

TIDINGS

A black and white photograph of a pair of hands gently cupping a large, vibrant red heart. The heart is composed of many small, round, pill-like objects, creating a textured surface. The hands are positioned around the heart, with fingers visible at the top and bottom, suggesting a protective and caring gesture.

Volume 85, Number 3, March 2022

CARING FOR THE VULNERABLE

The Christadelphian Tidings
is pleased to introduce the ***EcclesiaSafe***
program to our community.



Sharee Grazda (Denver Ecclesia, CO)

San Juan Mountains, CO

"No hand of man or woman involved. Planted and nourished by God. I love the representation of surviving, even flourishing, in a very hard place."

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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EDITORIAL

CARING FOR THE VULNERABLE

By Dave Jennings



EcclesiaSafe

CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

ABUSE. It never happens in our homes or our ecclesias. Right?

Sadly, abuse does happen within our community. It is possible that it happens less frequently among us than in the institutions of our world. But surely all sin that we see around us in society regrettably happens to some degree in our ecclesias and families.

While none of us can produce quantifiable data about how often abuse occurs within our own community, most of us are aware that it has occurred. We may be aware of a life forever damaged, relationships broken, or parties estranged by the impact. For some children, sexual abuse has destroyed trust and significantly undermined spiritual development. The stories we do know are often repulsive.

We've all seen the news headlines that have brought major secular and religious institutions into reproach for not preventing or responding appropriately to child sexual abuse. Church leaders, who were tasked with the protection of the flock, often participated in abuse or covered it up. Some parishioners have viewed this recklessness as a reason for them to abandon their faith.

Our community operates on a great deal of trust. We view our ecclesias as families and other brothers and sisters as aunts and uncles. We are together often. We may take for granted that our children are cared for and always safe.

Yet, child sexual abuse rarely comes from the unknown abuser, who creeps in unawares, but the individuals that are well-known and trusted. In trusting relationships, such as we have in our community, we have all the more reason to be aware of how child sexual abuse could occur and how we can work together to prevent it.

The Christadelphian Tidings is pleased to introduce the **EcclesiaSafe** program to our community. This program provides awareness training for ecclesial leaders, adult, and teen members, as well as young children. Additionally, there are useful resources, such as sample policies and procedures, to assist your ecclesia in establishing a robust child prevention program. The **EcclesiaSafe** program will officially launch on March 1 and can be accessed at tidings.org/ecclesiasafe.

Difficult Subject

I acknowledge this is an extremely sensitive topic for us to discuss within our circles. But, over the past year, we were struck by the acceptance we consistently heard across the continent for the development of this program. Brothers and sisters are aware this topic must be addressed and that we need to proactively establish policies and train our members now. There are governmental requirements for how we educate and respond to allegation claims. Even the insurance agencies for our ecclesial halls are beginning

to require a formal program by each ecclesia to prevent child sexual abuse. But “compliance” to the laws of the land, while important, is never our primary motive. We have a higher calling and responsibility to care for and protect everyone. There can be no doubt that we all wish to provide a loving, safe and nurturing environment for the little lambs that we are so blessed to have in our community. Their needs are paramount.

We are aware there are many types of abuse that threaten our body, including physical, emotional and verbal abuse for spouses, during dating, or with elders, just to name a few. Child sexual abuse is the first type of abuse the *Christadelphian Tidings* will be addressing. We plan to provide additional resources on other forms of abuse in the months ahead, Lord willing.

I am so thankful to a wonderful group of brothers and sisters (see the box below) who labored over this past year to develop the **EcclesiaSafe** program. They devoted countless hours to the development of the resources that are now available. Each volunteered to be part of this team because of their personal passion for helping our ecclesias be safe places for our children. Please take the time to review the

resources now available. Work with your ecclesia to determine what your specific program ought to entail. Some ecclesias have already developed effective programs. For those ecclesias, we salute you and hope these materials will serve as a reinforcement or refresher for your own work. For ecclesias yet to establish a child protection program, we believe the **EcclesiaSafe** program may be able to accelerate your implementation.

One of the consistent characteristics of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ is that they are kind and compassionate, caring especially for the vulnerable and the powerless and at-risk. They expect us to do the same. It is the prayer of the Tidings Committee that the launch of the **EcclesiaSafe** program in your ecclesia will not only result in a program to prevent abuse but will also help to generate healthy dialog among us about the care of one another. Our goal is to create and sustain healthy, productive, and loving relationships in our homes and within our ecclesias.

May God bless you and your ecclesia to provide a safe and loving environment for all.

Dave Jennings

We wish to thank the following brothers and sisters for their important contributions to the EcclesiaSafe program development.

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INTEGRITY

By Nathan Badger

His Children are Blessed

I vividly recall the launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger. January 28, 1986, was a freezing day in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Our grade-seven class crowded around a TV set in our school library to witness Christa McAuliffe, a teacher-astronaut, “go where no schoolteacher had ever gone before.”

We cheered as the rockets roared to life and Challenger hurtled towards space. But, 73 seconds into the launch, the unthinkable happened: a massive explosion. We were heartbroken and shocked. Challenger had disintegrated. The lives of all seven astronauts were gone in an instant.

An investigation was ordered, and in the months that followed, a single word frequently head-lined the press as the reason the mission failed so tragically: **integrity.**

Firstly, Roger Boisjoly,¹ a Shuttle rocket engineer, had warned that the O-ring

seals in the solid rocket boosters would lose their integrity in cold weather. They were faulty and could not be trusted to withstand the launch. Coupled with hot rocket gases, they would crack, fail and result in a catastrophic explosion.^{1,2}

And secondly, Roger demonstrated professional integrity. He appealed for months to have the faulty rocket seals fixed; he was honest and did everything he could to avert a disaster. Even on the morning of the launch, Roger raised repeated and strenuous warnings that NASA should delay. It was the coldest day they had ever launched! But there was too much money, media, public pressure and “saving face” at stake. Sadly, Roger’s integrity was of little value, and NASA dismissed his warnings.^{1,2}

Saving Lives

In the months before the launch, Roger stuck to his values and told the truth about the faulty rocket seals, despite

peer pressure, intimidation and the possibility of losing his job and close friends. Even after the disaster, he showed integrity. He continued to spell out the facts, tell the truth and illuminate “cover-ups” that had been taking place for years, which ultimately led to the loss of seven lives. He suffered significant ill-treatment and psychological strain for standing up for the right thing. Eventually, Roger was even forced to resign from his job because he was ostracized by colleagues and labeled a “whistleblower.” All to save people’s lives by being truthful and not giving in to pressure or being dissuaded by slander.^{1,3}

Thankfully, at the end of the investigation, and in subsequent years, Roger eventually came to be viewed in a different light. He was heralded as a “man of integrity.”⁴ His example prompted international changes in workplace whistleblower policies and the design standards of NASA and many engineering companies.¹ Since the Challenger disaster, Roger’s integrity has saved many lives, despite the seven that were originally lost.

I recently revisited the details of the Challenger disaster. It forced me to ask, “What is integrity?” And “What does God think about integrity?” This month, we want to determine what this word means and illuminate the importance of integrity in our discipleship, all from God’s perspective. Next month, we will investigate several practical ingredients of integrity and discuss how they can positively impact our discipleship. We

will find, as Roger Boisjoly did, that integrity eventually saves lives.

The Integrity of Job

There are many descriptions of integrity on the internet, but the best one is contained in God’s Word. The Book of Job contains a robust definition of integrity, alongside an inspiring demonstration of this word in action. Job was a man who was blessed with great prosperity and happiness; he also suffered devastating troubles and sadness. He suffered debilitating illness and the loss of children, family, friends,

assets and self-esteem. At the same time, he was slandered, maligned through gossip, humiliated, defamed and falsely accused. He was relentlessly judged by several of his “friends,” and undoubtedly others. I am sure Roger Boisjoly could relate. Yet, in all these events, God upholds Job as a great man of integrity:

Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still, he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause. (Job 2:3 NKJV).

We learn that Job was well-known by God for his integrity. It was an integral part of every aspect of his life, both during his initial prosperity and his subsequent troubles. It governed his thoughts, his words, his actions and interactions, and for that reason, God commends him, even to his enemies.

[Integrity] governed
his thoughts, his
words, his actions,
and interactions, and
for that reason, God
commends him, even
to his enemies.

God's Definition of Integrity

Job 2:3 also contains a definition of integrity: the very example of Job. In this verse, God identifies five key ingredients in Job's integrity that are worth marking in our Bibles:

1. Knowledge (of right and wrong)

—God states that Job was “*one who fears God.*” This required that Job maintained an accurate understanding of who God was and how God wanted him to live. He understood God's definition of right and wrong and its practical application in his life. We learn that a knowledge of God and his values are a fundamental ingredient of integrity. How can we develop integrity if we do not know the character and nature of God, or what He has stated is right and wrong from His Word?

2. Conviction (dedication, hold-fast-ness)

—God emphasizes that Job “*holds fast*” to his integrity, even when others attempt to “*incite God against him,*” and to “*destroy him without cause.*” Regardless of the circumstances, Job wholly and fully dedicated himself to act on the godly knowledge he had gleaned. We learn that integrity means a deep devotion and “hold-fast-ness” to God's values. Nothing should move us from our convictions, whether ups or downs, though it may mean we incur loss, harm or humiliation.

3. Behavior (actions, words, thoughts)

—God reveals the faultless behavior of Job. He was an “*upright man*” and one that “*shuns evil*” (“*escheweth evil*”


KJV). According to Strong's, to be “*upright*” means to be “straight, or even” and to shun evil means to “turn away or revolt from” people or circumstances that are perverse in God's eyes. Job's walk matched his talk and his inner thoughts. We learn that integrity is about personal actions, words and thoughts that are driven by God's values. Furthermore, to entertain an environment that scorns these will only undermine our efforts to achieve holy conduct.

4. Consistency (wholeness, complete, all the time)

—God describes Job as “*blameless,*” and a man of “*integrity.*” The thrust of these two words, which both originate from the root word *tamam* (Strong's 8552), is “morally complete, full, or whole.” In other words, Job was not two-thirds good and one-third bad. He was fully and completely a man of integrity. Today we would describe him as consistent. We learn that integrity means every day, in every way. This is not a trait that is part-time, or only “when we feel like it.”

5. Character (who we are, traits, qualities)

—Lastly, God testifies that Job is “*my servant*” and that there is “*none like him in the earth.*” His traits and qualities identified him as unique, and he was widely known as a different kind of person. Throughout the Bible, we learn he was kind, generous, compassionate, just, patient (Jas 5:11) and righteous by faith (Ezek 14:14), among many other qualities. These admonitions also confirm that Job's knowledge, conviction,



Have we made a concerted effort to develop a knowledge of God and his perspective on what is right and wrong? This requires that we regularly search for it through prayer and reading...

behavior and consistency were inseparable parts of his character. And his character was a wonderful ingredient in his integrity. We learn that our character or distinctive traits are important to God. Not because others notice them, but because He wants us to match the very character of God himself (e.g., *Exod 34:6-7*).

Integrity may be a difficult word to wrap our heads around, but Job offers a helpful definition and demonstration for our discipleship. And through Job, God shows that integrity is not simply an academic exercise. All five ingredients require considerable effort, and possibly blood, sweat, and tears. Without sustained action, we will not achieve godly integrity.

A review of Job's ingredients also allows us to ask some tough questions about ourselves. Have we made a concerted effort to develop a knowledge of God and his perspective on what is right and wrong? This requires that we regularly search for it through prayer and reading, rather than a cursory acknowledgment on Sunday morning or at CYC. It's an effort that requires constant tending and growth. Are we deeply convicted by this knowledge, and do we stand fast to this conviction

though the sun may shine or a tornado rip through? Does our behavior match our conviction and knowledge so that we assert God's values in an unmovable and consistent pattern? And is God's character an inseparable part of our integrity?

Also, did you notice how difficult integrity would be without all five ingredients? Each of them is inter-linked. They support and lean on one another. If you remove one, integrity collapses like a Jenga tower. For example, we can hold deep convictions, exhibit good behavior, act consistently, and maintain a character that appears impeccable. But if all these ingredients are founded on a distorted knowledge of God, or of right and wrong, then our integrity will also be distorted. To have integrity, we must undergird the other ingredients with the correct knowledge, and vice-versa.

Like Roger Boisjoly and Job, we will be tested by circumstances and people. Forming a break wall of integrity will help us, and others, to hold fast when we confront the waves and storms even if parts of our lives are washed away. Close friends or our brothers and sisters may even challenge us. God provides us with forty-two chapters that illustrate Job's struggles to understand, develop

and tenaciously hold on to his integrity. They are a guide and encouragement for our own lives. More than once he is challenged to set his integrity adrift in the chaos (e.g., Job 2:9). Job's friends go even as far as to deny his integrity and falsely state that he *"was endlessly evil, makes false pledges, strips the naked of clothing, refuses water to the weary and bread to the hungry, sends widows away empty, and crushes the fatherless."* (Job 22:5-11 ESV). These are staggering accusations and must have been crushing to Job, but he holds fast. When we experience Job's pain, we need to remind ourselves, that in the end, it was Job's integrity that helped save the very lives of his misguided friends (Job 42:7-9). As Roger Boisjoly also discovered, integrity eventually saves lives.

At a Venture

There is another intriguing verse that enhances and completes our definition of integrity. During the period of the kings, Ahab joins forces with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to fight against the king of Syria. During this battle, the record states that *"a certain man drew a bow at a venture and smote the king of Israel [Ahab] between the joints of the harness."* (1 Kgs 22:34).

The phrase *"at a venture"* is the Hebrew word *tome* (Strong's 8537). Surprisingly, it is the same Hebrew word used for Job's *"integrity"* in Job 2:3 (Strong's 8538 *toommaw*), albeit in the masculine form. Strong's Concordance defines both words as meaning "complete, full, integrity, perfection, upright, morally innocent, and simplicity." Both words are normally translated as *"integrity"* throughout the OT. But in

this instance, the different rendering helps us identify another aspect of integrity: the arrow was fired with innocence and simplicity. There was no ill-motivation or pre-meditation by the archer to specifically kill King Ahab. The ESV and several other versions expose this same meaning when they translate the phrase *"at random"* (e.g., ESV). Unfortunately for Ahab, God permitted the arrow to find him, and it killed him.

Practically, this verse helps us to further understand godly integrity, and forms the sixth ingredient:

6. Innocence—Integrity demands a certain level of innocence and simplicity. It does not involve ill or manipulative motivations. It is pure and not devious. It means we are not constantly planning to see what we can get out of someone or how we can take control of a situation. It means we are not seeking to repay, be punitive or vindictive. Instead, we leave this for God to sort out (Rom 12:19).

This final ingredient is an incredible challenge. It is difficult to objectively evaluate our innocence or motivations, let alone someone else's. Only God can intimately and accurately judge the heart (Prov 21:2 NKJV). And that is why only God can truly judge whether someone has integrity or not. But it is important to personally reflect on whether our behavior is innocent, in the sense of this verse. Do we have ulterior motives that cause us to try and manipulate things, and only serve to complicate our circumstances? Perhaps we lie, cajole or seek allies to support our cause? Maybe we intentionally

fire arrows to achieve our end goal? Or do we seek simplicity and purity of intention? It is helpful to remind ourselves that our lives are always subject to God's plan and timelines, and we need only align ourselves with Him. In the end, God will judge the situations we encounter, as He did with Job and his friends.

The Integrity of the Upright

Integrity is a lofty mission. Each of the six ingredients we have explored is a significant task on its own. Job surely made mistakes, though God still considered him to be a model of integrity. We will also make mistakes and must not be discouraged by our missteps.

Several verses in Proverbs encourage us to keep working at them. Solomon uses the word integrity when he reminds us that *"the integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them."* (Prov 11:3). Here, this wise king reveals that God deeply values integrity and wants us to develop it in our lives. Fundamentally, integrity guides the lives of disciples to be *"upright,"* or *"straight"* (Strong's). This is the same adjective used to describe Job (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Solomon also contrasts integrity with perversity. Integrity is completely the opposite of perversity, crookedness

(ESV), or the *"distorted and vicious"* (Strong's) behavior of transgressors.

Without integrity, it is impossible to be an *"upright"* disciple, and we will follow a twisted and harmful path that will eventually destroy us and others nearby. But, if we walk with integrity, it will guide us to become upright disciples. Integrity is like a compass or a GPS which ensures we are on the right hiking trail and that we take the straightest route or the correct forks in the road.

Solomon also shows in Proverbs that integrity will have a positive impact on those around us: *"The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him."* (Prov 20:7). If we decide to integrate integrity with our daily decisions then our children, friends, spouse, colleagues, and others around us will be blessed by God through the outcomes of our integrity. And if we model integrity for others, they may even follow our example of godly integrity.

In the end, as Roger Boisjoly, Job, and Solomon discovered, integrity saves lives.

Nathan Badger,
(Cambridge Ecclesia, ON)

¹ Wikipedia. "Roger Boisjoly." Accessed January 26, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Boisjoly.

² Berkes, Howard. "Remembering Roger Boisjoly: He Tried to Stop the Shuttle Challenger Launch." February 6, 2012. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2012/02/06/146490064/remembering-roger-boisjoly-he-tried-to-stop-shuttle-challenger-launch>.

³ Arnold, Denis. "Case 5. Roger Boisjoly and the Challenger Disaster: Disloyal Employee or Courageous Whistle-Blower?" Accessed January 26, 2022. <https://philosophia.uncg.edu/media/phi361-metivier/readings/Case-Challenger.pdf>.

⁴ Rempel, William. "Engineer Who Opposed Launch Known for Integrity, Intensity." February 26, 1986, Accessed January 26, 2022. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-02-26-mn-53-story.html>.



FROM HEAD TO HEART

By Jeff Gelineau

I'M coming to find in my life that knowledge often lets me down. But God never lets me down. If I trust in my ability to understand what God is doing in my life, I will be disappointed when I come across something I don't understand. If I simply learn to trust God, then I am never disappointed. For me, I have found that the preoccupation with having to understand everything is a hindrance in growing my relationship with God. I have had to focus on moving the knowledge in my head to a trust in my heart.

Some may read this and feel uncomfortable, because it may sound like I'm saying that understanding the Bible isn't as important as simply trusting God. This is a complex and confusing topic, and I find it hard to explain. I often find when trying to describe something that is difficult, it can be better to define what you are NOT trying to say.

- I'm not saying that if you read and study the Bible enough that your knowledge will save you.
- I'm also not saying that all you need is to trust God and He will save you.

Reading and understanding God's word is important, but it is not the goal. The goal is to grow closer to our Creator and his Son, our Lord Jesus.

This is a conversion process. It always begins with knowledge. It must begin with a desire to understand the Bible. You must know God to trust Him. But if you just stay in the knowledge-gathering mode your whole life and don't use that knowledge to build a relationship with God, then you have no hope. 1st Corinthians 13:8 famously tells us that "*love never ends*," but "*as for knowledge, it will pass away*."

You must be converted. Whatever knowledge that you develop in your life must bring you to a lasting and

growing relationship with God. It is our relationship with God that saves us, not solely our knowledge of Him. God is concerned that you have an active and growing knowledge about who He is. How else can a healthy relationship be built if you don't know who He is? God is more concerned that you trust Him. What good is all that knowledge of God if you don't develop a relationship with Him?

The relationship grows because you add more knowledge about who God is and what He stands for. You also nurture it by experiences that you share with God. Effectively, you grow your trust in God by hearing how He has dealt with those in the past, and by seeing how He deals with you today.

You won't be saved if your faith is still based solely on knowledge. That knowledge must bring you to a trusting relationship with God for you to be saved. Proverbs 3:5 comes to mind, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."* You must have things that you understand correctly. But the Faith that is described in the Bible is based in trust in God (rather than us), and a faithfulness to God by being humbly faithful to others.

Each time we are stretched to deal with something outside of our familiar patterns of thought, we have the opportunity to grow. Life is a series of challenges to a faith that is preoccupied with correct thinking. You see things, hear things, and read things that make you question what you once thought you were certain about. You are exposed to articles, blogs, posts, songs, stories, movies, shows, and conversations that make you stop and think.

Peter Enns, a Christian author and college professor, ran an informal survey¹ in 2013 that asked the following questions:

What are your one or two biggest obstacles to staying Christian? What are those roadblocks you keep running into? What are those issues that won't go away and make you wonder why you keep on believing at all?

He writes:

"In the days to come, I was overwhelmed with comments and e-mails from readers, many anonymous, with bracingly honest answers, often expressed through the tears of relentless and unnerving personal suffering. The responses fell into five categories.

1. The Bible portrays God as violent, reactive, vengeful, bloodthirsty, immoral, mean, and petty.
2. The Bible and science collide on too many things to think that the Bible has anything to say to us today about the big questions of life.
3. In the face of injustice and heinous suffering in the world, God seems disinterested or perhaps unable to do anything about it.
4. In our ever-shrinking world, it is very difficult to hold on to any notion that Christianity is the only path to God.
5. Christians treat each other so badly and in such harmful ways that it calls into question the validity of Christianity, or if God even exists at all."

As I read over that list, I had an overwhelming feeling that those survey answers totally resonated with me. It's

not that I don't have answers to those problems. I've had answers that I have shared with young people and friends who have brought similar questions to me in the past. It's just that I don't really feel like my answers are genuine, accurate or honest. I've learned now that I don't have to have answers to those questions. I shouldn't expect myself to fully understand the way that God works or why He does what He does.

When my faith is based on the knowledge that God is good, that He loves me, and that He is all-powerful, then it doesn't bother me when I don't understand something.

That doesn't mean that I have given up on thinking about these things. I am in a lifelong, loving relationship with God and Jesus, and I want to do all that I can to better understand these questions because I believe that will improve my relationship.

You may have noticed that all five of these issues have one thing in common. Peter Enns describes it well.

"All five categories have one big thing in common: Faith in God no longer makes sense to me. Understanding, correct thinking, knowing what you believe—these were once true of their faith, but no longer are. Because life happened. A faith that promises to provide firm answers and relieve our doubt is a faith that will not hold up to the challenges and tragedies of life. Only deep trust can hold up."²

The common denominator is that it doesn't make sense to us as humans. From a human point of view (the only one we have fully in this dispensation) these things seem wrong. *"For now we see in a mirror dimly."* 1 Cor 13:12. With practice and knowledge, we can begin to see through what we understand to be a more divine point of view.

We may want to reconsider the answers that we give our young people when questions like these arise in their lives. We may want to reconsider whether we give them answers at all. For me, the gut reaction has been to jump to the defense of the Bible and give them a workable answer, pieced together from other important concepts in the Bible. It is best to come to their level and relate to them that these are things that we find troubling as well. We can be honest and admit that we do not have all the answers.

Share with others that you agree that these really are challenging questions, and that you struggle with these issues yourself. But also, be sure to share with them the one big certainty that we do know: God is good, God loves us, and God is omnipotent. God knows way more than we will even come close to knowing. His understanding is way beyond ours. We need to come to love God, and to trust that God is doing what is best.

My head may not always be able to understand why God does something, but my heart trusts Him.

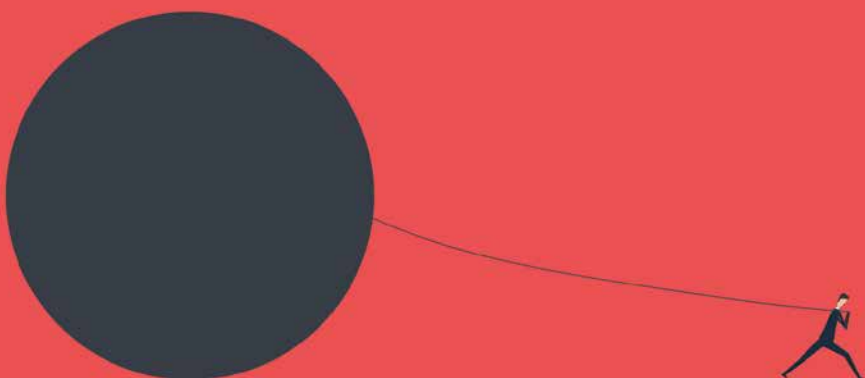
Jeff Gelineau,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)

¹ Enns, Peter. *The Sin of Certainty* (pp. 119-120). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

² Ibid. (p.120)

BURDENS

By Duncan Kenzie



OUR reading for consideration is Matthew 11. Up until recently, according to Matthew, Jesus' ministry had been popular and free of conflict. He had openly traveled around Galilee, publicly conducting his work. As Matthew 9:35 records: *"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness."* (Matt 9:35).¹

But circumstances would soon become more dangerous, and Jesus gives an indication of this shortly after the call of the twelve disciples: *"I am sending you*

out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." (Matt 10:16).

The "wolves" would primarily prove to be the religious authorities who were beginning to be more aggressively hostile to Jesus' teachings and work. When we reach Matthew chapter 11, we find John the Baptist in prison. His imprisonment is described in Matthew 14, in a flashback to the story (see Matt 14:1-12). Recall that Jesus is John's cousin, so when John sends some of his disciples to ask if Jesus is the one who is to come (i.e., Messiah), it's likely John himself already knew this

and that he was providing them with encouragement and a spiritual path forward.

Jesus' response to this question is at once obvious and enigmatic. When he states, "*Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor*" (Matt 11:4-5), he is stating the obvious: "Look, you have heard about and seen the miracles I have been doing. What more proof do you need? Not only that, but God's truth is no longer restricted to the wealthy, educated special class of religious scholars such as the Pharisees, but available to even the lowliest of society." Jesus' next phrase, however, is much less obvious: "*and blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*" (Matt 11:6 ESV). The NIV translates this as, "*Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.*" This is the first recorded instance in Matthew's Gospel of the format of "*Blessed is...*" since the beatitudes in chapter 5. Surely it is an echo of the message there, directed at the crowds of people on the mountainside, again from all walks of life, and likely including the poor. So why does Jesus say this? If we go back to Matthew 5, we see the last beatitude is this one:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
(Matt 5:11-12).

The theme is the same as Matthew

11. It concerns persecution and rejection, something John the Baptist was experiencing directly, something that Jesus was starting to experience more frequently, and that Jesus had warned his disciples to expect. Jesus was inviting his listeners to become part of the "Kingdom of heaven," part of God's dominion and family of believers. This invitation is meant to be a blessing for all of us who accept it, but by the same token, it can lead to pressures from others that can result in suffering for Christ's sake. In Matthew 11:12 Jesus expresses this idea with this stark language: "*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.*" (Matt 11:12).

The only other occurrence of the phrase "*subjected to violence*" is,

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it.
(Luke 16:16).

Here, in a confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus is teaching that you cannot force your way into God's kingdom by self-justification or other means or, in other words, by relying on your own supposed goodness as expressed by your outward actions. The previous two verses explain this:

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight." (Luke 16:14-15).

This is a central theme of both the gospels and Paul's letters. Self-justification by works or by fine outward appearances is completely counter to the principle of being "saved by grace through faith" and does nothing except lead to death. Many of the pressures and persecutions that new believers in the first century experienced were the result of this kind of thinking. We sometimes refer to this as salvation by works, or legalistic thinking, because it often springs from a desire to return to observance of laws as a basis for righteousness. This is what Jesus means when he states, "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." He became the "stone of stumbling and rock of offense" (Isa 8:14; 1 Pet 2:8) for those who rejected his message of salvation.

Jesus strongly condemns this kind of thinking in Matthew 23, in his powerful, astringent polemic against the scribes and Pharisees:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (Matt 23:13).

Notice again the violent imagery employed here: "You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's places." In other words, the Pharisees, by their complex and overwhelming system of rules, had made it impossible for ordinary people to be considered worthy of a place in God's kingdom. Jesus goes on to describe many inconsistencies in their rules when compared to true divine principles. For example:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut

the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Matt 23:13, 23).

His message here is that when we focus on outward actions and those that are trivial, we have completely missed the higher principles God wants us to follow. Note there is nothing wrong with diligent and earnest obedience

The Pharisees, by their complex and overwhelming system of rules, had made it impossible for ordinary people to be considered worthy of a place in God's kingdom.

in itself—Jesus doesn't tell them to abandon tithing completely—he says, essentially, you should have practiced justice, mercy, and faithfulness without neglecting your reverence to God through tithing. This confirms another key principle Jesus taught—"He who is faithful over little I will make faithful over much." (Matt 25:21 ESV). But the danger for us is that we may find it easy to observe and keep rituals without practicing these greater principles, in this case, justice, mercy and faithfulness. I think Jesus likely has Micah 6:8 in mind here:

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD

require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:8 ESV).

Faithfulness, justice and mercy are overarching principles that must guide our way of life.

“Walking humbly with your God” is likely a synonym for “faithfulness.” Faithfulness involves loyalty, commitment and integrity. As Christ’s disciples, this is the great calling to which we have been called. Faithfulness does not involve focusing on outward, ritualistic practices, such as concerns over how we conduct our morning services (Zoom has shown us there is more than one way to do that) or what hymns we sing, or what clothes we wear, or what type of bread or wine we use for the emblems, or what version of the Bible we read from. (Surely having our Farsi-speaking brothers and sisters so much a part of our ecclesial world has now taught us that any insistence on using only the KJV is foolish). Faithfulness is concerned with the large issues, not the trivial ones, such

as personal consistency in behavior and thought. For example, my hope is that when I am among my brothers and sisters, they see the same version of me that my family does at home—and that it’s a godly person they see, not one filled with pride or inconsistencies or judgment towards others.

Justice involves being fair to everyone, extending trust by giving everyone the benefit of the doubt. Or, as Paul puts it, *“esteem others as better than himself.”* (Phil 2:3 NKJV). Justice involves core integrity and honesty. You cannot be just if you lie about something, if you distort facts, or if you are biased in your opinion. Justice involves providing for the needs of the poor and destitute, giving a personal, practical element to your faith, not just saying, *“Go in peace, be warm and well-fed”* (Jas. 2:16) without doing anything about it. Mercy involves practicing forgiveness and understanding your own need for mercy from God. It is also expressed in kindness, both in attitude and in action. Practicing mercy facilitates the ministry of reconciliation which Christ gave to each of us as our personal

Mercy does not look for wrongs or seek to punish them. Mercy is interested in opening the door to the kingdom of heaven as wide as possible, not slamming it shut in people’s faces.

responsibility (see 2 Cor 5:18). Mercy does not look for wrongs or seek to punish them. Mercy is interested in opening the door to the kingdom of heaven as wide as possible, not slamming it shut in people's faces. Mercy does not excuse sin, but it does extend love, kindness, and grace to the sinner, with the hope and desire of positive change resulting from the expression of that mercy.

Let's go back to Jesus' speech against the Pharisees because there is a further connection with today's reading in Matthew 11. Earlier on in this speech, Jesus addresses the crowd:

They (the Pharisees) tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. (Matt 23:4 ESV).

This is likely a reference to the arcane rules and laws the Pharisees had devised and added to the true Law of Moses over the years. But these rules did not help one become closer or pleasing to God. In contrast, they simply placed unbearable burdens on people's faith, crushing their spirit and serving to alienate them from a path to God's presence through simple, trusting obedience.

Do we sometimes place unnecessary burdens on our brothers and sisters? Have we sometimes lost the simplicity of our faith and exchanged it for rituals and rules that create burdens and alienate rather than liberate us and bind us together in love? In Acts 15, early in the growth of the church, the brethren dealt with a major crisis due to the vast cultural divide between Jewish and Gentile converts. The resulting formal

letter that resulted from the Jerusalem conference contained these lines:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell. (Acts 15:28-29).

Note the use of the word "burden" here (the actual Greek is "lay upon you no greater burden,"² similar language to Jesus' in Matt 23:4). Even with all the potential conflicts over the form of worship, residual wrong beliefs (on both sides), and countless cultural differences, the apostles only saw fit to suggest (not even absolutely demand) the few changes in conduct for the Gentiles mentioned in verse 29. Notice the apostles were keen not to impose unnecessary burdens. This is the spirit we must maintain in our ecclesial lives. It's all too easy to make demands of others to conform to our understanding of what is right and true godly behavior and belief. But really, we should focus on ourselves. We often talk in terms of brothers and sisters being conservative or liberal in their religion. One brother expressed it this way to me once: we must be conservative with ourselves, and liberal towards others. In other words, always have the highest expectation of godly thought and conduct for yourself. Do not worry yourself about others' apparent weaknesses, faults or inadequacies. Instead of seeking to place burdens on them by the imposition of your standards and expectations, choose

to “*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” (Gal 6:2 ESV). Bearing someone’s burdens involves engaging with a spirit of understanding, mercy, kindness, and justice—the key principles we saw earlier. It means listening and coming to a place where we can understand a person on their terms, not our own. We cannot influence people for good if we do not first seek to understand them.

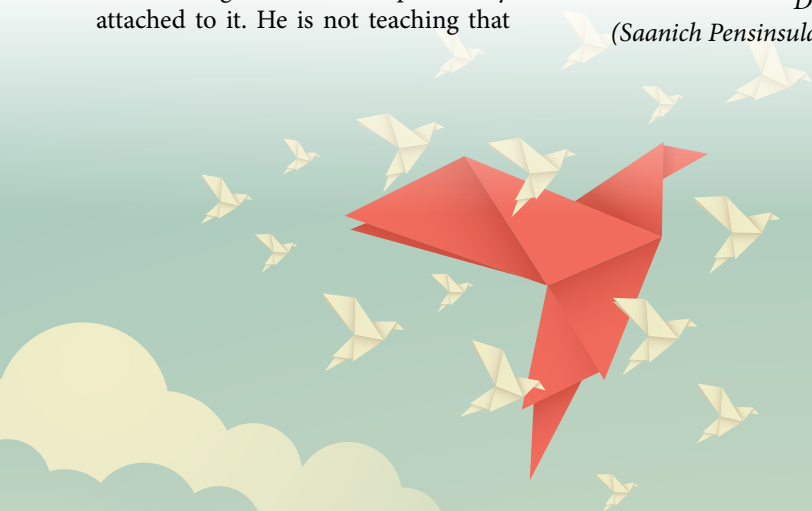
I think this is the essence of Jesus’ message at the end of Matthew 11, where in contrast to the violent, destructive practices of the religious rulers of his day, Jesus says:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt 11:29-30 ESV).

Jesus is not denying that following Him has a great deal of responsibility attached to it. He is not teaching that

life itself is a picnic once we choose to follow Him. He does not state “I will take away all your burdens and cast off all yokes”. Instead, he calls us to be slaves to righteousness, to follow in his footsteps, according to the example He left for is in his submission to the cross (1 Pet 2: 21-25). But his burden is light. It is not the burden of following rules and laws that aim to unnecessarily stifle our individuality or freedom of conscience or that are barriers to our worship. It is not the burden of experiencing judgment from our brothers and sisters when we fail to meet their own expectations. It is the burden of quiet, trusting faithfulness, of personal integrity, sincerity, and obedience that springs from a true love of our Savior, lightened by an understanding of the great mercy that has been extended to us and by a belief that we stand before God in a condition of grace (Rom 5:2).

*Duncan Kenzie,
(Saanich Pensinsula Ecclesia, BC)*



¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version.

² Greek word for “burden” in Acts 15:28 is βάρος - baros. In Matthew 23:4 it is φορτίον phortion. See in Matt 11:30 and Luke 11:46.

IT'S ALL ABOUT REACHING OUT

By Tim Harford-Brown

An Interview with Bro. Tim Harford-Brown of *The Flying Scrolls*.

IN the following conversation, recorded on December 29th, 2021, Tim Harford-Brown (Rugby, United Kingdom) and Levi Myers (Cambridge, Ontario) discuss the power of music as a form of community outreach and in-reach. Bro. Tim also shares his past and current musical projects from *The Flying Scrolls*, a Christadelphian music group, and reveals personal insights into the

process of writing original music and recording songs professionally. The full interview is featured in the March 2021 episode of the Good Christadelphian Music podcast, available wherever you listen to podcasts.

Levi: Today, I'm super excited to have with me Tim Harford-Brown. He's a member of the band, *The Flying Scrolls*. Tim, why don't we just start with a background on what you're doing with music in the Christadelphian world.



The early days of Street Reach in action.

Tim: Well, first and foremost, the group, from its very inception, was all about preaching the Word of God through music. It originally started with Sis. Yve Smithers, who is now my wife. She initially wanted to go out onto the streets of Handsworth, in Birmingham, and perform little drama sketches, and then do music and Bible readings. Basically, encouraging people to either come along to a Sunday meeting or to take a leaflet or a flyer, or just listen to the reading, but basically to preach the gospel. So that's really how the group started.

Levi: That's fascinating. It's definitely a different way for a band to come together as a group! And I love that you're doing it with your wife. That's super special.

Tim: Yeah! So then Yve's sister joined the group as well—she's a singer. Then her boyfriend (they're now husband and wife as well), who until very recently were in the band too. Yve's parents were in the group as well. From about 2004, we went out onto the streets pretty much every month, weather permitting, and we played in some pretty amazing weather conditions—In the UK But we get all sorts of weather

here—hurricanes, rain and sunshine—especially a lot of rain! We were doing this outside every month. We came up with the name, Street Reach. One time we did a Street Reach, in Torquay, which is where I'm from, in Devon, and it was so hot. I had a couple of cymbals on the drum kit because I'm a drummer. With the sun it was like sitting in front of a mirror basically. I actually caught sunstroke that weekend! But other times it was raining, wild weather. We played all sorts of weather conditions and we got really sort of hardened to it. We very much encouraged people to come and join us from the ecclesia that was nearest to us, wherever we were doing it, and they would. We would always find a cafe afterward and have something to eat or just a cup of tea or coffee, so it was a fellowship experience as well.

Levi: Street Reach, you called it? That's a cool name, I like that.

Tim: It was all about reaching out, that's the idea. From then, both sets of people in the band got married, and we started having children, and that kind of changed the dynamic of the band. As we were going along, we thought, wouldn't it be great to reach more people if we



A photo of The Flying Scrolls group from 2013, taken for the Job: Dust to Diamond album photoshoot. Back row from L to R: Tim Harford-Brown, Mark Smithers, Nat Stock, Charlie Adams, Rob Lawson. Front Row from L to R: Julia Smithers, Dawn Stock, Abigail Coleman, Yve Harford-Brown, and Andy Weighell.

could? So, we decided to make some recordings. There was an abandoned project that I had in the back of my mind, which was started in the late eighties/early nineties with some friends of mine down in Devon, on the story of Job. They'd written about seven or eight songs about Job. The idea was like a rock opera, with a story. It had a beginning, a middle, and an end, but they'd only tackled half the story of Job. For one reason or another, they didn't finish it off. I got their permission to carry on and along with my brother-in-law, we wrote the remainder of the songs needed. So, we had fourteen songs in the end. That became our first recording, and we called it "Job: From Dust to Diamond." We had the entire book of Job, forty-two chapters, in these fourteen songs. That was our first record. It took us a long time to make, about three and a half years.

Levi: Tell me more about the recording process. Did you have equipment of your own? Did you have to go to an actual studio?

Tim: Well, we did a bit of both. Basically, the best way we found was when we got MacBook Pros (a bit of a plug there!), we got a digital interface and just bought some really good microphones and recorded it ourselves. Then right at the very end, after we mixed it, we went into a professional recording studio for six days and we got a guy to master it for us. So that's like polishing a car. You've washed it and you've cleaned it, and then the final bit is to polish the car. That's basically what mastering is.



Members of the Flying Scrolls recording vocals for an album.

It kind of polishes everything, giving it a professional sound.

Levi: It's kind of the process of making it sound the best on any speaker you listen to, right?

Tim: Right. As well, because we did it professionally, each song had a code. So, when we put it onto streaming services, it meant that it's registered as us. It's a good way of doing it, really. After we did Job, we did another record called "3:16." I think there's forty-six "3:16s" in the Bible, and we managed to get forty-two of them into sixteen songs. We kind of put them into groups. That took a bit more than two years to record.

Levi: That's an interesting concept. It certainly does take a lot of time, effort and work, but it's well worth it.

Tim: It is well worth it. When we started doing Street Reach, we wanted it to be a preaching project and it still is. We realized that music is such a powerful thing and obviously it's from God. And we realized that you can really get a message across in a very short and succinct way in a song. More than



Bro. Joe Miles plays guitar.

you could in a lecture, you can get very complex things across in a song. So, for example, on the 3:16 album, we've got a song called "Love Manifest." We've got John 3:16, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,*" in that song. In this three to four minutes of the song, you've got the entire concept of God's love. We just found it's a really potent and powerful way of preaching. It's something, as Christadelphians, that we should embrace a bit more, I think.

Levi: I think that's really important because there are a lot of people out there who learn in different ways, and who will respond differently to music than others. Music can be extremely powerful and moving for many people. Like you say, as Christadelphians, in the past, there've been a lot of piano-only songs, or the green hymn book by itself, which I think is very good and has its place. But I also think there's room for a variety of different styles and arrangements, just always incorporating those amazing lyrics that can teach and

uplift and praise.

Tim: Yeah. Obviously when you write a song or when you record something, you never know the impact it's going to have. There's a song on the Job album called "My Redeemer Lives", which is all about Job's faith and about his belief in the resurrection from the dead, which is a cornerstone of our faith, isn't it? I've had people come up to me and say, "I want to have that played at my funeral, I really love this song. It's very powerful." Again, it's a four-and-a-half-minute song, and you never know the impact it's going to have. Yes, it's hard work and it's really difficult to write original material that doesn't sound like anybody else, but if you can do it, it can have a really amazing effect.

Levi: I really like the concept of preaching and just kind of finding that different avenue. Because preaching, so often, I think, in the Christadelphian community, has just been inviting people to a lecture, or a seminar that we're putting on. I think it really opens the door for a whole different vein of people, where something like music really appeals to certain individuals



Bro. Andy Weighell on bass.

more than sitting in an hour-long class. You can build a connection through people with the music, and that can become a conversation that they have, where they still are able to have Scriptural discussions. The music can be that initial pull, something which might interest them.

Tim: That's true. It's been really important for the people involved in the group that fundamentally the lyrics are straight out of the Bible. I'd say probably 90% of our songs are direct quotes from the Bible. That's something that is massively important to us because there are a lot of Christian groups out there that have written some great tracks, some very catchy songs. But there's a lot of stuff out there that hasn't really got much spiritual depth to it. So that was important, as we're a Bible-based community, to have the Bible as the focus of what we're all about. That's what we've tried very hard to incorporate into our music.

Levi: Please tell me about one of the favorite songs that you have written or done, that you've been involved with.

Tim: "My Redeemer Lives" is one I'm pretty pleased with. I wrote it when I was working in a factory. When I first moved to Birmingham, I worked in a factory that was making car parts for Audi sports cars. There was this steam hammer that was for hammering the parts out, and the song just came to me while I was working. The lyrics to the chorus is, "My Redeemer lives, I will see His face, me and not another, He will give me a place, a place in his Kingdom, a place here on Earth, although I'm dead, he'll raise me, born to a second birth."

I'd been reading a lot about Job at the time and that whole chorus almost came to me, but this was before we had audio devices on phones. I didn't have a recording device on my phone, so I quickly had to get a phone and ring up my answering machine at home, so I wouldn't forget it. When I got home, it was there on the answering machine, and then I could kind of work the chords out! That's basically how a lot of my songs go. Many of my songs come to me that way when I've been thinking about a passage in the Bible and doing something else.

Levi: You mentioned some upcoming projects, what's next for you guys?

Tim: We are working on new material, and we are going to start recording some new songs this year, God-willing, we hope to have a new album out this time next year. It's not a themed album



Bro. Tim Harford-Brown on drums.

as such, it's a collection of songs. It seems that a lot of the songs are about the Kingdom, or about needing the Kingdom. It wasn't planned that way; it's just how it seems to have gone.

All the members that are going to be recording on the record have actually written songs for this album, so that's really nice that everyone's involved in the writing.

There's also an album that's in the pipeline about the Song of Songs. We've got about fifteen songs that are written, ready to go.

Levi: Well, this has been so encouraging for me, and I think for a lot of other people, to hear of brothers and sisters out there who are really trying to use music as a tool for preaching and for these exciting and uplifting kinds of things. Music can be something that's controversial for people, but it really should unite us and excite us and help

us to be a tool that we can use for both building our faith and for building the faith of those around us. Thank you so much for sharing all of this.

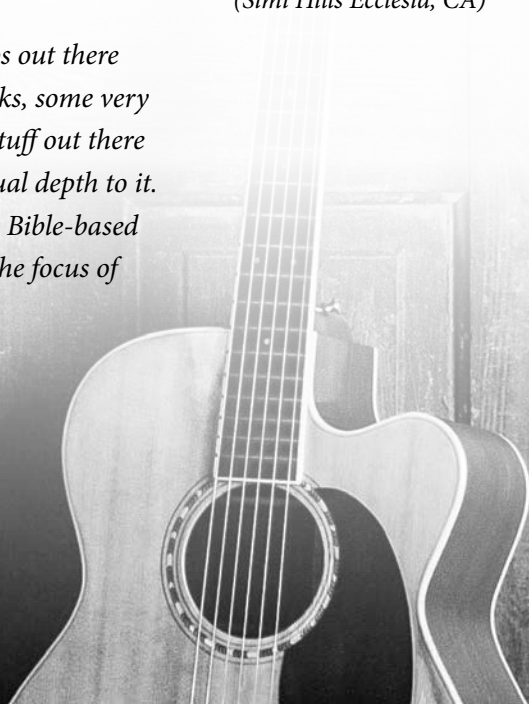
To listen and learn more about the band, Search: "The Flying Scrolls" on Facebook, Spotify, and YouTube.

Also, please visit the band webpage: theflyingscrolls.co.uk, where albums can be previewed and purchased as digital downloads. Bro. Tim Harford-Brown can be contacted at harfordbrown@hotmail.co.uk.

We thank him again for taking the time to share his experiences and thoughts!

*Jessica Gelineau,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)*

There are a lot of Christian groups out there that have written some great tracks, some very catchy songs. But there's a lot of stuff out there that hasn't really got much spiritual depth to it. So that was important, as we're a Bible-based community, to have the Bible as the focus of what we're all about.



Editor's Note: Our congratulations to Bro. Levi and Sis. Jessica Gelineau with the birth of their new daughter, Mattea Josephine Gelineau, born January 29th.

WHO CAN BIND THE STRONG MAN?

By Steve Cheetham

IT started out with an accusation from his own family: “*He is out of his mind.*” The scribes, surprised at hearing this from Jesus’ relatives seized on this thought and then slandered him. “*He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.*” (Mark 3:22).

Jesus then rebukes them for their faulty logic and shows that Satan could not cast out Satan. He then illustrates this showing a house divided against itself is doomed to fail. But then, an unusual parable, “*No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.*” (Mark 3:27).

How would his disciples understand this parable? What do you think it means? Samson was the only strong man in scripture who was bound, enabling the enemies of Israel to plunder the house of Israel. In light of this parable, we can clearly see the goal of the Philistines was to “bind the strong man” of Israel.

Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him. (Judg 16:5).

Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.”(Judg 16:6).



The Hebrews displayed an astounding lack of faith. They saw the miracles and signs of Samson but wouldn't follow him. In the end, Samson stood alone.

If they bind me. (Judg 16:7).

And she bound him. (Judg 16:8).

If they bind me fast with new ropes. (Judg 16:11).

The Philistines eventually prevailed. *"But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass."* (Judg 16:21).

What is even sadder is that earlier, Samson's own countrymen from Judah, thought it expedient to bind Samson. *"We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines."* (Judg 15:12).

Samson was God's Deliverer. The angel proclaimed that he would begin to save them from their arch enemy, the Philistines, yet the men of Judah worked alongside the Philistines to

bind Samson and deliver him for death.

The Hebrews displayed an astounding lack of faith. They saw the miracles and signs of Samson but wouldn't follow him. In the end, Samson stood alone. The Hebrews had chosen to remain in bondage to the Philistines, instead of becoming free men. With Samson bound, they could spoil and rule over the house of Israel.

Perhaps what we miss at the beginning of our story was that Jesus' own family wanted to bind him too! The words "*lay hold*" mean to restrain, "*seize by force*" (Weymouth), "*lay hold on him*" (YLT). Like Samson's brethren, Jesus' brethren wanted to have power over him, and bind him up. Like the Philistines, Jesus' religious contemporaries eventually succeeded and caused him to be bound and delivered to his enemies. *"All the*

chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: And when they had bound him, they led him away.” (Matt 27:1-2).

In the end, Jesus stood alone.

We can easily understand that Samson **was** a strong man. What we fail to appreciate sometimes is that Jesus was the strong man! *“Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.” (Psa 80:17).*

Consider these similarities: both Jesus and Samson had their births announced by angels, both were to be deliverers, both performed signs and miracles. We see many parallels between Samson and Jesus. But in the end, Samson ended up being a slave in his enemy’s house. He would die with them. The slander of the scribes painted the same picture. Their hateful slander against the Son of the Living God was that Jesus couldn’t save because he was the slave to a Philistine god, Beelzebub. But we still haven’t solved this parable. Who is the strong man that Jesus speaks of?

When we read carefully, the answer is given. Evil can’t cast out evil. The strong man in the parable must be sin. Sin is what binds all of us to death. So, the real question in Jesus’ parable is who can bind the strong man of sin?

There is only one man stronger than “the strong man”, only one man who can bind him—Jesus!

But let’s step back for a minute. The Greek word *Beelzebub* means: “Lord of the House”. When you think of this slander directed at Jesus, you realize that sin was never “The Lord, the possessor of the house” of Jesus, his

body. Until Jesus lived, sin successfully resisted every attempt made against it. Even a strong man like Samson could not prevail against it. The mighty Samson could not bind sin, so sin ruled in his house.

But Jesus was always the Lord of his house, not Beelzebub. Jesus would not be under its dominion. Jesus bound the strong man of sin his entire mortal existence. Paul picks up on this in Hebrews and Romans.

That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb 2:14-15).

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Rom 6:16).

We can see how this simple parable starts to illuminate a greater truth to us. Sin is the master that has ruled mankind. It is the strong man demanding submission, obedience from us. But the parable goes on. There are two metaphors used in this parable.

1. *“Spoil his goods”*—The word “goods” (Gr. *skeuos*) is translated as “vessel” 19 out of 22 times. I believe the translators missed this and it should have been translated as “spoil his vessel”. Scripture uses “vessel” as a metaphor for our bodies. It’s the same word used in 1 Thessalonians; *“that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thess 4:4).* Or in this version *“keep his body holy” (BBE).*

This is where Samson, and the rest of us have failed. For us to successfully possess our vessel means that everything that was previously in it, (i.e., sin), be displaced, pushed out, swept clean and filled with righteousness. Jesus did what we fail to do. He took possession of his body, took it captive, spoiled it.

This brings us to our second metaphor.

2. “Spoil the house”. The word “house” means an “inhabited dwelling” or the “inmates of the house” (Liddell & Scott).

All of us are inmates, locked in a body of sin. Prisoners seeking freedom. This can only happen if someone more powerful than the strongman of sin frees us. We probably don’t think of sin or the infirmities of the flesh this way, but clearly, all of us are bound.

Behold, a woman that had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years; and she was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up. And when Jesus saw her, he called her, and said to her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. (Luke 13:11-12).

Now consider verse 16 in the context of this parable:

And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?

Jesus can unbind, unloose those bound from sin. Perhaps the very next day, Jesus would illustrate this parable. Jesus crossed the Galilee with the sole intention of healing one-man—Legion.

There met him... a certain man, which had devils long time, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. (Luke 8:27).

He was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness. (Luke 8:29).

Legion was a strong man, who could not be bound. He made his home in the tombs. Who could conquer such a formidable enemy? Jesus overpowered Legion, the strong man. We next see him submissive, sitting at the feet of Jesus and “in his right mind.” (v 35) The Greek for “right mind” means to “exercise self-control,” “to curb one’s

passions.” When you think of our Lord, the real battle was inside himself. Jesus defeated the strong man of sin within him by condemning it, never giving in to it. He strangled evil thoughts and bound them tightly.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh... casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God,

and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor 10: 3,5 ASV).

This is where Samson, and the rest of us have failed. For us to successfully possess our vessel means that everything that was previously in it, (i.e., sin), be displaced, pushed out, swept clean and filled with righteousness.

But the only way sin could be truly defeated, was to put his body to death. When Jesus was raised, clothed in immortality, he had taken his captivity captive. It was conquered and destroyed. Jesus entered the arena of sin, this was in his own body, and there he defeated it!

This brings us back to Samson. Samson was in the arena, in the house of a Philistine God, possibly Beelzebub. He too stretched out his arms, and he destroyed that house of sin. He brought down that evil building and he also destroyed his own body of flesh. His death pointed to what Jesus would do more fully. Only Jesus could say, *"Destroy this temple (i.e. house, see Matt 21:12-13), and in three days I will raise it up."* (John 2:19).

Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD

the Lord belongeth the discharge from death. (Psa 68:18-20 KJ21).

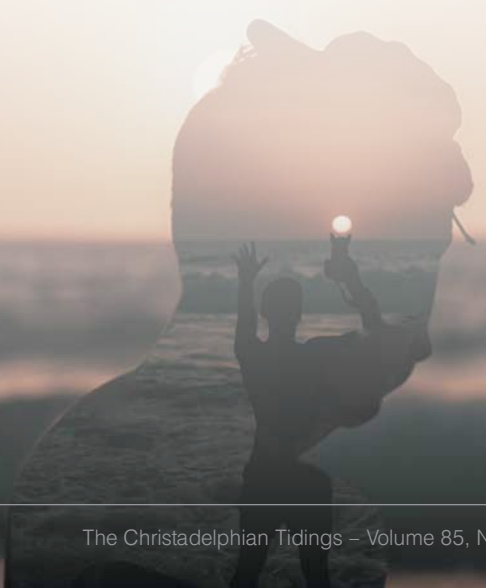
Our strong man Jesus tells us this: *"Him who overcomes."* Perhaps a better translation is to *"Him that conquers will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."* (Rev 3:12).

In Matthew's account where Jesus is called Beelzebub, Matthew adds one more detail. *"He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad."* (Matt 12:30 KJ21).

This challenge from Jesus is directed to us. Which strong man will you serve? Will you battle the strong man of sin who is trying to occupy your body, or do you resist? If we choose wisely like Legion, this blessing will fall on us too.

But Jesus said unto him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how He hath had compassion on thee." (Mark 5:19).

Steve Cheetham
(Moorestown Ecclesia, NJ)



PART 2

DAVID IN ROMANS

by John Owen

IN Romans 5 the Apostle shows the impact of sin juxtaposed with the impact of God's grace. We, as David wrote in Psalm 51, are "*shapen in iniquity*," each of us is born with a sin-prone nature, flawed, hence Romans 5:12, "*so death passed upon all men*". We grasp that we are born mortal, it's the nature we all inherit. But here is the key point, "*death passed upon all men, upon which all have sinned.*"



We've inherited a mortal, sin-prone nature; on top of which **we** have sinned! It's important that we accept we are sinners who deserve to die.

In baptism, we acknowledge that we publicly confess that we can't save ourselves and we need Christ's victory. Romans 6:4 shows,

We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

The Lord Jesus Christ was raised by the glory of the Father, in other words in accordance with God's standard, His character (cp. Exodus 33-34). Because the Lord Jesus had never sinned, it was right that God raised him from the grave. In His grace, God has mercifully offered salvation to those who accept His standard, those who have the humility to see His way as the only way, the perfect way, and furthermore try to live by it.

We are now walking in newness of life (Romans 6:4, which is clearly a newness of spirit in Romans 7:6). In this new way of life, we all have a responsibility to hear and use our knowledge of God to make decisions that we believe, from scripture, to be right. God has given us free will; the question is who will we serve? Self, sin, which leads to death? Or God's right ways? We note in 2 Samuel 7 where God makes such a fundamental promise to David. Twelve times David is referred to as God's "servant." We know too that David's service is from his heart, Nathan said to him, "*Do all that is in thine heart.*" This is where the change should come at our baptisms,

Ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you, being then made free from sin, he became the servants of righteousness. (Rom 6:17-18).

Where Saul had chosen to serve sin, he'd ended up in the grave with no hope. David is choosing to serve God and His right ways were choosing eternal life, God promised him "*Thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee.*" If we too make that choice and "*become servants to God,*" we know "*the end, everlasting life.*" (Rom 6:22). Is serving God easy? No, it's a challenge, because it's not our way! Our weak natures are prone to sin; naturally, we want to serve ourselves.

In Psalm 51, as David asks for forgiveness from God, he first asks to be washed and cleansed of his sin—as God's inspired writer we see him laying the seeds for the need for us to be baptized to wash away our sins (cp. Acts 22:16). We also notice from the Psalm that David prays, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*"

This is surely the "*newness of spirit*" that we are now serving God in. Our sin is dealt with, we have a new spirit, we are choosing God's ways because we want to live by them, and we see they are better than anything the world can offer. Does that mean we are now perfect? Sadly not!

God has given us free will; the question is who will we serve? Self, sin, which leads to death? Or God's right ways?

We still fail. Romans 7 shows us clearly the battle we all have with sin, even after our baptisms.

The inspired apostle speaks of his personal battle with his nature, and his frustration with it, *“The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.”* (Rom 7:19). A key point from this is that the spiritual person (e.g., Paul) has a battle going on. For us, it is important the battle with sin is well and truly alive. The influence of the world in our lives (much of which we choose to bring into our homes, and minds!) too easily sears our conscience, like *“a hot iron.”* (1 Tim 4:2).

How do we keep the battle going? There is a clue in Romans 7:22, *“I delight in the law of God after the inward man.”* This is picking up Psalm 40, *“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”* In another Psalm, David was inspired to write giving us the thoughts and words of the Lord

Jesus Christ a thousand years before he existed in person (Hebrews 10 proves that).

If we make God’s will our delight, the battle becomes more effective. We look at God’s ways and see them as right—the beauty of His creation, His set up of man and woman, the family structure, a clear unchanging moral code defining right and wrong. It’s a stable rock on which we can build our lives. Wonderfully too, in God, we see a character that is: *“merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth.”* (Exo 34:6). Of course, the fruit of God’s character, His spirit, is *“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”* (Gal 5:22).

Why wouldn’t we delight in God’s ways when we see the fruit? Practically, how can we help ourselves delight in God’s ways (to help keep the battle going in us)? Clearly, in alluding to Psalm 40,



Psalm 143	Romans
1: "In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness."	1:17: "Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith."
2: "In thy sight shall no man living be justified."	3:23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."
4: "My heart within me is desolate."	1:21: "Their foolish heart was darkened."
8: "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk"	8:1, 4: "Walk not after the flesh but after the spirit."
9: "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies."	7:24: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death."
10: "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."	8:14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."
12: "I am thy servant."	6:22: "being made free from sin, and become servants to God."

we realize that we are to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Before he says, "I delight to do thy will," he says, "Mine ears hast thou opened."

This is surely a huge help. To delight in God's ways begins with an open ear to the Word of God. For the Lord Jesus, morning by morning (Isa 50:4), made time to listen to his Father's Word.

We know we have a weak sin-prone nature. If we are serious about the battle, what choices can we make to help ourselves in this struggle? Are we giving time to God's word each day? Do we make a choice to take our family to a Bible School for a holiday? Do we get involved in preaching campaigns? Do we put the local fraternal, or study days, in our diary and go to them? What do we listen to on journeys? There really are lots of ways that we can feed on God's Word. Too easily we put barriers up and make excuses; instead, we feed the flesh! Rather, we are instructed to

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." (Rom 13:14).

Bro. Robert Roberts in the preface to the *Bible Companion* wrote: "Salvation depends upon the assimilation of the mind to the divine ideas, principles, and affections, exhibited in the scriptures... much spiritual fructification is only to be realised in connection with fructifying influences of the Spirit in the Word."

In Psalm 143:10, David prays, "**Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.**" Within the Psalm there are number of connections we can make to Romans.

Whatever the context in which David wrote this Psalm, it is clear that he is aware of his unworthiness—so he pleads to God on the basis of God's character, verse 1, "In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness." He knows that he can't plead to God

on his own righteousness, verse 2, *“For in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”* He’s struggling enormously with the problems he’s facing, verse 4, *“My spirit is overwhelmed.”* Even in that tremendous struggle, notice what he does, verses 5-6, he starts recalling Scripture, he prays, his ear is open to scripture. In verse 8 he says, *“Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning, for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk.”*

He’s willing to be taught by the word, verse 10: *“Teach me to do thy will: thy spirit is good; lead me in the land of uprightness.”*

Because
although (as
weak erring
creatures) we
don’t know
what to pray
for always,
our spiritual
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is making
intercession
for us!

In spite of our current problems, *“the sufferings of this present time”* as Romans 8:18 puts it, God will help us through them, especially if we have chosen and continue to be God’s servant, just as David did. We serve our Heavenly Father; we make choices in our lives which put His

will before our own.

We can be confident if we are choosing to serve God and His right ways rather than choosing to serve ourselves and sin. Granted, although we still have struggles with sin and our own mortality, we have confidence in our hope of glory. Romans 8:31 assures us that for those who want God’s ways, God is on our side: *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* There is so much comfort to be taken from

this section of Scripture. If we can align our minds to Christ, we share a fellowship of Spirit (cp. Phil 2:1-5). The Spirit we’re trying to cultivate isn’t our natural disposition. But, if we have a genuine desire to be Christ-like, our spiritual mindset can help with our circumstances, because although (as weak erring creatures) we don’t know what to pray for always, our spiritual mindset is making intercession for us! How? Because God, who knows our hearts, knows the spiritual mindset we have. The word *“because”* in Romans 8:27 both the AV and RV margins render as *“that”*—it’s the mind of the Spirit that *“makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

When we’re really feeling the drag of our human nature, we can feel lost for words, but the point here is God knows our innermost thoughts! We believe Romans 8:24 is picking up Psalm 38, a psalm of David. David is struggling with life, but he writes, *“Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee.”* In other words, Lord, you know my desire, you know my innermost thoughts, my groanings.

This is what is so wonderful about these verses in Romans. If your heart’s desire is to be in the Kingdom, God will see that you truly love and want to serve Him. The result of which is that God will ensure that all the challenges of our mortal lives will work together for good. Nothing will be *“able to separate us from the love of God, which is Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Rom 8:39).

John Owen
(Mumbles Ecclesia, UK)

A PHILOSOPHY OF DOCTRINE

By Richard Morgan

HAVE you ever debated with someone, perhaps from another church, about doctrine and come away from the discussion thinking, “Well, what was the point of that?” For instance, I’ve had many discussions on Biblical Unitarianism versus

Trinitarianism. But rarely do those discussions go anywhere because the person I’m talking to is just as firmly entrenched in their understanding as I am, so we both come away thinking we won the debate.

The impasse of doctrinal discussions got me thinking lately about our *philosophy* of doctrine. Let me explain what I mean by that. A Christadelphian's understanding of the Godhead is that there is one God, the Father and that his son Jesus Christ was a man born by the power of the Holy Spirit and had no preexistent form. That's typical Biblical Unitarianism. On the other hand, an orthodox evangelical Christian believes that the Godhead comprises three persons sharing a unity of substance, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now, if both the Christadelphian and evangelical Christian were intellectually honest, they would have to admit to themselves that, at least at first, we believe what we do because we were brought up with those beliefs. That is, most of us inherit our understanding of doctrine because we were born into whatever church we end up attending.

Less often do we have instances of individuals, completely independent of a prior understanding of doctrine, base their belief of either Biblical Unitarianism or Trinitarianism on their completely independent study. I would submit that **nobody** could ever independently derive the Trinity from the Bible. That doctrine was formulated as the result of centuries of Christian thought during the Roman period, with intellectuals (albeit also steeped in classical philosophy alongside the Bible) building on the work of each other. To think that somebody could start reading the Bible without any knowledge and arrive at the same conclusions borders on the ridiculous. Someone might conclude

the deity and/or preexistence of Christ, but not the Trinity. On the other hand, I have had the personal experience of meeting several Christadelphians who have studied themselves out of their Trinitarian churches to arrive at the same understanding as us regarding the Godhead. But, unless someone is really searching and studying for themselves, we believe what we believe most of the time because that's how we were brought up.

All of this begs the question as to whether God is happy with people who understand doctrine because that's what they were taught by other people, like their parents or Sunday School teachers. On the one hand, it is reasonable to assume that this has to be the case. Paul writes, "*How are they to hear without someone preaching?*" (Rom. 10:14.) Most people aren't inclined or can't spend the time to delve into the Scripture and find out all the things it teaches. For example, God didn't expect every Israelite to be a Bible student and teacher, and He separated the Levites for that task. Similarly, not all of us are Bible students, and there is much other work in our ecclesias that is just as necessary and important.

On the other hand, James writes, "*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*" (Jas 3:1.) It behooves the teachers among us to try to get things right—to teach sound doctrine from the Bible. That necessitates "*rightly handling the word of truth.*" (2 Tim 2:15.) Does it, though, condone blindly following what was passed on by

past generations? For instance, when preparing a talk on a first principle topic, is it good enough to find out what the BASF has to say on the matter and base everything off that?

While dependence on the work of others has its place in how we go about studying and teaching the Bible, surely there is more to it, and that's where we come to think about a philosophy of doctrine. To help us, we can look at history. How did those who went before us arrive at a set of doctrinal beliefs, and can we learn from them? Let's go back five hundred years to the time of the Protestant Reformation.

The Protestant Reformers of the 16th century, men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli, realized that the Catholic Church had become blinded by tradition. As Europe began to free itself from the feudalism of the Middle Ages during the Renaissance, education flourished, and people who had only known knew life as a serf could now learn to read and write. Prior to that, during the Middle Ages, learning was mainly available to only the erudite scholar and clergy. They used a learning method called **Scholasticism** which only worked to entrench orthodox dogma further. A Scholastic would take two seemingly contradictory texts, for instance, a Bible passage and a work by a classical philosopher, and an attempt to harmonize the texts through a didactic, learning technique. Consequently this just reinforced

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much of the religious syncretism that had produced the orthodox body of doctrine in the first place. It simply melded Bible passages with Platonic and Aristotelian thinking.

As Scholasticism began to lose popularity, it made way for Renaissance Humanism (not to be confused with today's Humanism), which emphasized individual learning and growth. Instead of defending church dogma, a catchphrase of Renaissance Humanism was *ad fontes*, which means "to the sources." There was a renewed interest in getting back to the original Hebrew and Greek, with Humanists like Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) gathering ancient texts to better

understand what the Bible teaches. In time, these things brought about a reassessment of the orthodox church that had held Europe in its grip for centuries.

The men who led the Protestant Reformation were very courageous. They stood up to the Catholic Church, identified its errors, and eventually pulled away. Corrupt practices such as indulgences were rejected, as were confusing doctrines like Transubstantiation.

However, some men and women who joined the Reformation did not think men like Calvin and Zwingli went far enough. They began looking at other more fundamental doctrines like baptism and the nature of God.

Unfortunately for many of them, the main branch of the Reformation became just as militant as the Catholic Church in their treatment of those who disagreed with them. Anabaptists were drowned in rivers. Men like learned Spanish scholar and physician Michael Servetus (c. 1511-1553), who studied the Bible for themselves and concluded that the Bible does not teach the Trinity, were burned at the stake.

At the same time, a man named Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), who grew up in Italy, the center of Renaissance Humanism, also concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity was not found in the Bible.

His views on the Trinity and other doctrines were extraordinarily radical, and he, like others, was threatened with persecution. He found an enclave in Poland, the only country in Europe that practiced religious toleration. For about one hundred years, Socinus and

those who followed him became known as the Polish Brethren. Later, they would be nicknamed the *Socinians* after their founder. Even though the Socinians as a distinct entity dissolved through internal dissension and subsequently when the Polish Brethren were exiled out of Poland, they took their writings with them as they scattered to places like Holland and England. The legacy of the Socinians is perhaps one of the most underrated in Christian history. Their writings—and

their philosophy of doctrine—affected and shaped the Christian churches in England, later the New World, and entered into the hearts and minds of men like John Locke and Thomas Jefferson in shaping the United States of America.

I have a copy of the Racovian Catechism on my bookshelf—the main summary of Bible doctrine as understood by the Polish Brethren. A Christadelphian could have written it. Doctrines like the relationship between God and Christ and the meaning of his death on the cross correspond to what we believe.



While the similarities between Christadelphians and the Polish Brethren are encouraging for us, their philosophy of doctrine should have even more meaning for us. To understand the importance of that philosophy, let me explain one of the fundamental differences between them and the main branch of the

Reformation.

The Polish Brethren were part of the **Radical** Reformation. Men like John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, whose movements produced what we call the main evangelical and Reformed denominations of today, were part of what history has termed the **Magisterial** Reformation. It was so-called because of their dependence on the magistrates to force people to adhere to the Reformation's views, doctrines, and procedures. Zwingli,

for instance, believed civic authorities should decide on religious disputes. John Calvin tried to set up a Christian city-state in Geneva. Zwingli gave his consent to drown Anabaptists, and Calvin endorsed the burning of Michael Servetus on October 27, 1553, in Geneva.

On the other hand, the Polish Brethren preached the separation of church and state. They also believed in freedom of religion and speech and preached toleration toward those who disagreed on religious matters. They emphasized the social aspect of religion and caring for other people in their conduct. Part of that came from their experience of being persecuted, but it was also heavily dependent on their philosophy of doctrine.

When you compare the outcome of these two branches of the Reformation, the differences are startling. One produced militancy and persecution, while the other created freedom and favorable treatment of one's fellow man. What was it in Zwingli's mind that justified him drowning people who disagreed with him? In Geneva, Calvin even set up religious secret police to make sure people obeyed his tenets. He imprisoned and even executed people who didn't fall in line.

One of the bases of their decisions was their understanding of **natural law**. Partly based on Romans 2:14—*"Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires"*—natural law is the idea that human beings have an innate concept of deity and God's laws. We can see that this has a degree of merit. For instance, it is doubtful we need to have a written law that says, "Don't torture children."

Most of us have a natural abhorrence for such a thing.

However, the Magisterial Reformers took it to another level and believed that they had an innate understanding of how to apply godly standards in society as Christians. Because there was no such thing at the time of the separation of church and state, and because the Reformers relied on the magistrates to enforce Christian standards, they felt justified in their maltreatment of those who dissented from their views. They thought that by them being Christian, they were right. What is also telling is that the Reformers, in attempting to defend their understanding of doctrines like the Trinity, frustratingly found that they had to revert to the old Scholastic methods.

However, Socinus and the Polish Brethren distinguished natural law from the law of Christ and often saw them in conflict with each other. Therefore, they did not believe that civic society was necessarily godly. Instead, they believed in the separation of church and state, non-involvement in politics, and, more importantly, for our consideration, they thought that an understanding of deity is **not** innate to human beings but can only come about by a reasoned interaction with divine revelation. They also left behind Scholasticism and embraced the methods of Renaissance Humanism, freeing themselves from orthodox dogmatic thinking. They were, therefore, voracious Bible students, realizing that one can only come to know God and His ways by reading His word. They also emphasized the importance of open inquiry and a personal examination of one's beliefs.

Hardest of all, do you believe in free speech and freedom of conscience, and do you tolerate people with different beliefs and different statements of faith?

Furthermore, they spoke out against reliance on creeds and believed that everyone is individually responsible for their salvation and not because they belong to the “right” church.

It is encouraging for us that the Polish Brethren, relying on revelation from the Bible, and using their capacity to reason things out, came to understand Bible doctrine similar to the Christadelphians. But let’s make sure we learn an important lesson from them. The example of the Polish Brethren is not on the doctrine per se but on the **philosophy** that led to their understanding.

Think of it this way; are you more like a Magisterial Reformer or one of the Polish Brethren? Do you, for instance, place reliance on creeds? Do you believe and do things as a Christadelphian because it’s what has been written down in the BASF or the Pioneer works? Do you justify your actions because it’s the way Christadelphians do things? Do you rely on tradition? Do you think you’re right because you’re a Christadelphian and we “have the truth”? Do you study the Bible and teach from it but only to confirm what you already believe? Do you **honestly** openly inquire about your beliefs and examine those things you think are true?

Hardest of all, do you believe in free

speech and freedom of conscience, and do you tolerate people with different beliefs and different statements of faith? That doesn’t mean you believe in the idea that “everyone has their own truth,” but you’re open to friendly debate, iron sharpening iron, and mutual respect that we’re all trying to find out from God what He wants from us, are open to change and are intellectually honest enough to admit when we might be wrong.

After the Polish Brethren ended as a distinct group, they took their writings and traveled throughout Europe. Socinianism ceased being a religious movement and became a philosophy that entered the hearts and minds of men and women who had a sincere desire to know what is true and right. In orthodox Christian circles, “Socinian” became a derogatory term, standing for those who refused to conform to the creeds of Christianity or the whims of the state church. But for those who embraced the Socinian spirit, it led them to think outside the box of nominal Christianity, reject notions like the Trinity, and strive towards the kind of people God wants us to be—free, reliant on the guidance given us through the Bible, and Christ-like to their fellow man.

*Richard Morgan,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)*

COSTA RICA YEAR END BIBLE SCHOOL

By David Collister

DECEMBER 2021 arrived, along with the Costa Rican Year-End Bible School. In a very rare occurrence indeed, I was in Costa Rica for the second time within six months. This came out of several circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is truly a blessing that we were able to hold this Bible School in person, as well as provide a link for those who could not be here in person. Technology truly is a blessing in these circumstances.

The theme the Costa Rican brothers and sisters chose for their Bible School

was “How to Love Yourself to Love your Neighbor.” They invited two speakers, Bro. Rene Castillo from El Salvador, and me. Bro. Rene gave classes on the topics of “Forgiveness for Ourselves, Learning to Value and Accept Ourselves”, and “How to Love Yourself According to God.” I developed the topics, “Knowing How to Choose What Helps Us to Grow”, and “How to Know to Be the Temple of God.” There were also other classes, including a sisters’ class given by Sis. Silvia Ostorga from El Salvador, and a brothers’ class given by me on the subject, “True Principles and Uncertain



Many were happy to attend this year.

Details”, which dealt with the theme first introduced in Bro. Robert Roberts’ article of the same name. The brothers considered the importance of staying true to the first principles while being careful to differentiate these from opinions that brothers may have on various topics, and always looking toward the edification of our brothers and sisters and avoiding divisions.

The classes for the very young were given by Sis. Marcela Castellanos from Honduras and classes for the older children were given by Sis. Marisol de Armas from El Salvador. Bro. Juan Diego Vargas gave the exhortation for the Memorial Service. In the exhortation, Bro. Vargas spoke on the theme of the Bible School to love our neighbor as ourselves as well as reminding us that we have been called and chosen. This is a great blessing, and, therefore, we should accept the fact that we have been blessed with abilities that can be used in service to God and to our brethren. Rather than indulging in self-

love, as taught by popular psychology, we should embrace the blessing that God responds to us and calls us to a wonderful hope. Instead of diminishing ourselves, we can look for ways we can serve our brethren, according to the abilities God has blessed us with.

A Bible School is not complete without good food and fellowship. The Costa Rican brothers and sisters provided both, including delicious meals despite the difficulties of staying within the COVID-19 guidelines. There were also



There is a lot of technology involved.



some great family activities and plenty of time to socialize. The organization was amazing. There was a family movie, *The Lion King*, which we enjoyed while munching on popcorn and other goodies in little bags. After the movie, Sis. Denisse Vanegas tied the themes in the movie with the theme of the Bible School. There were games to help promote the spirit of fellowship, as well as a musical presentation that was both

entertaining and funny and displayed the musical talents in the ecclesia.

All in all, the Bible School was a huge success, due to the hard work behind the scenes. It also provided spiritual nourishment to all in attendance, both in-person and virtually.

*David Collister,
(Verdugo Hills Ecclesia, CA)*



A PAN-AMERICAN (LATIN AMERICAN) BIBLE SCHOOL

By Jim and Jean Hunter



Young people enjoying the beautiful scenery.

By the end of 2021, travel and hygienic restrictions were being eased in Latin America, so in El Salvador plans were made for a second consecutive Bible school under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. We prayed that God would allow the project to go ahead and bless it to His honor and glory, and for the spiritual benefit of all who could attend. There were eighty-three in attendance, more than we had dared hope for. Our God

was gracious and gave us this time together around His Word.

Since there had been few mission visits to South America for the last couple of years, it was decided to invite some brothers and sisters from isolation in the south of the continent, who would normally not expect to get to a Bible School up in Central America.

To this end, we had with us Bro. Richard Castillo of Santiago, Chile, Bro.



Sis. Marcella teaching a kid's class.

Sami Borja and his sister in the flesh, Sis. Dalia Borja of La Paz, Bolivia, and Bro. Lucas Genner of Buenos Aires, Argentina. From the north, came Sis. Abi García, and our friend, William Sansores, from Campeche, Mexico. From neighboring countries, Sis. Marcela Castellanos from Honduras, and Bro. Víctor and Sis. Marina García from Guatemala. The main classes were given by visitors. Bro. Richard Castillo gave the four adult classes and Bro. Víctor García gave the men's class and the exhortation. Bro. Sami Borja and Bro. Lucas Genner split the classes for the young people.

The local young people hosted the visitors for a few days before and after the school. They treated them to a day at the beach, visits to scenic and archeological sites around the country, and a tour of the capital, San Salvador. Each day ended with dinner and chats around the readings. For those from the Southern Zone, it was a particularly

marvelous experience to get to meet so many new brothers and sisters and enjoy their fellowship.

For the school itself, we went up to a rustic but roomy hotel in the mountains, to meditate on the Word and enjoy each other's company. The classes focused on Biblical characters and the lessons to be learned from their lives. Bro. Sami and Bro. Lucas prepared Bible games to play at the end of the young peoples' classes. The games were so popular that it was difficult to get the kids out of their classroom and on to the next activity!

We held the traditional, hard-fought "Bible competition," which everyone loves. The local CYC organized Bible games for the afternoons, followed by informal conversations or Bible Bingo (always popular due to the chocolate prizes!). In the afternoon, when the young people usually present Bible skits, they turned the tables on the



Group photo!

adults, dividing them into four groups and giving each one a bag of props and 20 minutes to prepare a skit on a Bible story, which was hilarious. The last evening was topped off with a bonfire and hymn singing. Everyone stayed up chatting till late into the night.

We are living in trying times. Ecclesias are struggling to encourage and nurture their members while continuing the work of presenting God's Word to those who are disposed to listen. In such conditions, this event was a particular blessing. We all left with renewed enthusiasm to build up

our little meetings and strengthen our fellowship, both in our own countries and in others, where there are Spanish-speaking brethren and sisters.

It should be mentioned, that as far as we are aware, no COVID-19 infection occurred as a result of either the 2020 or the 2021 Bible Schools. May our Lord Jesus return soon, bringing the peace, good health, and justice that our poor world so desperately needs.

*Jim and Jean Hunter,
(Los Angeles Hispanic Ecclesia, CA)*

San Salvador, capital of El Salvador

YOUTH CONFERENCE IN SIERRA LEONE

By Ronald Morovia



THE Christadelphian Youth Sierra Leone Coalition Conference is a gathering of young people from different Christadelphian ecclesias across Sierra Leone. It was established eleven years ago, primarily to promote unity among the different youth groups, with the motto “Unity in Christ”.

The three-day conference, which is held every December, brings together over one hundred young Christadelphian young people across Sierra Leone. They can learn more about the Bible, discuss

topics and issues that will enhance their spiritual growth, and socialize and strengthen the bond among the different groups.

Deprived of holding the conference last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, attending this year’s conference was a delight. The conference ran from December 17-19 in Bo, Sierra Leone’s second capital in the Southern province, the agreed location for the yearly event.



With the theme *“Judge not, that you may not be judged”* (Matt 7:1-5), the conference began with choruses, spiritual songs ministration, and hymns. In his opening address, the chairman of the coalition, Bro. Daniel Kamanda, welcomed members and reminded them about the purpose of the gathering, stressing it is to strengthen the bond among the different groups and members and enhance the faith of members. He further emphasized that the spiritual aspect is the core priority of the gathering and therefore appealed to participants to be attentive to all discussion, and feel free to clarify things

that may have been confusing to them. He further encouraged members to be committed to ensuring that the youth coalition continues to be a success to help promote the Christadelphian faith and spread the gospel across Sierra Leone.

This year’s youth gathering in Bo provided a platform for members to discuss topics such as Christian marriage, Christadelphian beliefs about heaven-going, hell, Satan, demons, and the Devil. A brother made a presentation on each of these topics, and an opportunity was given to participants to ask questions, discuss



When making his presentation on Christian marriage, Bro. Abubakarr Kargbo reminded members of the true meaning of marriage. “A wedding service may make a couple into husband and wife, but it does not make a marriage. Husband and wife need to work at their relationship out of love, care, and respect for one another. Marriage is a lifetime's occupation, with the constant need to work with, and adjust to, each other,” he noted. Bro. Kargbo also stated that the first priority for every marriage is the relationship of the couple with God. For all who follow Christ, the first and greatest commandment is still to

the comfort of a healthy marriage. This means that it is by taking God's teaching seriously, that we will experience His richest blessing in every aspect of our lives, including marriage.” Marriage is not presented to us by God as an ideal, idyllic state, to which none of us match up. It is presented as a blessing from God for fallible, stumbling human beings who need each other. The marriage that is perfect is the marriage that will last forever—our union with our Lord, in which we will know as we are known. The man is the head of the woman, as Jesus is the head of the Church. In the same way that the Lord Jesus sacrificed himself for his bride,



love the Lord our God. “This does not change when we marry” he stressed by quoting, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”* (Matt 22:37, 38) Bro. Kargbo emphasized, “It is our relationship with God which teaches us the responsibilities and priorities in all our other relationships, and it is He who designed all the delight and

so must the husband for the wife. Both husband and wife are under a covenant relationship with the Lord Jesus, and it is the responsibility of each of them to resolve disagreements. Prayer is at the heart of a deep, spiritual relationship. Praying, individually and together, will help us to build a firm foundation for marriage.

Bro. Albert Williams delivered a presentation on the topic “Heaven and

hell.” Christadelphians do not share either the modern idea of heaven or hell for everyone, or the more traditional ideas of blessings in heaven and punishment in hell. There are no eternal abiding places where people hope (or fear) to go to at death. This does not mean of course that there is no reward for the righteous or indeed no punishment reserved for the wicked. But whatever these might be, because of the harmony that exists throughout the Bible, such reward or punishment must be consistent with the facts that we have already established. A consideration of what the Scriptures say concerning heaven encourages us to develop an understanding of what the Bible teaches about these vital questions of life and death. Heaven is God’s abiding place. Of course, in making such a statement we must not limit the power and transcendence of God, whom Scripture teaches to be everywhere present by His spirit.

Each day ended with social activities like athletics, football (soccer) games

among the different groups and movies in the evening. On the final day of the conference, they observed the normal Sunday school and Breaking of Bread service, where Bro. Denis Mboya delivered the exhortation on the theme of the conference. Bro. Denis informed brothers and sisters that our duties are to restore brothers and sisters who may fall, and not to judge them, noting judgment belongs to the Lord.

The breaking of bread service was followed by a thanksgiving service that comprised youth activities, musical contributions from various groups, jokes, drama and more social activities. The conference also provided an opportunity for the membership to discuss plans to develop and expand the coalition, with executive members giving a report on various office activities. The highlight of this year’s conference was the introduction of new members from three new ecclesias.

*Paul Morovia,
(Freetown Ecclesia, Sierra Leone)*



NEWS & UPDATES

Christadelphian Support Network Fellowship Weekend

You are warmly invited to our 2022 CSN Fellowship weekend April 8-10, 2022. Feel free to also invite your brothers, sisters, young people and friends. CSN Fellowship weekends aim to give everyone the opportunity to refocus their lives through fellowship, relaxation and renewal.

The theme for the weekend will be “I am a Child of God”, and there will be time for discussion and reflection as well as enjoying one another’s company.

The event is being held at Holland House, near Pershore, UK. Apart from its tranquil setting above the banks of the River Avon, Holland House has very comfortable accommodation and the staff make everyone feel very welcome and provide excellent meals throughout the weekend.

The cost per person for the weekend will be £225, to cover the accommodation, all meals and administrative expenses. A deposit of £60 per person is

requested on booking, with a collection taken during the weekend allowing those attending to contribute as much towards the remainder as they are able. We don’t want cost to put off those for whom the weekend would be most helpful! Your ecclesia might also be able to offer financial support to members who would benefit from attending but might struggle with the cost.

We can also offer day places on Saturday 9th and/or Sunday 10th for those who would prefer this option. The cost is £35 for each day which includes morning and afternoon coffee/tea and lunch.

We are pleased to be able to return to meeting in person at Holland House this year. We have been assured by the management that they take all reasonable precautions to make your stay as safe as possible but we would request that everyone attending take a lateral flow test within 24h of arrival and if this shows a Covid positive result, please stay at home.

To help our planning, and to minimize the cost to CSN, please book early. Bookings should be made on-line at our web site at chsn.org.uk/future-events

CSN Committee

Mississauga West, ON

In March 2021, we rejoiced to witness the baptism of MADELINE DEADMAN, daughter of bro. Jason and Sis. Maryanne Deadman. We pray for our Heavenly Father's blessing on our new sister as we journey together to the kingdom and age to come.

September 2021 marked the 25th year since the founding of our ecclesia. We started with 28 brothers and sisters who lived in the area but had traveled significant distances to their previous ecclesias. With our Heavenly Father's blessing, we have grown to a family of 70 members and about 18 Sunday School scholars.

In November 2021, we hosted a Study Day comprised of in-person and remote attendance using Zoom with brother Matthew Drywood (Cambridge, ON) presenting the topic "He revealeth the deep and secret things" (Daniel 2:22). The classes were very encouraging and the event was well attended by brothers and sisters from near and far. We thank our brother for his service on our behalf. We also thank the members of the Toronto West ecclesia for allowing us to use their ecclesial hall for this event.

In 2018, we purchased a property that will be used as a new ecclesial hall. In June 2021, we issued a financial appeal to ecclesias in Canada and the United States. Our appeal noted that

necessary renovations were estimated to be approximately \$275,000 and that, with our existing funds and expected additional member donations, we expect to have a funding shortfall of approximately \$85,000. We are very grateful to our Heavenly Father for the generous and loving support of the ecclesias which responded to our appeal. To date, we have received approximately CDN\$40,000 from other ecclesias. The first phase of renovation activities started in late 2021 despite the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. We expect that this activity will be ongoing throughout much of 2022, God willing.

Joel Thorpe

Orangeville, ON

It is with a heavy heart to announce the **Orangeville Ecclesia** has **closed**, effective immediately, due to a decline in membership.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the numerous Brothers, Sisters and friends who visited us over the years. Your presence on Sunday mornings and at our ecclesial events always served to uplift us and meant more than we can express. Thank you also to our members, past and present, for making the Orangeville ecclesia a safe and uplifting place to come together in fellowship, to edify and encourage, and a place to teach our children and young people about the joy set before us.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Jason Grant

Sarasota, FL

On behalf of the Sarasota, Florida ecclesia I would like to commend Brother Don and Sister Ellie Haughton to the Worcester, Massachusetts ecclesia. Our ecclesia enjoyed the company and fellowship of Brother Don and Sister Ellie for several years and they will be missed.

James Wilkinson

Toronto Fraternal Gathering

God willing, this year's Toronto Fraternal Gathering, to be held the weekend of April 15-17, 2022. The speaker for the weekend is Bro. John Perks (Ottawa, ON) and his theme for the weekend is "Sermon on the Mount – The Salt and Light".

As the date gets closer, we will provide a further update with the Zoom/YouTube links.

Doug Jackson

BIBLE SCHOOLS

Idyllwild Bible School

Please join us at Idyllwild Pines Camp the week of July 24-30, 2022.

Our speakers this year are:

- Mick Roberts, Ashby de la Zouche, UK
- Allen Laben, San Diego, CA
- Jason Hensley, Simi Hills, CA

We look forward to meeting in person with all those who would join us. There are no plans for broadcasting the classes, so we encourage you to attend in person.

Please register online at:

californiabibleschool.org

Mid-Atlantic Bible School

Held at Shippensburg University in Shippensburg, PA the week of July 2-10, 2022.

Speakers and topics, God willing:

- Bro. Dennis Bevans, Austin-Leander, TX, Adults: "Noah - Saving Your Family in a Dark World", Teens: "Timothy - My Own Son in the Faith"
- Bro. Jason Hensley, Simi Hills, CA Ecclesia, Adults: "Giving Grace" and Teens: "Jeroboam - Nation in Ruins"
- Bro. Joseph Palmer, San Diego County, CA Ecclesia, Adults and Teens: "What has the Lord Jesus Christ got to do with me?"

Register online at:

midatlanticbibleschool.com

Southwest Bible School

Schreiner University has given us the ultimatum to change our dates or not have the bible school at their campus. So the new date for our bible school is June 26-July 2, 2022. Also, we have had to change a speaker from Bro. Mick Roberts to Bro. Dev Ramcharan.

The speakers planned for this year are:

Bro. Mark Giordano

- "My Sins and the Sins of My People"

Brother Dev Ramcharan

- "Behold My Servant"

Bro. Mike Steele





- "The Glory Set Before Us"

Please register at:

www.swcbs.com

OUR COMMUNITY

In this fast-paced world of ever present news, *The Tidings* has decided to no longer publish **Ecclesial News** or **Coming Events** in the magazine. We feel that these items are much better served in an online environment where they can be posted and shared much more expediently. You can find the most recent information online at www.tidings.org

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Your comments on this change are welcome by email to editor@tidings.org

Thoughts on the Way *John in Gethsemane*

OUR little group left the upper room and made our way through the streets of the quiet city. It was dark, very dark, but our eyes adjusted to the darkness, and we continued slowly along the cobbled streets without stumbling. We knew our way; we had followed our leader many times on this same walk. But we did not realize that this would be our last such trip, ever.

As we walked through the narrow streets, he talked to us. His voice was strong but gentle, and loud enough so that we could hear every word. I can remember every word he spoke; I hear them when I wake up, and before I go

to sleep again. Each day, he talks to me, and each day I listen—even now that I am an old man.

He spoke to us, his followers, as though he were our father. Strangely, it felt right that he was a “father.” I am John the son of Zebedee, and the youngest of his disciples. I am now the only one of the original Twelve who still lives. All my closest, most cherished friends have passed on, so plainly the Teacher expects me to remember his words, to write them down, and to remind the world, everyone, with ears to hear, what he said, and what he did.

Now, as I tell these stories, I make new friends, all the time. They come to my humble home, one at a time or in larger groups, and they listen fervently to all I have to tell them about the Savior, Jesus the Son of God. Some are eager, some are doubtful—at first—but soon they understand and join their companions and beg me to go on and on to relate the whole story.

Yet who can tell the whole story? The world itself cannot contain all the stories of what Jesus did, when he walked upon this earth—never mind all that he has done for us now that he sits with his Father in heaven, continuing to inspire one life after another?

I have loved this man since the first time I set eyes on him. It was at the Jordan River when I saw him approach my friend the Baptist, and when I saw him lowered into the water to be baptized. I don't know why, but I thought—even then—that there was something special about this man, and I was determined to find out what it was that made him so.

It was a whole lifetime ago, but yes, I did find out what it was that set him apart from us, and everyone else. It was that love, not the love I instinctively felt for him at first sight, but the love that he radiated all the time. It was simply love, nothing more. Not the love of a man for a woman, nor even the love which a respectful son has for his father and mother. It was a love that soared in the skies above, and a love that reached into a tomb and raised the cold body of a friend. It was a love that could not be contained but reached out to embrace all human beings.

It was a love which drew to itself little children, who scarcely understood why

they were drawn to him, but they came and embraced him, and he returned the favor, put his hands on them, and blessed them, one by one. It was a love that embraced every person he met, as we trudged down dusty roads from one village to another.

Every day, wherever we went, he stretched out his hands to touch those who were sick, those who were lame or blind or deaf or even consumed by leprosy. His touch—just a simple touch—changed each of them, man or woman, into a new person. He found people who were downcast, with disease and weariness and worry and fear, and his touch created a new being, as though each of them had just been reborn, at that very moment. Where once their faces revealed pain and grief, and bitterness and anger, I now saw in their eyes bright reflections—of devotion, eagerness and joy. And when they finally left, they went away with heads held high and hearts singing as they thought of the new world to come—where love would be the rule, not the exception, a world where God would be all in all, and His glory would stretch from sea to sea.

I thought of all these things as we followed him into the darkness of Gethsemane. It was midnight, and we were very tired. He left us to our rest, while he went a bit further into the shadowing trees. I slept, restlessly, and awoke occasionally to hear him praying. He was crying and pleading, with his Father.

I knew then that something most extraordinary was about to happen, and it did. They came for my friend Jesus, with torches and swords, and marched him away. He went with

them, calm and unafraid—if anything, his captors were afraid of him! At the same time, we scattered and ran and hid. We wanted to save ourselves, but ironically, he was the one who saved us. He went willingly to the trial and the cross and the tomb—and he endured it all, to save us!

I saw it all, and I heard it all. To this day, I remember everything. The darkness, the beatings, the mocking, and finally the hammers and the thick iron nails. Then I heard his prayer; this time it was: “Father, forgive them.” And I knew then that, amid excruciating torture, there was still love—his love, for us his followers, for those whom he had healed and whom he had taught, and even for those who were preparing to kill him. The love was still there, strengthened by his terrible trials. His love was a love stronger than death, and we were the objects of his love.

When it was all done, and he had been raised from the dead, he came to us again. He told us to go into the world and tell people the good news—that one day a great light would disperse all darkness, and love would conquer hate, in all its aspects. I know that day is coming because I have felt that very love which our Master lavished upon us all, every day we were with him.

I have lived many years since those experiences, but I have never lost sight of the Master’s all-encompassing love. I have had my share of suffering, sorrow, and loss, but I have also known the truest love, the love of Jesus for all mankind. Greater love has no man than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.

This may sound strange, but he is present with me every day: I can feel him nearby, wherever I go. His love embraces me, each night as I close my eyes, and when I open them the next morning, I know that my Savior is still there and that he has been watching over me all through the night.

This joy is what I wish for all of you. This is love: not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. So, we know and rely on the love which God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother and his neighbor.

George Booker,
(Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX)

I have lived many years since those experiences, but I have never lost sight of the Master’s all-encompassing love. I have had my share of suffering, sorrow, and loss, but I have also known the truest love, the love of Jesus for all mankind.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE TIDINGS...

"The Hand of our God in the Philippines"



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