With an open mind, it begins to modify the way you see the geography of the world. However, this new map was threatening at that time to some who were personally invested in the world of cartography. One influential cartographer attacked Peters as being on a "crusade." He described Peters' work as being "cleverly contrived, cunningly deceptive."¹ Some attacked

Peters and his motives, not the actual projections and work that he had done. It is not hard to see from this story that men can become easily attached to what had been a longstanding tradition. All these cartographers would agree that the Mercator map was not intended to be used as an accurate representation of the continents, but rather to assist ship navigation. Yet, it had become the traditional way of looking at the world. When Peters introduced a new perspective, the dialog turned personal, and he was labeled and attacked as a deceiver.

As believers, we too have formed images, constructs and traditions in our spiritual worldview. Some of these images may have been created for specific purposes years before to address a pressing issue at that time (e.g., Mercator's map) but may not be relevant any longer. Some may have been inaccurate all along. Others are as true today as they were 150 years ago. What we see as truth has always been subject to constant review. The Scriptures, not long-standing tradition, is the only authority to discern what is right and wrong.

The word "culture" is not found in our Scriptures. But we are all familiar with the term and how it is applied. For better or worse, we are all born into a culture. Culture shapes the way we think and how we react to the world around us. It guides how we discern what is right or wrong, normal or abnormal. It provides a blueprint for processing of information. Culture is determined by several factors, to include national boundaries, our race or sex, the neighborhood we live in and our immediate family.

As a Christadelphian community, we share a culture, with a unique set of expectations and distinctive vocabulary that may have developed over many decades. We acknowledge that understanding culture is also a critical Bible study tool. For instance, being able to understand the culture of the pagan world during Paul's travels greatly enhances our understanding of the issues he faced and why he often emphasized certain doctrines and practices.

Culture can be our friend when it embraces spiritual thinking. Our culture can provide important boundaries which allow for us to discern and avoid sin, as well as to promote righteousness. For example, if your cultural norm is to assign trust, even without evidence, to new acquaintances, this may nurture the welcoming of new members to the ecclesia and help them to feel accepted and valued. But if the prevailing cultural norm is to distrust others until sufficient evidence has been gathered over time to justify trust, welcoming new members into the ecclesia may be strained. We can become captive to our culture if we allow our thinking and consideration of the Scriptures to be arrested by what feels normal, or what we have always been taught. When culture dominates our thinking, it can limit the power of the Scriptures in our life.

THE GOSPEL WINS OVER CULTURE AND TRADITION

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of*

God.” (Rom 12:2). Paul understood, as he moved through the multiculturalism of Roman society, that all are initially conformed to the thinking of the world we find ourselves in. But we are called to transform, and this is done by the renewing of our thinking. In Greek, “renewing” is *anakainosis* or “renovation.” It represents a complete change for the better. This really is instructive about the process we need to embrace if we desire to transform our minds. For instance, when we create a plan to renovate a kitchen, we remove cabinets and walls that are unhelpful, but keep things that are functional. It is all part of making the new kitchen more functional and according to the master plan. The renovated kitchen is “like new” and it serves our purposes better than the old.

The Bible itself is our primary and authoritative source for interpretation. But we have also historically relied on non-Christadelphian scholarly works to expand our understanding and appreciation of many doctrines and expository topics. Some scholars outside of Christadelphia have credentials in linguistics, languages and history, which can provide us with more insight into passages being studied. However, they must always be used with great caution. Unless the scholar’s remarks are found to be fully consistent with the Scriptures, these works should never be positioned as authoritative. At best they are supplements to good Bible study. For instance, if a scholar were to claim that a certain passage is to be understood in a certain historical or cultural context, this must then be tested across the entirety of the Bible

to ensure that it is consistent with the principles seen in other settings and applications. Scholarly works can open our appreciation of certain passages, to be sure. But we must test them against the backdrop of the consistent teaching of all Scripture.

To truly learn and understand, we must have minds that are flexible. Calcified minds prevent the advancement of truth. When Jesus was confronted by the disciples of John and the Pharisees over the practice of fasting, Jesus was clear that what was needed from believers was a new way of thinking. They were not to patch a new, unshrunk garment with old material or to put new wine into old bottles (Matt 9:14-17). Old wineskins would become brittle and burst. The teachings of the Lord required elastic minds which could expand to accept the concepts of the gospel.

The Apostle Peter was a man who needed to change his mind. Though he had seen evidence of the calling of the Gentiles, he remained confused about just how they were to be accepted. He would have known that the gospel message was that through Abraham and his Seed, “*shall all nations be blessed.*” (Gal 3:8). But Gentiles weren’t circumcised. They had backgrounds steeped in idolatry and paganism. They ate food that no law-abiding Jew would ever consume. Just how was it that they were to be accepted into the family of God?

Through a vision, the Lord revealed to Peter, who was experiencing great physical hunger at the time, that unclean animals being presented to

him in the vision were acceptable to eat. His default was to recall that he had never eaten creatures which were common or unclean. This was to Peter an expectation of any follower of God. His mind could not flex to accept that such dietary compromise could ever be acceptable. It was more than a commandment. For Peter, it was part of his religious culture as a Jew. This surely couldn't be right! But the lesson was, *"What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common."* (Acts 10:15). This vision is reinforced later by his interaction with Cornelius.

Surely, Peter was a righteous man, and he accepted this teaching from the Lord, and his mind began to be transformed on this important issue. We would expect that he would no longer see his Gentile brethren as unclean. But, in Galatians 2, we read of how Peter once sat and ate with Gentile believers. Paul and Barnabas must have seen this as a positive reinforcement for their work and the new understanding of the acceptance of Gentile converts. Yet, when *"certain came from James,"* *"he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision."* (Gal 2:12), Even though he had embraced the new thinking from his vision, he lacked the necessary courage to stand up for this new understanding, under the perceived pressure of those who were not so enlightened. Paul rebuked Peter for this, and to his credit, Peter did not reject the correction. Sometimes, even when we come to new and improved understanding of Scripture, we too can waver when others we respect may reject what we believe to be right. It demands courage.

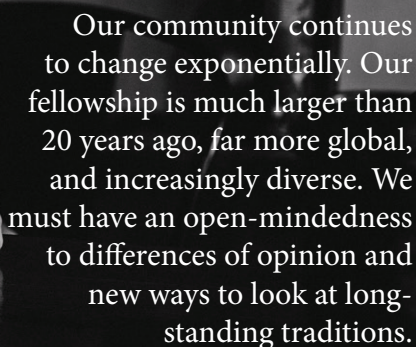
Today we don't get descending-sheet visions or Road-to-Damascus experiences, so we have to rely on careful scrutiny of the Scriptures as our only revelation. That is the challenge. We all have developed certain ways of thinking about life in the Truth and what things we feel are normal and right. Maybe it is the manner of worship services, the music we use for our hymns, how we dress for memorial service, or how we view a particular doctrine or prophecy. These may become extremely comfortable to us and can be armor-plated with



well-intentioned traditions. However, traditions can be remnants of unenlightened interpretations from prior generations, or they may have once served a certain purpose, but are unhelpful now. Let me give a simple and administrative example. Many ecclesias have a constitutional requirement that the nomination and election results for ecclesial offices must be read in their entirety for multiple weeks during the announcements at Memorial Service. The recording brother often speedily reads through this lengthy list and the audience struggles to remember

what was said. Now, that made a lot of sense 50 years ago. But today, that same information can be easily reproduced and distributed, or even emailed to members. It is more efficient and likely more effective than reading the results out loud.

It is unhelpful to place tradition, stability and conformity as stronger pursuits than a commitment to openly pursue truth. Spiritual minds are never stagnant. Like the Bereans of Macedonia, we desire to “receive the



Our community continues to change exponentially. Our fellowship is much larger than 20 years ago, far more global, and increasingly diverse. We must have an open-mindedness to differences of opinion and new ways to look at long-standing traditions.

word with all readiness (*prothumia*—eagerness or willingness) of mind” and to search “the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11). This has been a vital part of our culture as Christadelphians for over 150 years. We do not choose to veer away from a sound discussion about the Word of God. Instead, we choose to listen to one other and use the Scriptures to discern what is right.

Can we have a discussion with someone about a spiritual topic, when our past tells us that this perspective

doesn't feel right? Can we effectively listen with the intent to understand and hear our brother out? Can we share a godly fellowship by examining what Scripture says? Will we be willing to accept that there may be issues that allow for a difference of opinion, without any compromise of the Truth?

Our community continues to change exponentially. Our fellowship is much larger than 20 years ago, far more global, and increasingly diverse. We must have an open-mindedness to differences of opinion and new ways to look at long-standing traditions. What knits us together (Col 2:2) isn't culture or tradition, but our LORD and His righteous principles. With great gaps in the culture of our brothers and sisters around the globe, we are certain to have differences in what we see as being normal. We have a great opportunity before us for growth and the sharpening of our comprehension of Scripture. Today, insisting that what is right is how things have been viewed or done in the past is not an acceptable way to resolve differences of opinion. It never really was. We need to seek an answer from Scripture and welcome debate and discussion about these principles. Doing this will only serve to make us stronger and more dependent on the timeless words of the Bible, versus our own cultural influences.

Here are a few points we might all consider when we feel a collision between our current thinking and the thinking of a brother or sister who differs from us.

- First accept that you are still on a journey for truth—one that is

unending. Our own knowledge of the Bible is incomplete and could benefit from a different perspective, even if in the end you don't agree.

- Recognize that some of what seems right or wrong to you may be culturally biased and not based on Scripture. This is a warning for all of us. The gospel of Jesus Christ did not promise comfort, but rather a fundamental challenge to the thinking of all men.
- Acknowledge our increasingly diverse community and accept that cultural diversity will naturally challenge traditions.
- Test everything and everyone by the Scriptures. While we are all doing the best we can to understand God's Word, we all make mistakes or have gaps in our understanding. Seek to understand your brother or sister and have an open and flexible mind.
- When brothers or sisters have a point of view that we do not agree with, it is important to not label or pigeonhole them. Accept those who question traditions or teachings as sincere students. Even if a Scriptural examination proves that their perspective was not consistent with Scripture, we are not called on to judge their hearts. How we behave toward those we disagree with is an accurate litmus test about how we love and honor each other and our Lord.
- There will be some topics debated, that when fully examined by Scripture, may be determined to have a clear answer. We must embrace what is right, even if it is uncomfortable or unpopular in society.

- There will be some topics debated where there is no apparent clear answer. In such cases, having different perspectives may be appropriate. Typically, these are not first principle issues, but interpretations of prophecy, uncertain details or traditions. We need to accept that there is great liberty within our community on such matters.
- Finally, it can take significant time to adopt a new idea or perspective. Even Peter, who learned the acceptance of the Gentiles through the vision and his interaction with Cornelius, backstepped when facing the judgment of those who had come from James in Jerusalem (Gal 2:11-12) and was rebuked by Paul. We need to have patience with those who we share our perspective with, understanding that it may have taken us significant time and testing to come to our own understanding.

Let's uphold what is doctrinally right and not faint in rejecting error (Rev 2:2-3). But, let the process be done by sincerely striving to understand the other person's point of view. Whether it is to be accepted, or rejected, let us not lose what defines us as believers—our “*first love*.” (v. 4). We are all striving to understand the pure teachings and principles of our God. We confess that we are imperfect reservoirs of His truth. Let us labor and show patience by trying all teachings by the Scriptures.

Dave Jennings

¹ Arthur H. Robinson, *The American Cartographer*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1985) pp. 103-111.

REVISITING JAMAICA

By Cassie Giordano

RETURNING to Jamaica 17 months after finishing our two-year stay was a bittersweet experience. My husband, David Giordano, and I were overjoyed to see our friends again, but our time was over far too quickly. As anyone who has ever been uprooted to live in a new place knows, you leave a piece of your heart behind when you say goodbye to the people you've grown to love. We never expected to be away so long. Still, the arrival of COVID-19 on the worldwide scene was an unanticipated barrier to travel after we landed in the US in early March 2020, just ahead of massive lockdowns in both countries.

Over those long months, while we adjusted to a more isolated lifestyle, I did my best to keep in touch with my ecclesial family in Jamaica. Several of our sisters in isolation in the Port Maria area became my close friends while we lived there, so we kept in touch

regularly during the lockdown. We were able to encourage, comfort and advise each other during the rapidly changing, anxiety-inducing progress of the pandemic. Whenever my energy for communication was flagging, I could always count on Sis. Carol Bingham from the Broughton Ecclesia in Jamaica to reach out to me and see how I was doing. Even when calls had trouble going through, she would keep trying until she got through to me. That diligence warmed my heart.

Despite efforts to stay in touch, we were sorely disappointed that any visits to Jamaica had to be delayed, so by this summer, we were determined to make it happen, no matter what. Quarantine on the island had been reduced to 8 days for vaccinated people, so we made plans for a month-long visit to allow three weeks of traveling around. I was nearly as anxious about this trip as I was when we first left home for



Bro. David Giordano with Sis. Shauba, Sis. Alissa
and Sis. Mildred in Port Maria

two years, this time entirely due to the uncertainty of COVID-19 while traveling. Armed with our vaccination cards, negative COVID-19 tests and ample supply of face masks, we got on our way, praying for an uneventful trip, which by God's grace, we had. At customs, we also received the good news that we could be excused from our 8-day quarantine by simply getting another antigen test after our arrival, so we gained another weekend's worth of ecclesial activities on our agenda.

Our first destination on the island was our former home ecclesia, Broughton. Its small size meant they could still meet under the health and safety protocols, so we had a wonderful reunion on our first Sunday. We couldn't help but admire the cheerful effect of the recent painting and repair work that had been done in the hall. Warm yellow walls with aqua and white accents were a great improvement on the peeling, cracked and worn room we had left behind. I did miss the fat lizard that used to creep out of the ceiling every Sunday to wander around above the

presider's head. His entryway has now been sealed properly, and he'll have to find another hunting ground!

We couldn't see all our members on Sundays, as the ailments of old age keep several of them homebound. So, we visited them all, as was our habit when we lived there. Sometimes we would do a little memorial service, sometimes a Bible reading or other

times, a simple chat. We also had to prioritize a visit to Bro. Ray Arthurs, who has recently retired from his long-time position of Recording Brother at Broughton. Although we saw him at meeting on Sunday, we wanted to have a longer visit under the breadfruit and mango trees in his yard, right across the road from the gorgeous Seven Mile Beach of Negril. Bro. Ray is always ready to give his thoughts on whatever Bible subjects he has been studying lately, and we'd missed our conversations with him.

On Fridays, we were pleased to see that youth activities had continued under the guiding hand of Bro. Hugh Kinlocke and Bro. Alvarie Johns. At times sessions were canceled when health and safety protocols were mandated but always picked back up again. Many of the young adults with whom we'd been having classes have now graduated from school and have full-time jobs at stores and restaurants in Savanna-La-Mar, so they haven't been around much. They managed

to make time to meet with us one evening for a lively class on faith in action, but we could sense the effort they made to make it out in time. The heavy schedules and work pressure for those lucky enough to find regular employment make it a great challenge to have time for much of anything else. It would take a great deal of faith and courage to prioritize ecclesial life when that choice would most likely cost you your job.

From Broughton, we made day trips up into the mountains to see the members of the small Harvey River and Argyle Mountain ecclesias and hold memorial service. For some, this was the first-time breaking bread with brothers and

sisters since our last visit a year and a half ago. We also spent five weekdays at the Round Hill ecclesia, where we participated in Bible classes nearly every night of the week. We relished the long-overdue fellowship and relief from the hot weather while we were up in the breezy hills.

Halfway through our visit, we set out for the east side of Jamaica to reconnect with the May Pen and Spanish Town ecclesias. Two national holidays were coming up, bringing with them the challenge of increased curfew restrictions, but also days when our hosts, Bro. Leroy and Sis. Lorraine Johnson were more available for visiting than usual. That meant



Bro. Matthew Henry, Sister Eula Henry and Sister Myrna White at Harvey River

enjoying the Bible readings together many evenings, and our first home-cooked Jamaican breakfast of the trip! Our only disappointment was that we were not able to make arrangements to see the brothers and sisters in Kingston before we left. We hope to make visiting there our top priority on our next trip.

We saved our most anticipated visit for the end of our trip: Port Maria. Talking regularly by phone with some of the sisters there made us more cognizant of the loneliness of being in isolation, with no ecclesial meetings for encouragement. Though attending virtual memorial service and virtual fraternal gatherings can be a great comfort, there's nothing like in-person fellowship with people of the same faith. When we finally saw our sisters, it was like a family reunion, and we couldn't resist hugs, even though that wasn't proper social distancing. We had plenty of time for catching up in the beautiful garden planted by Sis. Alissa Oakley's husband, and in the shade of a mango tree, I did an informal Sunday school lesson with her six-year-old daughter. Little Athaliah has clearly been taught well, because she told me the whole story of Moses and the children of Israel from the CSSA book that I left with Sis. Alissa. In the afternoon Sis. Shauna Chin-Sang arrived and we all headed to the home of Sis. Mildred Bishop where we held memorial service and shared lunch on the veranda. The next day we took everyone on a 90-minute drive to Port Antonio to see Sis. Enid Hall, the sole surviving member of the once thriving ecclesia there. At 98 years old, her physical vision is failing, but not her spiritual vision. Her greatest complaint is that she's had to give up her long

habit of daily Bible reading because she simply can't see the pages anymore. We could see her happiness in getting to hear and discuss the Word with us, and we knew which of her favorite hymns would get her singing along by memory. Everyone wanted an excuse to linger, so we brought along lunch to share to give ourselves a little extra visiting time. We couldn't postpone the drive back forever though, and we eventually had to bid her farewell and promise to call as often as possible. Dropping everyone off at their homes marked the end of our visit to the area, and we left with the heartache of goodbyes, but also the invigoration of time spent together discussing the word of God.

The last few days before our flight home were a whirlwind of last visits and goodbyes as we made our way back to the west side of the island. It is amazing how short a month can seem when spread out among so many places! We were comforted to see that none of our brothers and sisters have suffered serious effects from the pandemic and seemed to be managing well in challenging times. We're certain that God was looking out for us in the timing of our travel, because barely a week after our return, Jamaica drastically increased curfew and movement restrictions again. We pray that our brethren continue to be spared as COVID-19 cases rise once again.

*Written by Sis. Cassie Giordano,
Missionaries to Jamaica
December 2017-March 2020*

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Regarding the Back Cover of the Special Issue

Dear Bro. Dave,

When I was looking at the back cover of the July/August special issue, I was struck by a statement made on that page. It read: "In Matthew 25, our Lord states clearly that it is our responsibility to care for the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and prisoner." Let me say from the outset that I am not questioning the value of helping those in need around us. We are by nature a compassionate and caring community. This is a wonderful thing.

What troubled me was the statement that our Lord "states clearly" what our responsibility is as his disciples. When I read Matt 25, this is what I find: *"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 'Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 'And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"*

It is that last phrase, *"the least of these my brethren,"* that seems not to get adequate attention. The same idea is found in the verse concerning the rejected: *"Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'"* It seems to me in both cases that Jesus is pointing out the neglect of his *brethren* as the key that reveals the differences between these two sets of disciples.

It may be a wholly different principle to assume that our faithfulness as Jesus' disciples will be seen in our feeding and caring for everyone in the world who is in need. If Jesus has now identified the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison as being a part of him (e.g., *"you visited me"*) and that these are his real *"brethren"*, doesn't it follow that the criterion for being deemed Christ's brother is not our faith or beliefs that through baptism unite us with our Master, but simply our poverty or neediness? So, we are led to believe that the focus of our work in Christ must be to reach out to these *"brothers"* of Christ and minister to them.

The end result of this train of thought may be to no longer to see ourselves as any different than other Christian organizations; we are doing the same things they do. So, a generation of young brothers and sisters may now gladly join together

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

with these other organizations, not perceiving that what we believe is truly vital to our salvation, not these “good” works. Nor will they recognize that we are called to proclaim this salvation to all around us. This is the best “good” work we can do for others!

I am amazed how our Lord’s command to love one another, that is, those who have become part of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith and baptism, is echoed again and again throughout the NT as a critical part of our acceptance before our Master in his day of glory. (Here are some to peruse: John 13:34-35, 15:12,17; Rom 12:10, 13:8; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:2; 1 Thess 3:12, 4:9; Heb 10:24; 1 Pet 1:22, 3:8, 4:8, 5:14; 1 John 3:11-18,23, 4:7,11-16; 2 John 1:5.)

Perhaps John sums it up best: *“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”* (1 John 3:16-18).

*Ted Sleeper,
(San Francisco Peninsula, CA)*

Regarding the Vaccination Controversy

Dear Bro. Dave,

COVID-19 has been and remains an enormous challenge for the world. Aside from the actual disease component, the resulting economic, social and political strains, policy measures and increasingly divisive rhetoric have taken a huge toll.

Discussions about vaccines, masks, social isolation etc., have taken on a life of their own. Unfortunately, many “discussions” about these topics have degraded to arguments, lectures, rants and recriminations between the different sides of the issues—and has also spilled into our community. Real damage is being done between brothers and sisters. This isn’t appropriate and is certainly not reflective of the principles set out in Philippians 2.

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves. (Phil 2:1-3 NASB).

Among believers, some feel very strongly about getting vaccinated and others feel just as strongly about not getting vaccinated. That’s fine. However, it would

not be fine, for example, for me to insist that you accept my position and for me to assume that if you don't, you're not only wrong, but you're sinning. Those advocating for vaccines may characterize the unvaccinated as selfish, conspiracy theorists, ignoring science, etc. Those advocating not getting vaccinated may characterize the vaccinated as lemmings, falling for cherry-picked facts, being dupes, etc. This kind of "discussion" is clearly out of sync with Paul's message. But even on a practical plane, it could prove very regrettable and embarrassing as more information continues to surface. Most of us aren't doctors or scientists, and even those who are can't possibly keep up with the pace of new information surfacing throughout the world that could change everyone's understanding significantly. So even on a purely practical plane it seems the course of wisdom is to stand down from taking strong positions with other brothers and sisters, and rather, with humility consider one another as more important than ourselves.

Here are some wise excerpts from the November 2020 issue of *The Tidings* article "Vaccination and Obedience to the Truth":

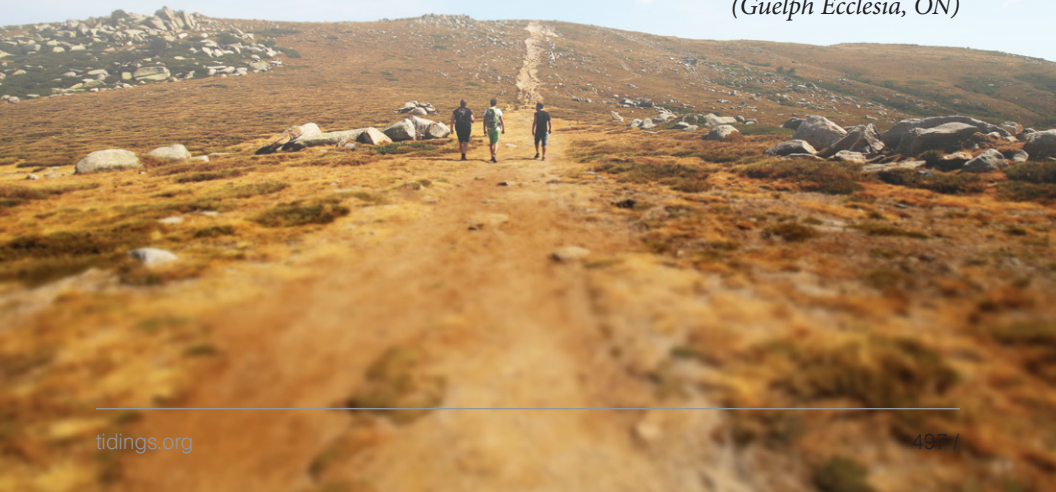
"It is critically important to say that until vaccination becomes compulsory by governmental authorities, this is a matter of personal conscience.

'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind' and act in accordance with his spiritually directed conscience. (Rom 14:5).

We must not judge others for taking a position that is different than ours."

Vaccination has nothing to do with our walk together to the Kingdom. It's the walk we have in common—not whether or not we've been vaccinated or based on whatever information we've accepted or not.

Doug Finlay,
(Guelph Ecclesia, ON)



NEWS & UPDATES

Prince George, BC

We are very happy to announce the baptisms of JOSIAH LAWRENCE on December 20, 2020, and ELIJAH LAWRENCE on May 30, 2021. Both are sons of Bro. Jonathan and Sis. Beth Lawrence.

We also welcome to our ecclesia Bro. Casey Brown by way of transfer from the Comox Valley, BC Ecclesia. Our small ecclesia very much appreciates the support that our new brethren will provide.

We thank our Bro. Dan Leadbetter from the North Battleford, BC Ecclesia for leading our annual May fraternal over Zoom. We have welcomed many brothers and sisters. We thank our Bre. Dean Montgomery, Marc Hunter, and Ken Loveridge. and on Zoom. Bre. Nathan Bartholomew, Nathanael Massey, and Mark Higgs.

Jonathan Lawrence

San Francisco Pensinsula, CA

We rejoice in the baptism of our new sister, GEREMAY AMPARO, on May 2, 2021. Sis. Geremay came to us from the Bible Seminar and her search for a non-trinitarian church. She has been meeting with us for over five years, so many of us knew her pretty well and were delighted by her decision to be baptized.

We have also welcomed with great joy our Bro. Nick and Sis. Leah Harden who transferred here in January 2021 from Wamuran, Aust. Ecclesia with their lovely children, Keturah, Lucy and Jaxson. They have both jumped in to minister to our ecclesia in teaching and whatever support we need. They are a great blessing for us.

We greatly appreciate the ministrations of several “virtual” speakers. Bro. Matt Colby (Toronto) led classes for our January study day. We have benefitted from exhortations by the following brethren: Matt Palmer (Mariposa, CA),

Christian Russell (Verdugo Hills, CA), Mark Carr (Toronto), Jeff Gelineau (Simi Hills, CA).

We are delighted to welcome Bro. Mark and Sis. Aruni Seagoe, and Bro. Seth, along with Indika and Tharusha, their other children, all from Portland, OR Ecclesia as members of our ecclesia.

Due to holding all our meetings through Zoom since March 2020, we have several who attend with us regularly but are not members. We have welcomed Bro. Jonathan and Sis. Meena Smith (Bloomington, IL) and Bro. Randy and Sis. Peggy Koniak (Carson City, NV). We have other occasional visitors. We join with Sacramento, CA Ecclesia once per month via Zoom. We began in person meetings July 18, 2021 with about ten brethren in attendance at our hall and the balance continuing via Zoom. We are thankful for those with IT skills who have made this possible. Several of our members due to frailty and health issues will only be able to continue with us via Zoom.

We were saddened by the falling asleep of our Sis. “Wendy” Christine Kistosturian on July 20, 2021. She had been residing in a Christadelphian care home in England for over a year.

Due to various reasons, we have lost or are losing several of our members, cost of housing here being a major factor. Bro. Jim and Sis. Rhonda and Sis. Anna Seagoe have all relocated to Mariposa, CA Ecclesia. Sis. Martha Frisby has moved to Pittsfield, MA and is in isolation there but is able to join other ecclesias via Zoom. Our Sis. Linda and Sis. Hannah Gallagher have moved to Reno, NV along with the

other children. We rejoice with our Bro. Kainon and Sis. Sierra Irons in the birth of their first child, Asher Uzziel, born July 12, 2021. They will be returning to Bro. Kainon’s home ecclesia in Abilene, TX the end of this year. We pray for God’s richest blessings on all in their new homes and that they may return to visit as they are able.

Our new secretary is Bro. Andy Merg who may be reached by email at: andrewmerg@gmail.com.

Andy Merg

Southern Oregon

The mailing address for the Southern Oregon, OR Ecclesia has changed to: P.O. Box 2473, Grants Pass, OR, 97528. Thanks for your work and including this in the magazine.

Tom Muniz

2021-2022 Western Edition of the Christadelphian Address Book

An updated Directory has been printed for the Western Ecclesias, and is available both as a Hard Copy and a Digital Download. Brothers or Sisters who would like to purchase a copy can contact Bro. Jeff Gelineau at jeffgelineau@gmail.com.



IN THE DECEMBER ISSUE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT **AFRICA**

Brethren from Africa and the CBM in the UK will share insights about the continent that has more Christadelphians than any other continent.

Don't miss it!



To make a donation or to subscribe, visit us at

WWW.TIDINGS.ORG

Stay connected and up to date. Find us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter!



The Brothers and Sisters who write for The Christadelphian Tidings do so on a voluntary basis, and the Magazine is provided FREE to any who would like to read it. The Magazine is available in a Digital Format online at www.tidings.org.

If you would like to order a printed subscription to The Tidings you may do so simply by making a donation to help cover the printing costs. The Suggested Donation approximates the actual cost of printing and shipping which is US\$50.00, and Minimum Donation is US\$25.00. If you can afford to donate more, please do so in order to help out those that cannot afford to.

The Christadelphian Tidings of the Kingdom of God

Periodicals postage paid at Simi Valley, CA

Send address corrections to: The Christadelphian Tidings • 567 Astorian Drive • Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941