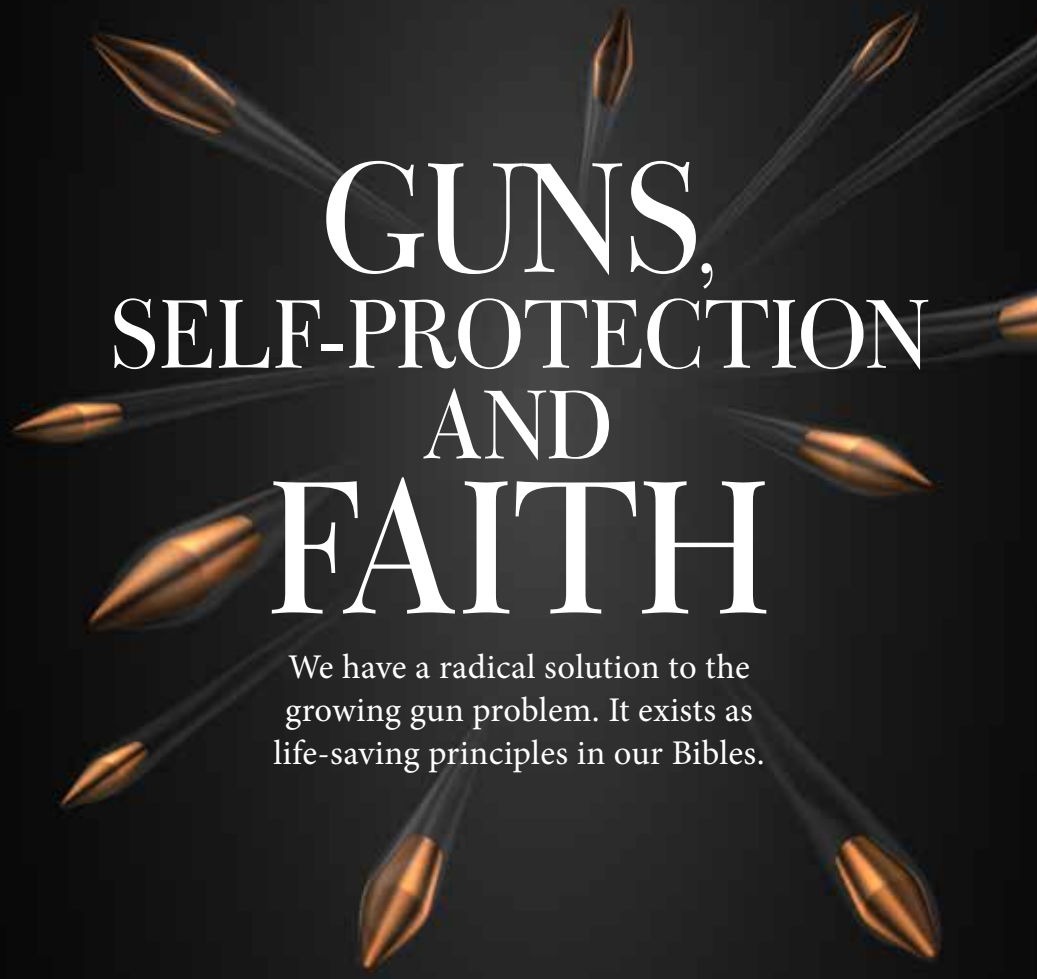

INCLUDES SPECIAL SECTION ON **PRAYER** (Page 15)

TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 3, March, 2023



GUNS, SELF-PROTECTION AND FAITH

We have a radical solution to the growing gun problem. It exists as life-saving principles in our Bibles.

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 3 / March, 2023



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THE QUICKENING OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

By Dave Jennings

QUICKENED is not a common verb in today's vernacular. Most modern Bible versions have translated it as "*made us alive*." Quickened, however, is a very flexible word. We can use it to describe both a person being revived from near death or a baby starting life. We can also use the word for either physical or spiritual life. While we look forward to the day when the dead will be quickened at the resurrection, we can experience a spiritual quickening today. In this mortal life, we are to experience the quickening of the Spirit.

Jesus and his disciples preached the coming Kingdom, along with the righteousness of God. But the message of the Kingdom was that it was "*at hand*," and often Jesus called it the "*Kingdom of Heaven*." We all look forward to the Kingdom of God when Jesus begins his righteous reign on earth. But Jesus wanted his followers to know that what was near, about to become accessible, was the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the realm believers enter when they are buried with Christ, raised as new creatures,

quickened by the Spirit. It is a new life, being planted together with Jesus. As Paul wrote,

*That even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he **raised us** from the dead **along with Christ** and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:5-6 NLT).*

Our physical quickening will need to tarry until our Lord returns. But life in the Spirit begins now. At present, we are united with Christ, who is in the heavenly realm.

It is common for us to read Romans 6 when we are blessed to have a baptism. This chapter captures the important doctrinal teaching of a new life, a “*new creature*.” Romans 6 is about a death, burial and revival of a new spiritual life. We have made a conscious decision not to be slaves to sin. But what is it that provides the strength and the quickening that is required to accomplish this battle? What actually changes when we come up out of the water? How are our mortal bodies quickened by the Spirit that dwelleth in us?

I can only speak for myself when I say that my view about this transformation has significantly changed since I was baptized 50 years ago. I understood the symbolic death in the waters of baptism, the forgiveness of my sins, and the new creature I could become if I remained faithful to Jesus Christ. But

I have come to see that the Scriptures throughout teach about a substantial and powerful change that begins at baptism. I used to see my spiritual life as about finding the will and personal strength to choose obedience over sin. I was responsible for running the race and doing the best I could. It was about doing more good things and less evil. If I could “extrude” a bit more good works, perhaps the LORD would find me more loveable. Sounds very legalistic, doesn't it?

As a young man, I thought just maybe I could bear down and beat the flesh, or at least make a strong effort. But as I failed over and over again, I learned that of myself, I could never be successful. The only strength I could depend on was not my own.

At the creation, Genesis describes the world as being in complete darkness. There was no energy, no activity. It was by the command of God that this world was made alive. God created light and formed all manner of life. After forming man, God gave Adam purpose and work to do. The creation was all about what God accomplished and what He imparted to His creation. When God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, He quickened him. A lifeless body was made capable of sensing, thinking, and doing work. God's Spirit gave Adam life, enabling him to live in harmony with Him.

We need to think similarly about our spiritual creation. Without God, we, too, are lying helpless in darkness. What energizes our new spiritual life is the Spirit of God that makes our

transformation possible and prepares us to do the work God has prepared for us. It is God's Spirit, working within us, that shapes this new creature and leads us to have the mind of Christ.

Paul wrote about this change:

*Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the **operation** of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (Col 2:12).*

The "operation of God." It's easy to read right over this phrase. The Greek word, *energeia*, indicates the energy of God, or as we would understand it, His Spirit. In Ephesians 1:18-19, Paul speaks of those whose eyes have been enlightened, knowing the "immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might."

In speaking of this rebirth, Jesus used an example all generations could relate to. The Lord spoke of the burial of a seed. If a seed does not "die" in the ground, it cannot produce fruit. Without this burial, the seed dies alone, fruitless.


Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. (John 12:24).

We are spiritually quickened after our burial in baptism. The transformational process begins, and we can bear fruit.

*That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, **And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe**, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places (Eph 1:18-20).*

Adam was given life to worship his Creator and do work God had prepared for him, such as tending the Garden, guarding it, and naming the animals. Our work is about bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit, the work of the Spirit in our lives. Paul spoke directly to the Ephesian believers about this.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in



We are spiritually quickened after our burial in baptism. The transformational process begins, and we can bear fruit.

Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:1, 2, 6-10).

Paul made clear that the Ephesians were **already** quickened. The life they had previously participated in was pursuing the flesh, making them “children of wrath.” They were now part of the Kingdom of Heaven, no longer

living according to the “prince of the power of the air.”

But here’s the point we all need to embrace. We are “created in Christ Jesus” to do good works which our God has “prepared in advance for us to do.” (v. 10 NIV). Our quickening by the Spirit transforms and renews our minds for a purpose—to do the will of God.

In Romans 8, Paul further describes this quickening. He adds,

*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom 8:13-14).*

This is a reminder to all of us who are in Christ Jesus. God provides spiritual strength to men and women who have faith in him. Those of the Spirit are given an ability that the flesh cannot accomplish—to discern spiritual things. We are promised strength to mortify the deeds of the flesh and, instead, produce the fruit of the Spirit. He has a personal plan for each of us, preparing us for work He will grant us the privilege to do. Our role is to live lives responsive to His leadership. We are never alone. We “*are his workmanship*” in Christ Jesus.

Let us have boundless joy when “*led by the Spirit*” to serve our Eternal God. Because of His love, we are taken from a world of darkness and “*planted*” with His son. By His strength, not our own, we bear fruit.

When Paul and Barnabas met with the elders in Jerusalem, they shared the exciting news about the Gentiles' acceptance of Christ. As they described these wonderful works, they properly noted that it was the work of God, done through them. They “*declared all the things that God had done with them.*” (Acts 15:4). They declared what “*miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.*” (Acts 15:12). Spiritual minds will always declare that their strength comes from God, through His power, His Spirit, that He executes good works through us.

In the end, this offers one of the most wonderful reassurances believers can ever have. We need not worry about our own inadequacies. The strength for what we must overcome, the work that is set before us, is by the “*operation of God.*” We are truly “*earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not us*” (2 Cor 4:7).

Each of us is in our LORD'S hands. We are His work of art. If we have faith, He will work great wonders through us, things we might never have believed possible. His training for work ahead is designed individually for us and our needs. Often this preparation comes from the wholesome words of Scripture, which makes the man of God “*perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” (2 Tim 3:17). Other times it will be through the practical training within the ecclesia or our families. It could even be through the pain of suffering. When we lie in ashes on the ground, we find our only strength is through him.

This is the unspeakable gift: the Father is lavishing his love on us.

But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 6:22-23).

Dave Jennings



GUNS, SELF-PROTECTION AND FAITH

By Nathan Badger

Editor's Note: There can hardly be a more timely and important topic for us to consider in our Life Application series than the issue of handguns and assault weapons. This issue touches many in America. It is important to note that this article does not address guns used for hunting or the elimination of pests.

We thank Bro. Nathan for identifying the Biblical principle of placing our trust in God, and not in weapons that can harm other humans.

WE need a radical solution. Gun violence and mass shootings are now daily occurrences in America. The gun-related statistics in America alone are jaw-dropping:

45,222 – Total gun deaths in America in 2022, the most ever (54% were suicides).¹

100,120 – Average gun-related injuries per year, 2013-2017.²

30% of Americans own a gun (highest per capita in the world), 41% live with someone who does.²

67% of gun owners list self-protection as the most important reason.²

600+ Mass shootings in each of 2020, 2021, and 2022 (compared to 336 in 2018).³

41% of white evangelicals own a gun (25-33% of other religions are gun owners).⁴

77% of white evangelicals feel safer with firearms.⁴

The issue of gun violence and gun ownership also affects Christians. Have you ever been threatened with gun violence, encouraged to purchase guns, sold guns, been introduced to large personal gun collections (including dizzying arrays of assault rifles), or met an individual who kept a gun in their car to protect the kids enroute to school? Do these scenarios exist within the Christadelphian community?

What is our perspective on guns as disciples of Christ? It would seem reasonable that guns used exclusively and responsibly for hunting or varmint control do not transgress God's principles. But should we purchase or use a gun to protect ourselves and others or even for war? The Bible offers a radical answer.

God's Principles

Gun ownership debates typically start with a myriad of verses examining individuals who used weapons or violence. It is far more helpful to examine first God's general principles on the subject and then investigate incidents or verses that appear to contradict these principles or are possible exceptions (many of which are beyond the scope of this article). Four key principles supply a solid Biblical foundation to the topic:

1. God Loves Life: In his second epistle, Peter proclaims that "*The Lord is...not willing that any should perish.*" (2 Pet 3:9).⁵ God proves this fundamental principle from the creation of man in Genesis 1 through to the Book of Life in Revelation 22. Over and over, God creates life and attempts to save and redeem humankind, despite its wickedness, because He loves life. God saves Noah and his family from the Flood. Gentiles such as Rahab, and the Gibeonites, are redeemed from corrupt Canaanite nations. God even sends his Son to save the lives of mankind because He loves life.

2. God Abhors Violence: The human propensity for violence appears early in the Bible. After Cain murders his brother Abel, God tells Noah he is about to destroy the earth because of its "*continual*" violence: "*I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them.*" (Gen 6:5, 13 ESV). If God was willing to destroy the very lives He loved, this event should impress upon us the extreme level of violence which existed and the degree to which God abhorred this violence. This violence "*grieved*" Him and He was "*sorry that He had made man.*" (Gen 6:6, 7). Do the gun statistics above cause us concern that we live in an era of violence comparable to Noah's (Luke 17:26)?

3. **"Thou Shalt Not Kill":** God includes a third principle in the Ten Commandments: *"Thou shalt not kill."* (Exod 20:13 KJV). There is no room for ambiguity. It is a command. God does not give us the unilateral right to take life because we did not create life, and we have no right to destroy the life He has designed. Furthermore, if God made man *"in His own image"* (Gen 1:27; 9:6), why would we act violently towards or even contemplate killing a human made in likeness to the angels and the Creator of the universe?

4. **"Do Not Fear," "I Am With You":** What do we fear most? Most of us fear death or harm. Our bodies are trained from a young age to avoid threats to our personal lives and those of our loved ones. God recognizes our propensity for fear and repeats the phrases *"Fear not," "Do not fear,"* and *"I will be with you"* over eighty times throughout the Bible. It is God's message to Abraham (Gen 15:1), to Hagar (Gen 21:17), to Joshua (Josh 1:5; 3:7), to Hezekiah (Isa 37:6), to Paul (Acts 18:9; 27:24), and to John on Patmos (Rev 1:17). It is God's message to all believers (Luke 12:7, 32). Though we fear death or harm, God encourages us to develop faith in His ability to save and protect. And if we do die in this age, God already has a solution. He assures us, *"I am with you always,"* and He will therefore *"also raise us up by His power."* (Matt 28:20; 1 Cor 6:14).

After we consider the above principles, what reason do we have to buy, own, hide, or threaten the use of a gun for self-protection or the protection of others? To trust in a weapon designed exclusively to kill instantaneously suggests that we do not love life as God does. We do not want to align ourselves with the same violence and wicked people because of whom God flooded the earth, nor with the same behavior that led to the violent murder of his Son, killed for our sake (1 Pet 3:18). The use of guns to kill other humans, in any form, and under any circumstances (without God's express directive), is completely incongruent with God's commands or principles.

What are our motives for owning a gun or wanting to own a gun? The statistics above highlight that fear drives gun ownership, and many Christians and non-Christians own a gun for that very reason. But God wants us to develop trust and faith in Him to work through all threats and fears, even if this means we *"lay down our lives"* for Him, our neighbor, or our brethren (1 John 3:16). If we own a gun for self-protection, perhaps our faith has fallen to fear *"those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,"* when instead, God has asked us to obey and *"fear Him [God] who is able to destroy both soul and body."* (Matt 10:28).

The Sword (Gun) and the Servant

God's principles related to gun violence are radical and take great humility and faith to accept (also compare Matt 5:17-48; 19:21-22). Yet, Jesus appears to dismiss them when he speaks to

his disciples: “*But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.*” (Luke 22:36 ESV).

Many gun-advocates, especially Christians, use this verse as evidence that Jesus urges us to buy, bear, and use weapons for protection. But is that what Jesus is really saying? No. Instead, Jesus is teaching a radically opposite lesson. Luke helps illuminate this using: 1. the “chiastic” literary structure of this event and 2. prophecies from Isaiah 53.⁶

1. Chiastic Literary Structure—The gospel writers often used chiasms to organize the details of their stories and lessons.⁷ The first parts of a chiasm lay out initial details, and the second parts provide a replica of these details, but in reverse order. The central portion of the chiasm highlights a key, practical message. By God’s inspiration, Luke crafts the following chiasm in chapter 22:

A) vv. 31-34—Peter’s Denial foretold by Jesus

B) vv. 35-38—The Disciples’ Denial foretold by Jesus

C) vv. 39-46—Jesus: Pray That You Will Not Fall Into Temptation

B’) vv. 47-53—The Disciples Deny Jesus

A’) vv. 54-62—Peter Denies Jesus

When we view Jesus’ statement in verse 36 in the context of the chiasm, we see it is not a command to buy swords. Rather, it is part of a prediction that Peter and the other disciples were about to deny him (parts A and B). Their denial is fulfilled at Jesus’ arrest

(parts B’ and A’) when they rely on themselves to deal with this threat rather than God’s principles.

Oddly, the disciples also interpret Jesus’ statement as a literal command for them to buy swords. In verse 38, they gather up two swords (knives) from the Upper Room, perhaps used in preparing the Last Supper, and share them eagerly with Jesus. However, they clearly misunderstood Jesus’ intent by his curt response, “*It is enough*”—as if to say, “You don’t understand what I mean.” Even later, when Peter and the disciples threaten and attempt to strike the mob with these swords, Jesus rebukes them “*No more of this!*” (Luke 22:51 ESV). Mathew’s account of this arrest includes Jesus’ censure: “*Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.*” (Matt 26:52 ESV). Jesus’ strong condemnation of this violence should leave all disciples who seek to follow him with a clear message: Jesus did not advocate using threats, violence, or weapons for self-defense or the protection of others.

Furthermore, Jesus characterizes the disciples’ natural inclination to rely on self:

- In the form of acquiring money bags to hold their cash.
- Traveler’s bags to carry supplies.
- As well as selling their cloaks to purchase swords for protection (Luke 22:36).

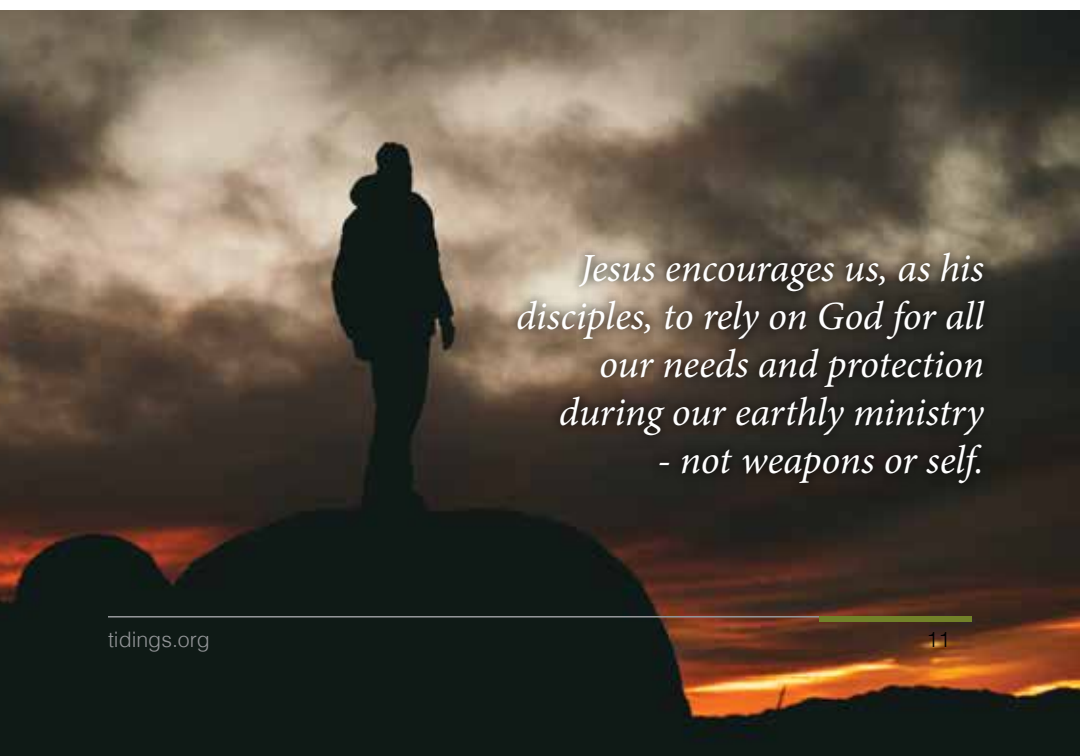
This contrasts with Luke 9:3 where Jesus instructs that they do not take a moneybag or a traveler’s bag, but he never directs them to buy a sword for protection. The intention is that

they were to develop faith in God for their daily needs and protection. In Luke 22:35, the disciples even confirm to Jesus they had lacked “nothing” without these items. Why, then, would Jesus command them to abandon reliance on God, and now fend for themselves? Likewise, Jesus encourages us, as his disciples, to rely on God for all our needs and protection during our earthly ministry—not weapons or self.

2. Isaiah 53:12—Luke 22:37, also contained in part B of the chiasm, supplies further evidence that Jesus is not commanding the disciples to buy weapons. Here Jesus connects and supports his prediction of their impending violent denial with an intriguing prophecy from Isaiah *“For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.”*

True to Isaiah’s prophecy, the disciples soon behave as *“transgressors,”* and Jesus is counted with, or *“numbered”* with them. In Luke 22:47, part B’ of the chiasm, Jesus and the disciples meet Judas and his armed mob in the Garden. In this terrifying moment, the first reaction of the disciples is *“Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”* (Luke 22:49). Moments later, Peter takes matters into his own hands, brandishes a sword, and cuts off the ear of the high priest’s servant. (Luke 22:50; John 18:10). By taking up swords against the soldiers, officers, and Pharisees the disciples had become *“transgressors”* of both Roman law and God’s laws.⁸ And Jesus was *“numbered”* with them. If not for his quick *“intercession”* (Isa 53:12) and healing of the servant’s ear, they may all have landed on the cross!

The depth of the disciples’ denial, as demonstrated in their violence and



*Jesus encourages us, as his
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- not weapons or self.*

"Jesus did not retaliate, and neither should we,
even if it means our death."

threats on life, is even more striking when Luke contrasts their choices with those of Jesus' in Isaiah 53. This entire prophesy emphasizes Jesus' willingness to be falsely accused, persecuted and murdered, but without retaliation: *"They made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man his death, although he had done no violence"* (Isa 53:9 ESV). By quoting Isaiah, Jesus was also pointing the disciples to his own example of **"no violence."** Isaiah, Luke and Jesus coordinate on a sure message which shows that Jesus did not own or use a weapon for self-defense, did not advocate that the disciples carry a weapon, or even provide the slightest hint that violence is ok when self or loved ones are threatened.

Woefully, the disciples missed this message, as we can too. To openly carry a weapon, conceal one in a night table or under the front seat of the car, or to threaten to use one, or attack another human being, is a blatant denial of our Lord and even God's principles which Jesus demonstrated. This exposes us as a *"transgressor"* of God's principles, like the disciples.

If we carry a weapon for self-defense or advocate for them, surely we rely

on ourselves and our poor judgment, just like the disciples. Instead, God wants us to develop our faith and trust He will look after us. Jesus did not retaliate, and neither should we, even if it means our death. It was only by doing *"no violence"* that Jesus could heal us from our transgressions and act as an intercessor for us, as he did for the disciples during the arrest: *"Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed...He bore the sin of many, And makes intercession for the transgressors."* (Isa 53:5, 12 ESV).

Pray That You Enter Not Into Temptation

The center of Luke's chiasm, part C, holds a powerful exhortation. Here, Jesus takes the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane and twice encourages them to *"Pray that you may not enter into temptation."* (Luke 22:40, 46). As a personal example, Jesus likewise prays and includes, *"Not my will, but Yours, be done."* (Luke 22:42 ESV). While he prays, an angel appears from heaven, *"strengthening him."* (Luke 22:43).

What temptation was Jesus talking about? Surely, in the immediate context of this chiasm, he was referring to the

temptation to resist arrest, to rely on self or weapons to defeat their enemies, and to lash out violently in the face of harm or death to self or others.

What was the solution to this temptation? Prayer! Regrettably, while Jesus prayed *“earnestly”* and with *“agony”* (Luke 22:44), Luke reveals that the disciples slept. The outcome is revealing. Jesus’ prayer to not enter temptation and for God’s will to be done (as he had taught the disciples to pray earlier in Luke 11:2-4) resulted in a non-violent submission to God’s will and even an angel to strengthen him. In sharp contrast, the disciples did not pray, ignored what God wanted to be done, and fell prey to brandishing their “guns” and almost murdering a man. Jesus even had to remind them that they could call on *“more than twelve legions of angels [up to 72,000!]”* (Matt 26:53). Do we believe we can call on these angels also?

Often the discussion of self-protection by guns starts with a myriad of justifications. Based on Jesus’ exhortation in the garden, this is the wrong starting point. Directly between his prediction of their denial and its fulfillment, he exhorts the disciples to pray they wouldn’t enter temptation. These prayers should also be ours as well as growing faith and trust God is with us and will protect us. These are prayers that we never find ourselves or our loved ones in threatening situations. Prayers that if we do, God will help us escape or deal with the situation as Christ did—without weapon, violence, injury or loss of life

to anyone. Prayers that God’s *“will be done,”* and that He will send angels to strengthen us in time of need—which He is delighted to do! Is our starting point prayer before we face threats? Or is it a gun with spent bullets? If it is, perhaps we are sleeping in the garden also. Or perhaps our gun closets are full, but our prayers are empty.

Gun Culture

The implications of God’s principles and Jesus’ example are radical and far-reaching. They should cause us to search deep within ourselves and evaluate our participation in a growing gun culture. This exercise may require us to ask hard questions and make hard decisions.

For example, why would any believer consider amassing a collection of guns which are built primarily for killing humans? Statistics clearly show that having a firearm in our house greatly increases the possibility of accidents, gun violence, and even gun-assisted suicide.¹ It is likely Jesus would encourage us to spend more time collecting the life-saving principles of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or “firing up” our brethren and sisters to *“good works.”* (Matt 5:16; Heb 10:24).

Does the uninspired “right to bear arms” in any country supersede the inspired laws and principles of God? His Word suggests the only right we have is to submit ourselves to God’s principles and the welfare of each other (John 14:15; 1 Cor 10:24; Jas 4:7). If guns are contributing to over 600 mass shootings per year, then perhaps we need to consider their effect on society

versus our perceived rights. If a disciple of Christ insists on his or her “rights” to the detriment of others, have they grasped the mindset of Jesus or a life of self-sacrifice?

Furthermore, what relation do we have with today’s media? Movies, shows, and computer games all glamorize the use of guns and violence. We are horrified when mass shootings occur in the news, but how do we feel when brutal violence occurs in our movies? Many computer games are dripping with the blood of humans and reward players for violence. Considering God’s principles, are we ok with our kids playing Fortnite, Call of Duty, World of Tanks, Mortal Kombat or other violent games? Would we “network” Christ into our game? How do these games instill Jesus’ values into our minds to “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.” (Luke 6:27)?

The Solution

We have a radical solution to the growing gun problem. It exists as life-saving principles in our Bibles and is exemplified in our Lord and Savior. It is buttressed by prayer and bolstered by our growing faith. To derive a sense of safety from the ability to kill your “neighbor” instantly is incompatible with the command to “love your neighbor.” (Luke 10:27). It is a claim to possess the power of life and death. That power belongs to God alone. As we seek to “become blameless and harmless” and “shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil 2:15), what radical steps do we need to take to follow the example of the crucified but risen, Lord?

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¹ Gramlich, John. “What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S.” *Pew Research Center*. February 3, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

² Hays, Christopher and C.L. Crouch eds. *God and Guns: The Bible Against American Gun Culture*. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2021. Note there are several helpful chapters in this book and a couple that are less helpful.

³ Brown, Stacy M. “Mass shootings dominated 2022: Will 2023 see meaningful change?” *The Washington Informer*. January 4, 2023. <https://www.washingtoninformer.com/mass-shootings-dominated-2022-will-2023-see-meaningful-change/>

⁴ Shellnutt, Kate. “Packing in the pews: the connection between God and Guns.” *Christianity Today*. November 8, 2017. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/november/god-gun-control-white-evangelicals-texas-church-shooting.html>

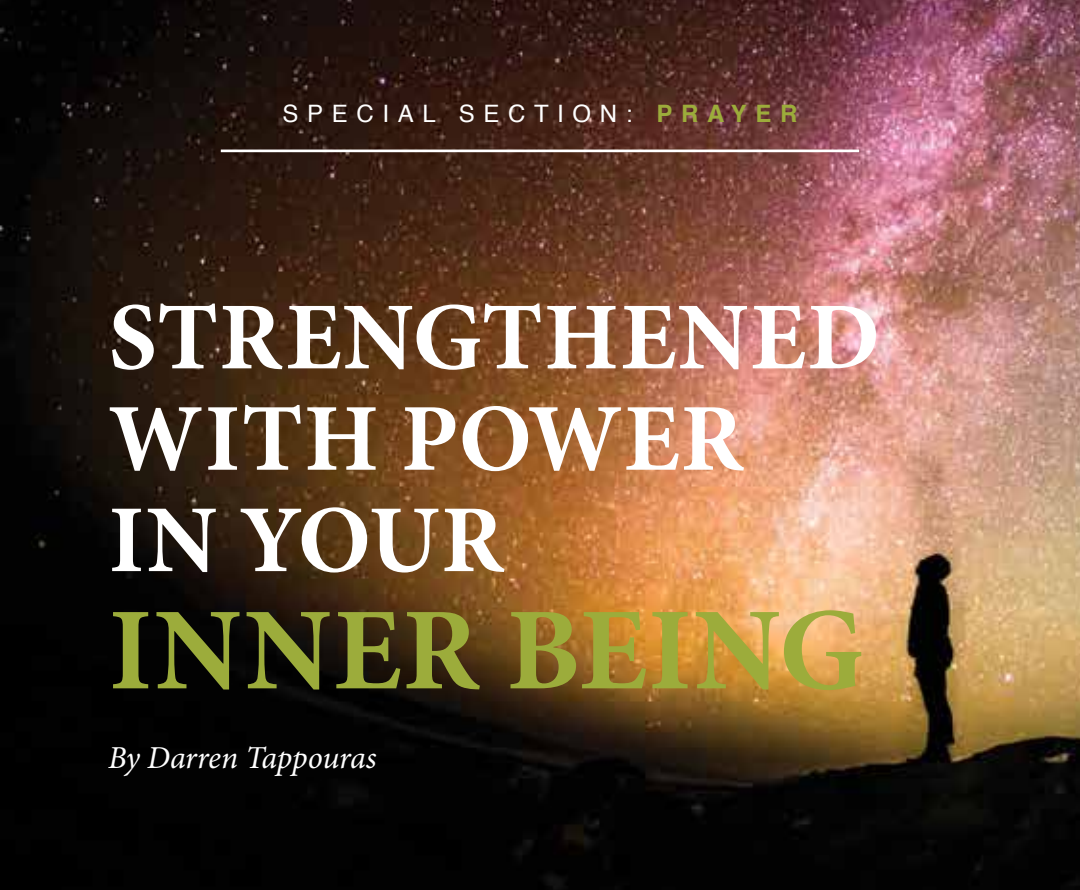
⁵ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

⁶ For more information on chiasms, I would recommend the Biblical Chiasm Exchange website administered by Bro. Stephen Palmer from the Mumbles Ecclesia, Wales: chiasmusxchange.com/explanatory-notes/

⁷ Burnett, David. “The Sword and the servant: Why does Jesus say to “Sell your Cloak and Buy a Sword” in Luke 22:33-35?” Accessed January 19, 2023. <https://www.dburnett.com/?p=2861> Note the link for the podcast which contains a fabulous investigation into these verses.

⁸ Some suggest that “numbered with the transgressors” was fulfilled when Jesus was hung between two thieves on the cross, as per Mark 15:28. However, this verse does not exist in manuscripts prior to 600AD and has been removed in most recent translations. Luke applies it to the immediate context of the arrest, though one could argue that Jesus was with “transgressors” in many instances.

STRENGTHENED WITH POWER IN YOUR INNER BEING



By Darren Tappouras

The Problem

There appears to be a discrepancy between the prayer guarantees promised by God in Scripture and our own lived-out prayer experiences.

Here are some amazingly generous and extravagant prayer guarantees:

- *“Whatever we ask we receive from him.” (1 John 3:22).¹*
- *“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” (1 John 5:14-15).*

- *“Whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (John 15:7).*

Yet, despite the explicit assurance in these passages, we find our own experiences do not always reflect these guarantees.

How, Then Do We Reconcile These Realities?

Some people suggest the solution is that God will always answer our prayers. It’s just that the answer may be “No!” This solution, however, does not conform to the context or syntax of the prayer guarantee passages and a “No” cannot be honestly or by exposition inserted into the passages.

If we agree that only positive answers

and results can be read into these prayer guarantee passages, how do we reconcile their content with our own prayer experiences? Speaking for myself, the consideration of the prayer guarantees has transformed how I interact with God, read His word, and live in Christ.

Here I am going to do something a little unusual for a study series and provide the conclusion at the start of our investigation. I believe, if we have the conclusion in our minds, we can more effectively evaluate the very well-known passages we will unpack as we progress through the rest of the study.

The Solution

- 1. The prayer guarantees are real, beneficial, and powerful and can be relied upon in our life now.

- 2. The prayer guarantees need to be applied to the intended scope.
- 3. The scope of these guarantees is the “inner man” (or inner being).
- 4. God’s new covenant and new creation priorities are focused primarily on the Inner being.
- 5. The prayer guarantee scope includes spiritual insight and perception, courage, comfort, strength, peace, wisdom, understanding, endurance, and patience.

The Way Forward

Personal recalibration of this divine priority will help us to empower our prayer lives and has the potential to revolutionize our entire life focus on Christ.

Our prayer preoccupation can often be on the physical externals of life’s

APPLYING THE PRAYER GUARANTEE

Application 1	Injury from Accident while Traveling	Prayer Guaranteed
External Request	<i>“Keep us physically safe as we travel.”</i>	Uncertain
Internal Request	<i>“Courage, strength and comfort to endure the trauma of an accident resulting from travel.”</i>	Yes

Application 2	Toxic, Destructive or Problematic People in our Lives	Prayer Guaranteed
External Request	<i>“Keep from problematic people in our lives.”</i>	Uncertain
Internal Request	<i>“Wisdom to deal with problematic people.”</i>	Yes
Internal Request	<i>“Courage to stand up to problematic person.”</i>	Yes

Application 3	Good Health and Recovery from Sickness	Prayer Guaranteed
External Request	<i>“Keep from sickness, or grant recovery.”</i>	Uncertain
Internal Request	<i>“Endurance to cope with the sickness.”</i>	Yes
Internal Request	<i>“Strength to be a faithful example in sickness.”</i>	Yes

circumstances—such things as health, employment, relationships, safety, finances, and projects. It appears life circumstances, however, are not covered by the prayer guarantees, and although prayed for, may not be responded to in the way we wish. Nevertheless, within our life experiences, God is still very much at work and involved.

The following Tables will help illustrate the conclusions reached. (Biblical substantiation later supplied.). Paul's famous prayer request for God to remove his physical circumstantial problem is illustrative here:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this [to remove his physical problem], that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:8-10 NIV).

Let's now consider the relevant Biblical evidence. We will present below some Biblical interpretative principles and related Biblical case studies that will help unpack this topic.

Interpretive Principle 1:

Physical examples and language which describe God's prayer response is actually used to illustrate internal transformational results.

Case Study: If you have faith as a mustard seed (Luke 17).

There are several verses where Christ appears to say that a believer can perform some incredible physical feat because of the power of prayer. These include plucking up a large tree by the roots and moving it into the sea (Luke 17:6), moving mountains (Matt 17:20), casting a mountain into the sea (Matt 21:21).

These physical results are presented as prayer request responses, *"it will happen, whatever you ask in prayer you will receive it."* (Matt 21:21-22 NIV).

Now, even a surface reading will prompt us to consider the language more closely. These are undoubtedly exaggerated acts: moving mountains and ripping up large trees. Also, we have no Biblical example of any of these events ever being achieved literally or physically by the apostles.

The context of all these citations will give us the answer. Let's focus on the reference in Luke 17.

"There are several verses where Christ appears to say that a believer can perform some incredible physical feat because of the power of prayer."

Context

Jesus has just told his disciples to forgive a brother if he repents (v. 3), even if he sins against them seven times in one day (v. 4). This commandment



prompts the disciple's response in the very next verse (v. 5) increase our faith. Why this response? To forgive in such a manner went totally against their entire worldview. Their whole upbringing and cultural conditioning had molded their thinking in the opposite direction. The previous words of Jesus "*You have heard that it was said, eye for an eye*" (Matt 5:38) not only reflected their community's norms but also their understanding of Scripture itself (Exod 21:24, Lev 24:20).

This revolutionary and counter-cultural teaching of Jesus had challenged them to their core, as it should us. The values and attitudes so deeply engrained in their thinking caused them to struggle to understand and perform what Jesus had said.

To transform their attitudes and thinking would take a miracle akin to a huge tree (with its Jewish cultural root system) being ripped up and thrown into the sea (v. 6).

We too have values, attitudes, prejudices, outlooks, and responses that reflect our cultural (including ecclesial), family and community conditioning that may need transformation. This metamorphosis is an internal miracle to which the prayer guarantee applies.

The takeout interpretive principle we want to illustrate here is that the physical descriptions of miraculously answered prayers refer to **internal** transformation.

Interpretive Principle 2:

Extravagant and generous answers to prayer in other New Testament passages focus on our inner being.

Case Study: Strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being (Ephesians 3:16-20)

Extravagant Guarantee:

Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. (v. 20).

Scope and Application:

Inner being (v. 16)

Your hearts (v. 17)

Spiritual comprehension (v. 18)

Knowledge that surpasses human knowledge (v. 19)

Being filled with the fullness of God (v. 19)

The power at work within us (v. 20)

This passage is a prayer (v. 14-16). When reading through this prayer, you are struck by the priority and emphasis that is very much focused on the inner being. The extravagant offer of God doing *“abundantly more than we can ask or think”* (v. 20) once again applies to inner transformation. Also, the passage strongly implies that what is achieved is beyond the ability, intelligence, and mental powers of the recipient but is directly attributable to God’s response.

Case Study: If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God. (Jas 1:5).

Extravagant Guarantee:

Ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (v. 5).

The fact that it is *“given”* by God would strongly indicate it is not something solely achieved by one’s own mental abilities and cognitive skills. God is very much responsible and involved in this event.

Scope and Application:

This passage refers to a transformed outlook that experiences joy while in the middle of trial (v. 2) and the value and benefit of trial to enhance and develop patience and spiritual maturity (v. 4). These are no doubt

supernatural and counter-intuitive perspectives.

This prayer is not for the trial to be removed or reduced, but for the inner being to be infused with a wisdom that transcends normal human reactions and responses.

God is described here as giving *“generously”* (Greek: bountifully and copiously with single-minded commitment). Note the emphatic *“It will be given him”* (v. 5) which again highlights God’s unwavering commitment to answer such prayers if asked in faith.

Interpretive Principle 3:

God’s promise to be with us can co-exist with, and empower us to transcend, the experience of negative external and physical life events.

There are many references to God being with us in our lives and never forsaking us. This reality can sometimes be confused with God removing or resolving adverse life circumstances. The following references will show that these two things, God’s care, and negative life events, can co-exist in the life of a believer.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So, we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”
(Heb 13:5-6)

Here we see a promise of divine help and concern co-existing with persecution. Note that the verse does not say do not fear what man **could have** done to me but rather, what man **can** do to me. The fact that God is with us does not stop men from **doing** things to us.

God's promise makes us confident He is with us and cares for us even as we experience negative treatment from men. We may conclude that while God may not step in and stop the physical or psychological abuse, He will help us by removing our fear and giving us courage, comfort, joy, and consolation even while experiencing such things.

"All things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28)

The fact God is working in our lives does not insulate us from negative experiences. This chapter contains other powerful assurances of divine help; *"if God is for us who can be against us"* (v. 31) and *"we are more than conquerors"* (v. 37) Yet, the chapter goes on to detail the life consequences God's people will experience, including being killed (v. 36), death (v. 38), tribulation, persecution, famine, nakedness, famine or sword (v. 35).

It is in all these things (v. 37) that God is working in our lives, not by removing them from us but while we are experiencing them.

If God is helping and working for us, yet we are still experiencing these negative life experiences, the answer must be found within the inner realm—the inner being.

Not Just Theory

When I have discussed this subject with friends and family, some have been disappointed. The fact that God is focusing on the inner being may appear to be "not real" or "wishy-washy"

compared to the physical and external focus we may desire from Him.

However, it is not our intention to reduce or limit prayer in any way. Just because the prayer guarantee may not cover something does not mean we should not bring our petitions before God. Scripture is full of such prayers. Some were answered, and some were not.

The reality is, however, that although this focus may be on the internal and intangible, it is no less real and powerful. The transformational power that God is offering has the potential to change our lives, our emotions, our fears, and our priorities in a way that transcends human experience.

The experience of early believers can illustrate the genuine effects of such prayers. When they were thrown to the lions by the Roman empire to die a horrible and painful death, they displayed superhuman courage. Though they were not saved from the lions, God was with them and comforted them, none-the-less:

*"The reasons the Christians could not be intimidated by the lions and even sang as they entered the arena was that Jesus' counsel, 'Fear not, for I am with you,' worked for them."*²

The power of prayer in our lives is just as real today as it was for them—Christ guarantees it.

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

² Smith, H. *The World's Religions, Chapter 8: Christianity*, 1991, Harper Collins, New York City, NY

GOD HEARS OUR PETITIONS

By Alfred Godfrey

I would like to share with you some thoughts on the readings in 2 Kings 20. This chapter affirms that we should take advantage of God's allowing us to talk to Him through prayer.

God instructs Isaiah,

Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. (v. 5).

It's comforting to hear God Himself say, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears," isn't it? Let's think for a moment of any reason in our lives when we have resisted praying to God over our needs, fears, illnesses, and most of all our sins! He hasn't responded to you directly or sent someone to tell you that He heard your prayer. However, He has indeed heard our petitions and answered many of our prayers.

Hezekiah's health is restored, and God adds fifteen years to his life. That, of course, can't compare to the eternal life that awaits us at the Lord's return. But to make our prayers effective, we should strive to be righteous, like Hezekiah.

Peter wrote,

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. (1 Pet 3:12).

David wrote,

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. (Psa 14:2).

May God always hear our prayers whenever we reach out to Him.

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MUSIC AND PRAISE

ON CREATING

A NEW SONG

By Jessica Gelineau

WINTER morning walks in Southern California can be chilly (don't laugh) but beautiful. On the hilly street overlooking my neighborhood, buckwheat and scarlet firethorn bushes grow thickly. Their tiny white flowers and bright red berries add color and texture to a sometimes-drab landscape. The hills here are greener than green by February and through April, thanks to the spring rains. Deuteronomy 32:2 comes to mind as I go on my regular walks.

*May my teaching drop as the rain,
my speech distills as the dew, like
gentle rain upon the tender grass,
and like showers upon the herb.¹*

Once the regular rains have passed, dew is often the only water our thirsty native plants receive, and the morning air feels freshest and best before the sun's heat sets in—often as early as 8 AM in the summer. How precious are these drops to the plants and people dwelling in desert-like terrain—and how precious are all of God's teachings to us? Perhaps they become more precious once their regularity sets in. "New every morning," writes Jeremiah. We've seen it before, and we'll hear these words again. But as avid walkers don't seem to grow tired of taking daily walks, maybe we best recognize the mercies found in the instruction of our Father once they have become so familiar that they seem like the morning dew. We crave those predictable dewdrops. We can't live without them.

Is there a paradox here, in the metaphor of the dewdrop? Can familiarity really breed freshness? How can habitual actions foster new creations?


Newness. Freshness. Creativity. Inspiration.

These are some ideas we'll explore together in this series: "**On Creating.**" Look out for it several times a year in the Music and Praise section of the *Tidings* magazine.

We'll now turn to our thought for today: **A New Song.**

The phrase "New Song," or *Shir Chadash* in Hebrew, appears in seven verses in the Old Testament. Six of these are found in the Psalms, with the Psalmist either exhorting the congregation to sing a new song or proclaiming that God gave the musician new songs in the first place. "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God," David tells out in Psalm 40:3. "Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD." A passage in Isaiah 42:10 and onwards describes all inhabitants of the deserts, the coastlands, and the cities singing a new song, declaring the praise of the LORD.

The last two times we see Scriptural reference to singing a new song are in the exhilarating visions of Revelation (5:9, 14:3). This time, the singers include four living creatures, twenty-four harp-carrying elders, a myriad of angels, and, well, every single creature that can be found in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth. Wow! Interestingly, the phrase "new song" here seems to refer to a single new song that God has composed and given everyone to sing in complete, unhindered unison. I've always thought of the words "new song" in the Psalms referred to many different original compositions (like the Book of Psalms itself).



As I continue to ponder the freshness of creation as seen in the morning dew, it seems notable that the Greek word *kainos*—the “new” in the New Testament “New Song” phrase—tends to be used more often to denote something unused, something never before encountered. It is not merely the opposite of “old”—there is a different word used in the New Testament for that type of newness or youthfulness. Strong’s definition of *kainos* reads “new—especially in freshness.” Just like the dew, I imagine that the “new song” of Revelation, though it will resound daily into forever, will not lose its freshness. We know some of the lyrics: “By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Rev 5:9).

David was a skilled composer and could easily string notes together to create original tunes. I can picture him saying (or singing, actually), “*I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you!*” (Psa 144:9) and meaning, “Here’s a brand-new song I’m playing for you now for the first time, God! May you accept my creativity expressed in this way as my offering of praise to you.” What I don’t picture—do you?—is that every inhabitant of Israel’s deserts and coastlands had a particular gift of musicality and could create tuneful worship songs. It follows

then that we shouldn’t read into the more commanding uses of the phrase, such as, “*Oh sing to the LORD a new song, sing to the LORD, all the earth!*”² as saying that God expects each of his followers to compose music. This simply wouldn’t be realistic! (Although, as an aside for the nerdier types among us—there are an astonishing number of original tunes yet unwritten. As the great Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev said, in a wonderful little essay in which he discusses the mathematics more exactly, “We need not be afraid that there will come a time when all melody will have been exhausted and we shall be obliged to repeat old tunes.”)³

What **does** it look like, then, to “sing a new song” to God in a more general sense? Here’s one idea. It looks like: creating. Something. Anything. To the glory and praise of God.

As a university student, I took an “Honors Seminar in the Creative Process” class. Yes, it does sound a bit of a pretentious way to describe a group of 12 or 13 twenty-year-olds and their professor sitting around a U-shaped table and discussing the lofty concept of creativity with no particular conclusion to the matter in their syllabus. Nevertheless, it was a memorable class for me, and to this day, I’ve held on to the “Creativity

Journal,” to which I was required to add pictures, notes, and ideas throughout the semester. Here’s something my twenty-year-old self thought important to write near the front of my journal.

I believe:

There is a God.

He is the ultimate Creative force.

Humans were created in the
image of God.

Humans are like God.

Humans are Creators.

Okay, good. This is still good logic. A quick look at the first few chapters of Genesis, as well as themes woven throughout the Bible, seems to support my youthful summation.

To the topic at hand: I can write songs. They’re usually simple enough to be taught to kids within a few Sunday School sessions, so I’m not talking serious musicianship here. But, bottom line, can I write a new praise song if you ask me to? Probably by Tuesday. And that’s a fun thing—a blessing, a gift from God—but I can also prepare delicious food for dinner with my family (if the baby takes a good afternoon nap), or draw a cute enough

picture or birthday card to impress my four-year-old. I can be creative in many ways when I take the time.. And all of those acts of creation are, I believe, acts of praise. They are singing a new song. They are examples of me living as who God created me to be a mini-creator.

Some of you can design and build homes or beautifully decorate their interiors. Some of you can paint murals or use software to create eye-catching graphics—even create the software itself! Some of your children can probably imagine entire worlds and play within them for hours. Some of you—and I’m so jealous—know how to hang items on walls artfully.

Life can feel overstimulating for those who live in the Western world. Our brains can feel clouded and cluttered as we often let continuous inputs override our own imaginations. Let’s make space for creating as an act of praise to our glorious God, the definer and Creator of creativity itself.

What new songs will you sing today?

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¹ All Scriptural citations taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

² Psalm 96:1

³ Profokiev, S. (1939). *Can There Be An End to Melody*. Pioneer Magazine. http://waltercosand.com/CosandScores/Composers%20L-P/Prokofiev,%20Sergei/Can_there_be_an_end_to_melody_.pdf

Editor’s Note: Music and Praise section editor, Sis. Jessica Gelineau, would love to engage with you and dive into conversations around the intersection of inspiration, creativity, music and praise. Please reach out if you have a thought to share or to further a conversation you’ve seen started in this installment of “On Creating.” You can send emails to jessica.r.gelineau@gmail.com.

PART 2

GOD IS NOT A
MONSTER

SLAVERY

By Chris Sales

IN our first article, we set some background necessary for understanding God's morality. The first key concept was that God's methods are far above our own and that He often acts in mysterious and wonderful ways. That is, God **rarely** acts as we think He should. Secondly, you cannot judge God or Jesus by the actions of their professed followers. Finally, the Law of Moses was always meant to be temporary and provisional.

In this second article, we will take a closer look at the topic of slavery.

What do you think of when you think of slavery? If you are like most people, you probably have images of people being bought and sold, treated like property. People are being mistreated, with lots of abuse. You may think of slaves being desperate to escape! It is usually a horrific situation.

The Bible does address this kind of slavery in both the Old and New Testaments, but it never condones it or encourages it. In fact, the kind of slavery allowed or tolerated in the Bible is quite different from this and was actually a merciful provision.

The stereotypical view of slavery today is more in line with what occurred in ancient Near Eastern culture and has been well-documented historically and archeologically. In the culture that surrounded God's people Israel four thousand years ago, the treatment of slaves was brutal and demeaning. Human trafficking and profiteering were a part of society. Slaves were completely at the mercy of their masters, with no rights at all. Runaway slaves were returned to their masters and often killed.

The Old Testament laws improved significantly on this ancient Near Eastern culture, and good treatment of slaves was encouraged by various rules. For example, Exodus 21:2 says,

If you buy a Hebrew servant [many translations say "slave" here], he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.¹

Later in that same chapter, it allows slaves to choose to stay permanently with their master because they love them! Obviously, this would only happen if a slave had been treated well. Also, human trafficking is strictly forbidden by the Law of Moses, and was punishable by death. Exodus 21:16 says, *"Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's*

possession." (NKJV) Slaves also had rights and were to be released if abused or mistreated. In Exodus 21:26 we are told, *"An owner who hits a male or female slave in the eye and destroys it must let the slave go free to compensate for the eye."* In contrast to many ancient cultures, under God's Law, runaway slaves from other nations were to be given refuge in Israel, not handed back to their masters. Deuteronomy 23:15-16 says,

If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand them over to their master. Let them live among you wherever they like and in whatever town they choose. Do not oppress them.

Considering these passages and others, it should be noted that in the Old Testament, the type of slavery that was permitted is more like indentured servitude (that is, working to pay off a debt), not what we think of normally as slavery.

You would understand the idiom when a friend says their job feels like slavery! Many of us are slaves to the grind, burdened by financial debt. Even the Bible speaks of this in Proverbs 22:7, *"The borrower is the slave of the lender."*

Perhaps it would help to think of apprenticeships, school debt, and contractual obligations to find a modern-day comparison of what the Bible means by slavery or servitude permitted under God's Law. Even in modern sports, we have owners of teams, and their players traded or sold, and no one gets upset because we understand the context.

This is more like what God's Word provides for. It is not the oppressive slavery that took place in the United States in the 19th Century. That kind of slavery was a cruel invention of men, not God!

In Old Testament times, there was no social security network like many modern nations have today. So, Israelites sometimes had to sell themselves to get through difficult financial times. The loss of a job, a failed crop, or just plain bad luck could be devastating for someone. Jobs were not readily available since there was no complex industry, so most people just worked for themselves by farming or trade. It could be easy to fall into poverty. God's law allowed the provision of servitude for these desperate circumstances. Contrary to the critics of the Bible, this type of servitude was not that much different experientially from paid employment in a modern cash economy like ours today.

Leviticus 25:39-40 states,

If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to you, do not make them work as slaves. They are to be treated as hired workers or temporary residents among you; they are to work for you until the Year of Jubilee.

God's Law could be seen as a merciful provision for people or families who found themselves in difficult times. They may have had to mortgage their land, but the Law required it to be returned in the year of Jubilee, so family inheritances could not be permanently lost due to a sudden and temporary setback. Beyond that, they

may have to sell themselves or their children to sustain the family through economically challenging times or pay off a debt. If not redeemed by a family member (another merciful provision of the Law), they would have to serve until released after six years, the maximum time allowed under the Law. Servanthood was voluntary and a far cry from the abusive and despicable behavior of slave traders and plantation owners.

Later in Israel's history, when the inhabitants of Judah took back Hebrew servants who had previously been released, God condemned them for violating His Law. He reminded them that they had been slaves in Egypt, and they, too, had been delivered. This experience should have made them more sympathetic to the plight of their fellow brethren. (Jer 34:12-22).

With this understanding of what is meant by slavery, as permitted by the Law, we see that it is more like indentured servitude. Let's look at a typical passage that may appear to challenge this view.

And if a man smites his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continues a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money. (Exod 21:20-21 KJV).

At face value, this may seem brutal and unacceptable. But if we dig a little deeper, and think about what we have already learned about slavery in Israel, this passage fits the pattern. Firstly, note that the rod was used for discipline, so the context is punishment for misbehavior, not abuse



for pleasure at the whim of the master. Also, if the punishment went too far and the servant died, the master was to be punished. The Hebrew word here (*naqam*) signifies revenge or vengeance and in Israel that meant capital punishment. As it says in verse 23, a life had to be given for a life taken. Murder was murder under God's Law.

However, if the servant did not die immediately, then it was to be assumed there was no murderous intent. The master only then had to suffer the loss of money. This may sound callous, but it was a reminder that good treatment of slaves would ensure the full repayment of the debt. In this case, if the slave died (or was injured severely and had to be set free), the master would have to endure loss. The debt would never actually be repaid.

Are these laws perfect and ideal, meant to inform us on how we should behave today? No. But in its time, it was progressive and humane. As one scholar wrote about these Biblical laws, "The protection of slaves from maltreatment

by their masters is found nowhere else in the entire existing corpus of ancient Near East legislation."²

There are other passages that are difficult to read with our 21st century lenses. However, we are reminded not to focus on a single text but to see it in the context of all of Scripture. Any deviations from the ideal moral standards set at creation are the result of human fallenness, and God's laws are trying to regulate and control the hard-heartedness of men, not idealize or condone it!

What about the New Testament? What does it have to say about slavery?

Israel in Moses' day was surrounded by societies wholly given over to the thinking of the flesh, where abuse, selfishness, and covetousness were rampant. Likewise, the Christians of the first century were engulfed in Roman society which was steeped in pagan idolatry and every kind of human vice. Regarding slavery, it is estimated that as much as 30% of the Roman population were slaves in the days of the Apostles!

How were the disciples of Christ to handle the inevitable mixing of masters and slaves in the Ecclesia?³

You have probably heard someone say something like, “Why did Jesus never speak up against the abuses of slavery?” This is simply **not** true. Jesus opposed **every** form of abuse and oppression! In fact, he explicitly said that his mission was “to preach deliverance to the captives,” and to “set at liberty them that are bruised.” (Luke 4:18 KJV).

Paul was divinely inspired to write that the status of slave or free was irrelevant in Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), and rules were given on how both slaves **and** masters were to behave. (See Eph 6 and Col 4). Masters were reminded that they are Christ’s slaves, while slaves were encouraged to see themselves as Christ’s freemen! (1 Cor 7:22). It was these revolutionary Christian affirmations that helped to tear apart the fabric of institutionalized slavery.

Before accusing the New Testament of not condemning slavery outright and commanding masters to release their slaves, it is important to note that Scripture is clear on the following points:

1. Slave trading is a sin (1 Tim 1:10 NIV);
2. Slaves are to be afforded full human dignity and equal spiritual status (1 Cor 12:13) and
3. Slaves were encouraged to gain their freedom if the opportunity arose (1 Cor 7:21).

The case of Onesimus is interesting. He was a runaway slave who became a baptized believer after meeting Paul in Rome. What was Paul to do? He encouraged reconciliation and saw the spiritual relationship between Philemon and Onesimus was more important than their human relationship as master and slave.

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him... For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?...receive him as myself. (Phlm 1:10-17).

In summary, we can see that the so-called slavery laws of the Old Testament were there to control and regulate a fallen human problem—not idealize it or condone it!

The New Testament writers do not try to abolish slavery, but rather make it ultimately irrelevant! In fact, all the structures of human fallenness are abolished in Christ, so we can all sit as equals at His table and share a meal together in fellowship.

In our next article we hope to look at the topic of God and women.

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¹ All Scriptural citations taken from the New International Version, unless specifically noted.

² Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), page 124.

³ Cartwright, Mark, *World History Encyclopedia*, November 2013, www.worldhistory.org.

PART 5 A TEMPLE FILLED WITH UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

By George Booker

But What About Ezekiel's Temple?

*This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles
the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Eph 3:8).¹*

BRO. Sulley wrote his book, *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy*, based on the assumption that the "Prince" in Ezekiel 40-48 referred to the glorified Jesus Christ. This assumption led to the conclusion that the temple described by Ezekiel was to be a Millennial temple over which Christ would preside. And, of course, since Ezekiel's prophecy mentioned animal sacrifices, then Bro. Sulley may have decided that there had to be animal sacrifices in a great temple in the Millennial Kingdom.

As an alternative, I suggest that Ezekiel's temple vision was not a plan for a huge temple in the Kingdom of God. Instead, it was a plan for a temple—similar to Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple—to be built by the Jews when they returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Do these details fit?

Many Bible scholars, both Christadelphians and others, agree that the temple to be built by returning refugees provides the historical

background for Ezekiel's vision. At the same time, this point of view rules out altogether the gigantic, elaborate Millennial Temple, as imagined by Bro. Sulley.

We shall now consider some details about the temple Ezekiel describes, and ask ourselves: "Do these details really **fit** a temple in the Kingdom Age?"

If they do fit, then there is no problem, and we can conclude that Bro. Sulley's theory has some merit. But, as we inspect this temple that Ezekiel describes, various incongruities come to light, and we begin to see that the square peg of Ezekiel's vision simply does not fit into the round hole of Bro. Sulley's conclusion.

First of all, the "*prince*" (Heb. *nasi*) described in Ezekiel 45-46, is most likely Zerubbabel, the prince of Judah during the time of their return. He was definitely not a "*king*" (Heb. *melek*), because he lacked the necessary authority and power for that office. In this case, such authority belonged exclusively to Cyrus, the king of Persia, who allowed the Jews to return and build a temple to their God (2 Chron 36; Ezra 1). As a prince of Judah, but certainly not as a king, Zerubbabel laid the temple's foundation to be completed by the returning exiles (Ezra 2:1; 3:8; 5:2; Zech 4:9).

This suggests that Ezekiel's temple was not intended for the Kingdom Age at all.

Furthermore, we note that:

- This prince (Zerubbabel) was to offer sacrifices for **himself**, that is, for his own sins (Ezek 45:22; 46:10-12).

- He was subject to **death** and needed to plan for his descendants' inheritance (Ezek 46:17-18).
- He had **sons** and presumably a **wife** (Ezek 46:16).
- At least one of those sons would **succeed him** (Ezek 45:8; 46:18) upon his death.

None of the items above can reasonably apply to the glorified Christ. He has no "sins" for which any sacrifice or atonement is necessary. He is immortal and can never die again. He never had, nor will he have, an actual wife and children. But since the resurrected and glorified Christ will never die, there is no need for successors, although there will be plenty of his brothers and sisters, the glorified saints, who will assist him in the administration of the Kingdom of God.

How could the immortal Messiah be the "*prince*"? This would mean that, in offering sacrifices, Jesus would be serving the altar, which was a foreshadowing of himself, as we see in Hebrews 13:10, 15:

We [the believers] have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat...Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.

Is it reasonable that, when the "shadow" and the "substance" come together, as Bro. Sulley implies, the "substance" (Jesus Christ) is made to serve at the "shadow" (the altar)? Surely this is the wrong way around. Surely the immortal Son of God would no longer need to offer any sort

of sacrifice **for himself**; his sacrificial work was completed when, on the cross, he cried out, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30), and then breathed out his last mortal breath. As the author of Hebrews wrote:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties [that is, in Herod's temple]; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [that is, Jesus Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Heb 10:11-12, 14).

Our Savior offered the one perfect sacrifice and then *"sat down at the right hand of God."* To require this Savior to offer sacrifices day by day is to say that his sacrificial work is not finished! This proposal is nothing less than meaningless and borders on the absurd.

To put it simply, Christ officiating in Ezekiel's temple just doesn't "fit!"

Bro. Sulley also assumes that the *"sons of Zadok"* in Ezekiel's prophecy are the resurrected and glorified saints. However, the prophet gives us plain evidence that the *"sons of Zadok"* were mortal men. We know this because:

- The sons of Zadok sweated (Ezek 44:18);
- They were commanded to drink no

wine (Ezek 44:21), in contrast to Matthew 26:29, where Jesus told his disciples: *"I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom";*

- The sons of Zadok were susceptible to defilement themselves, like any mortal men (Ezek 44:25);
- They had no inheritance (Ezek 44:28); and, of course,
- They all died, sooner or later.

So there is the proof that the temple that Ezekiel envisioned would have Levites who turned away from God and defiled themselves by worshipping idols (Ezek 44:10-14,25). Once again, the Millennial Temple of Bro. Sulley simply does not fit in Ezekiel's prophecy.

In Ezekiel's temple vision, we see the LORD'S warnings to the house of Israel but not to Gentile believers. For example:

Say to the rebellious house of Israel, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'Enough of your detestable practices, O house of Israel! In addition to all your other detestable practices, you brought foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh into my sanctuary, desecrating my temple while you offered me food, fat and blood, and you broke my covenant. Instead of carrying out your duty in regard to my holy things, you put others in charge of my sanctuary.' This is what the

Sovereign LORD says: 'No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh is to enter my sanctuary, not even the foreigners who live among the Israelites.'" (Ezek 44:6-9).

There are other passages where Ezekiel characterizes this house of

"an undivided heart and...a new spirit...They will be my people, and I will be their God." (Ezek 11:17-21).

- God will *"sprinkle clean water on [them], and [they] will be clean... from all [their] impurities."* (Ezek 36:24-28).

*There are many Bible prophecies
that should be interpreted conditionally, that is,
"If you will obey me, then I will bless you..."*

Israel as *"rebellious"* (Ezek 24:3; 44:6). This cannot apply to the Jews in the Kingdom of God, and it certainly cannot apply to the immortalized saints who will live in the Kingdom.

Contrast this scenario with the prophets' pictures of Israel in the Kingdom:

- Jeremiah speaks of them as having God's law written on their hearts (Jer 31:33).
- They are said to *"know me [the LORD], from the least of them to the greatest,"* and that *"I [the LORD] will remember their sins no more."* (Jer 31:34). (This is particularly interesting in contrast to the priests in Ezekiel 44:10-14, who worshipped idols.)
- They are said to *"be my people, and I will be their God"* (Jer 32:38) and to have *"singleness of heart and action."* (v. 39).
- These Jews *"will never turn away from me."* (Jer 32:40).
- Ezekiel, in earlier chapters, says that God will give to the house of Israel

The Jews whom the prophets describe as living during the Kingdom can scarcely be portrayed as rebels against the LORD.

In Ezekiel 43:10-11, the LORD tells Ezekiel to encourage his fellow Jews to repent of their sins and join wholeheartedly in this building of the new temple:

*Son of man, describe the temple to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their sins. Let them consider the plan, and **if they are ashamed of all they have done**, make known to them the design of the temple—its arrangement, its exits and entrances—its whole design and all its regulations and laws. Write these down before them so that they may be faithful to its design and follow all its regulations.*

There are many Bible prophecies that should be interpreted conditionally, that is, *"If you will obey me, then I will bless you,"* or *"If you turn away from me, then I will punish you."* (See, for examples, Deut 30:1-3; Psa 81:13-14; Isa 59:20; Jer 3:12-19; 4:1-2; 18:7-

10; Amos 5:15; Zeph 2:3; Zech 6:15; Acts 3:19-20).

"If they are ashamed..." This prophecy was conditional upon the Jews' repentance and obedience. If they truly changed their ways, God would bless them with a new temple in which He would dwell. But if there was no meaningful change for the better, there would be no new temple.

Verses like the ones above may explain why Ezekiel's vision was never brought to the fullness of glory for which he had hoped in the days of Ezra. The reason could simply be that the people of Israel never showed themselves ready to receive such a blessing.

Could it be that we believers, in this day and age, have not repented and sought the LORD as we should, and therefore our lack of faith, collectively, has led to a delay on God's part?

The LORD is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient ["longsuffering": KJV] with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Pet 3:9).

Ezekiel's vision refers to aliens or strangers who have settled in the Land:

*"You are to allot the Land as an inheritance for yourselves and for the **aliens** who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the **alien** settles, there you are to*

give him his inheritance," declares the Sovereign LORD. (Ezek 47:22-23).

This command fits very well with the Jews' return from Babylon since there were many aliens already in the Land. But does it relate so easily to the Kingdom Age, when the land of Israel will especially be the homeland of the twelve tribes of Israel, and when the "Gentiles" who do dwell there can scarcely be called "aliens"?

The boundaries of the twelve tribes outlined in Ezekiel 47 are consistent with the Israel of Ezra's day, after the Jews' return from exile in Babylon. They are not consistent with the much larger allotment of Land in the millennial Kingdom as outlined in Genesis 15.

Ezekiel 47:18 describes the eastern border for the twelve tribes at the Jordan River, and Ezekiel 47:19 speaks of the southern border as the "river" (Heb. *nachal*). *Nachal* is the Hebrew word for a small stream, or a "wadi" (RSV, NIV, NET), an often-dry river bed that usually has only a seasonal flow of water. This *nachal* here is usually identified with the *Wadi el-Arish*, sometimes called "*the brook of Egypt*" (in Hebrew, *nachal mizrayim*). This is a wadi in central Sinai considerably east of the Nile River. In the Old Testament, this wadi marks the southern border of the tribe of Judah (Num 34:5; Josh 15:4, 47; 1 Kgs 8:65; 2 Chron 7:8).

The borders described in Ezekiel 47:18-19 are, as said above, consistent

with the post-exilic Israel of Ezra's day. However, they are not consistent with the more far-reaching extent of the Promised Land as God described it to Abram.

In Genesis 15:18-21, God describes the Land which He promised to Abram and his children:

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi [Heb. nachar: a large river, such as the Nile] of Egypt to the great river [nachar again], the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

The land promised to Abraham and his spiritual "seed" (Gal 3:26-29) is the much larger land stretching between two great rivers, the Nile in Egypt and the Euphrates in Assyro-Babylon. But the land described by Ezekiel is a much smaller area, suitable for the smaller number of returning exiles.

Ezekiel's vision of the temple area seems to describe Jerusalem not so much as an inhabited city but primarily as one large, walled temple complex. However, the Jerusalem of the Kingdom Age is described by the

prophets elsewhere as a city without walls and inhabited by children:

Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. (Zech 2:4).

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there." (Zech 8:4-5).

Ezekiel sees in his vision a large temple area but no real city. The people of Israel are presumably living elsewhere. Historically, this fits very well with the city that Nehemiah endeavored to rebuild. Nehemiah actually had to command the men building the walls "to stay inside Jerusalem at night." (Neh 4:22).

After the walls were rebuilt, "the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt." (Neh 7:4). So finally Nehemiah had to seek out the Levites and the singers where they lived in the regions round about, and bring them into Jerusalem (Neh 12:27-29). Evidently, Nehemiah understood Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 40-48) to be for his own day.



This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "The gate of the inner court facing east is to be shut on the six working days, but on the Sabbath day and on the day of the New Moon it is to be opened." (Ezek 46:1).

In the Kingdom Age, will the east gate of the temple, as Ezekiel pictures it, be shut six days out of seven and open only on the Sabbath day? Or would the gates be kept open perpetually? The answer is easily found, in both the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah prophesies of "the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

*Your gates will **always stand open; they will never be shut, day or night**, so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations—their kings led in triumphal procession (Isa 60:11).*

And the Book of Revelation echoes this same language:

*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. **On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.** (Rev 21:22-25).*

As far as gates are concerned, the temple complex which is described by Ezekiel bears a great resemblance to the second temple rebuilt in the days

when the Jews returned from Babylon. But in this regard, such a temple bears no resemblance whatsoever to the glorified Jerusalem of the Kingdom Age, which needs no closed gates.

Then there is perhaps the most significant question of all: What is **not** described in Ezekiel's vision?

- In this temple of Ezekiel's vision there is no lavish use of gold and silver.
- There are no High Priestly garments of glory and beauty.
- There is no golden lampstand.
- There is no table for the shewbread, or Bread of the Presence.

The list could go on. The **contrasts** between Ezekiel's temple prophecy, and the divine worship of the Kingdom, as described by other prophets, are numerous. But the **comparisons** of Ezekiel's temple to the temple of Ezra and Nehemiah's day are numerous.

Ezra and Nehemiah's new temple was, of course, a holy place for the worship of the LORD God, but its limitations and omissions only served to remind the Israelites that it fell far short even of the temple they had known before, which had been built in the days of Solomon:

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former

glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?" (Hag 2:1-3).

The temple of those days, when Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah oversaw its construction, would only emphasize to the minds of the

and desirable for the convenience of mortal peoples. But such a structure will never, in the most profound sense of the Scriptures, be **the** "temple of the living God." As the martyr Stephen pointed out, just before he was stoned to death by his rabid enemies:

There are numerous New Testament passages that demonstrate that God's real temple, the one which supersedes all other "shadows," consists of Jesus Christ the cornerstone (Isa 28:16; Zech 10:4; 1Pet 2:6), along with his disciples, who constitute his "body".

Jews who saw it that it fell far short in replicating the outward glory of Solomon's temple.

And to us today, who have read Ezekiel 40-48, the descriptions should emphasize how far short that temple fell in possessing the glory of the future Kingdom of God, when the LORD God and His Son Jesus Christ would be the true glory of the spiritual temple, which consisted of all redeemed and glorified saints.

What Ezekiel's temple does not seem to have is a Messiah who would be both King and Priest and who would offer one sacrifice that would be all-sufficient. This differs from numerous sacrifices, which have no real value in forgiving sins.

I am not arguing that there will be no literal temple structure in the Millennium. Such a building could serve as a gathering center and a place of worship. However, I am suggesting that the true temple of the Millennium will be the immortal saints alongside Jesus Christ. Anything else, such as a structure of wood and stone, in whatever configuration, may be useful

The Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?" Has not my hand made all these things? (Acts 7:48-50; cp. 1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 57:15).

There are numerous New Testament passages that demonstrate that God's real temple, the one which supersedes all other "shadows," consists of Jesus Christ the cornerstone (Isa 28:16; Zech 10:4; 1Pet 2:6), along with his disciples, who constitute his "body":

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's **temple** and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's **temple**, God will destroy him; for God's **temple** is sacred, and you are that **temple**" (1 Cor 3:16-17).*

*Do you not know that your body is a **temple** of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. (1 Cor 6:19).*

*What agreement is there between the **temple** of God and idols? For we are the **temple** of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (2 Cor 6:16).*

*You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's **household**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the **whole building** is joined together and rises to become a holy **temple** in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a **dwelling** in which God lives by his Spirit. (Eph 2:19-22).*

*Christ is faithful as a son over God's **house**. And we are his **house**, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (Heb 3:6).*

*Since we have a great priest over the **house** of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:21-22).*

*You also, like **living stones**, are being built into a **spiritual house** to be a holy priesthood, offering*

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:5).

*Him who overcomes I will make a **pillar** in the **temple** of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. (Rev 3:12).*

*I did not see a **temple** in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its **temple**. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. (Rev 21:22-23).*

Such passages emphasize that the temple of the New Testament is a spiritual house comprised of true believers in Christ, both now and in the age to come. In this "temple", the glory of God and the purpose of God will be fully realized. God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28), and the glorified saints will indeed be His glory, which will fill the earth in the Kingdom Age (Num 14:21; Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14).

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Note: In this section, I am especially grateful to Bro. Harry Whittaker for his unpublished paper, *A Fresh Look at Ezekiel's Temple*.

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version unless specifically noted.



FIRST PRINCIPLES

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

By Richard Morgan

Editor's Note: “Living by Faith” is an important topic for all of us to consider. In this series of articles, Bro. Richard introduces us to the first principle of “living by faith”. While this may not be listed in our Statement of Faith, it most certainly is a foundation of what we believe, and a first principle taught broadly in Scripture. I hope you will find these articles interesting and provocative.

JESUS once taught us a parable about two men who went into the temple to pray *“one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”* (Luke 18:10). The point of his parable was directed towards *“some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.”* (v. 9). While the Pharisee showed his arrogance, it was the tax collector who *“went down to his house justified, rather than the other”* (v. 14) as he prayed, *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”* (v. 13).

While many people prayed in the temple in New Testament times—after all, it was a house of prayer—there’s only one other time we’re specifically told someone went into the temple to pray. It was the Apostle Paul. When recounting his conversion experience, he told his listeners he was *“praying in the temple.”* (Acts 22:17). This language connection with the parable is fitting because before he became the Apostle Paul, he was a Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus. But it was as the tax collector in the parable, appealing to God for forgiveness, that he not only went down to his house justified but wrote extensively in his epistles of the doctrine of justification by faith.

The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector encapsulates the two opposing religions highlighted in the New Testament. What separates them is the doctrine of justification—whether from following the Law of Moses or by faith—and the outworking of that religion in how we treat others. The Pharisee treated others with contempt. That’s the natural result that comes from justification by the law, a religion where one’s (supposed) righteousness is measurable and

quantifiable. Looking down on others who can’t keep up with your standards of righteousness (notably, outward acts of ritualistic religion), a person who is justified by law will become judgmental and dismissive of others.

Justification by faith is an important doctrine because of the kind of person it develops. A person of humility, knowing their righteousness is imputed by faith and not by their ability to follow the law. A person of integrity, who has been open and vulnerable towards God, acknowledging their sin and appealing to his mercy and forgiveness. But not only that, justification by faith has also been designed by God to produce in its adherents a character of true righteousness.

In the following series of articles, we’re going to trace the steps of the Apostle Paul as he expounded the theme, *“The righteous shall live by faith.”* It’s one of Paul’s stock phrases, quoted from the prophet Habakkuk and found in his epistles to the Galatians, Romans, and (if indeed he wrote it) Hebrews.

Our journey begins with Paul on his first missionary journey to the area of Galatia, recorded in Acts 13-14. We’re going to look at his first recorded speech in which he preached Christ and concluded with the doctrine of justification by faith.

Luke records:

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. (Acts 13:13-14).

Having preached on the island of Cyprus, they left the port of Paphos and came to Asia Minor, before traveling from the coastal town of Perga to the inland city of Pisidian Antioch. Luke's comment in verse 14 is very terse, simply recording the journey. However, this one-hundred-mile trek is a testimony to the zeal Paul had to preach the gospel message. His route would take him through the treacherous Taurus Mountain range inhabited by bandits that even the Romans had difficulty controlling. But Paul was so determined to deliver the message to his fellow Jews and Gentiles, he was willing to take extraordinary risks. This was not a matter of a minor theological difference with his previous religion as a Pharisee. It was a matter of life and death.

Having sat down in the synagogue on the Sabbath, Luke tells us,

After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it." (v. 15).

This was Paul's chance, and he grabbed it eagerly, concluding with the following words:

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. (vv. 38-39).

That, in a nutshell, is the gospel message. Faith in what Christ has done for us frees us—or as the word

translated "freed" means—justifies us, something which the law of Moses could not do.

It's easy for us, as twenty-first century Christadelphians, to gloss over statements like these. Of course, we understand we're not justified by the law of Moses—in fact, we were never under it to begin with. However, on a psychological level, it is very easy to slip into the same mindset as the Pharisees. We consider our sinfulness and efforts to justify our actions and behavior by thinking our attendance at meeting, Bible reading and study, and busying ourselves in ecclesial activities can make up for our shortcomings. They can't. Nothing can make up for our sins but the mercy and forgiveness of God and our faith in his willingness to forgive us.

Before we get into Paul's speech in detail, notice they first read from the Law and Prophets (v. 15). Just like our daily reading planner, the Jews had theirs too, only it was a weekly plan developed during their captivity in Babylon. These are the Sabbath readings still read in Jewish synagogues today. Each portion, or *parsha*, has a name associated with it. For instance, towards the end of October (or the month *Tishri* in the Jewish calendar), Jews read from *parsha B'reisheet*, which is Hebrew for "beginning," the title of the Book of Genesis in the Jewish Bible, and the first word in the Bible translated "In the beginning" (Gen 1:1). On the Sabbath, the Law, or Torah, portion read is Genesis 1:1-6:8, and the Prophets portion is Isaiah 42:5-43:10.

We can make an educated guess as to what *parsha* was read from before

Paul's speech in Pisidian Antioch, and just as Christadelphian speakers often exhort from the daily readings, it seems Paul based his remarks on the Law and Prophets that had just been read. Paul begins his speech in Acts 13:17 and starts with a short history lesson: *"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it."*

Look at the phrase *"made the people great."* It's the same Greek expression found in the Septuagint (LXX) of Isaiah 1:2, where God says through the prophet, *"I have begotten and reared up children."* The reason we want to look for verbal links with the LXX is because it was the commonly read version in Jewish synagogues of the first century.

There are also connections with Deuteronomy 1. In verse 18, Paul continued his history lesson, saying, *"And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness."* That's an unusual thing to say until we realize that the Greek for *"put up with them"* is used in Deuteronomy 1:31—*"The LORD thy God will bear thee as a nursing."* Then in Acts 13:19, Paul says, *"And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance,"* using the same Greek expression as Deuteronomy 1:38—*"for he shall cause Israel to inherit it."*

While just a few verbal links aren't conclusive, although they are concentrated in Paul's introduction, it is interesting to note that in *parsha*



Devarim, the Law and Prophets sections read were Deuteronomy 1 and Isaiah 1. The *parsha Devarim* is read during the summertime, the Jewish month *Av* (our July), a prudent time for Paul and his companions to make the trek through the Taurus Mountains.

But it's when we look at the context of these Law and Prophet portions we see their aptness for Paul's message.

The Book of Deuteronomy, called *Devarim*, meaning "words" in the Hebrew Bible, was Moses' message to the new generation about to enter the Promised Land. The previous generation couldn't enter the land because of their lack of faith. So, the Book of Deuteronomy is a message to the generation of the faithful in which "Moses undertook to explain this law." (Deut 1:5). For the Law to be effective it needs explanation because we know the Jews struggled to see beyond its letter and thought righteousness came by following its rules and rituals.

Isn't that precisely what Paul was doing in his speech and all his preaching? He was **explaining** the Law and Prophets. Paul's speeches and epistles are replete with references to the Law and Prophets read on every Sabbath. Having been converted, he could now look at them with new sight, the eye of faith. The gospel message is very much an explanation of the Law and Prophets.

But there's another intriguing connection to Paul's message seen in the word "explain" from the verse in Deuteronomy. It's an unusual word only found here, one other time in Deuteronomy, and in one more place, the prophecy of Habakkuk:

And the LORD answered me: Write the

vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. (Hab 2:2).

This just happens to be the introduction to the prophet's famous statement, taken up in Paul's preaching of justification by faith—"but the righteous shall live by his faith." (Hab 2:4).

Deuteronomy 1, just like Paul's introduction in his speech, is the historical prologue to the book. Referring to the generation that lacked faith, Moses reminds the people that God "*set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them.*" (v. 8). However, "*in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God.*" (v. 32). Paul's speech reminds his listeners again of the promise and concludes with a lesson regarding the importance of faith.

Isaiah 1 can also be seen as a springboard into Paul's speech. He told his listeners "*You could not be freed by the law of Moses*" (Acts 13:39) and Isaiah says the same:

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. (v. 11).

Performing ritualistic sacrifices can't justify anyone, and what God is looking for instead is for Jerusalem to "*be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city*" (Isa 1:26), not the city of righteousness where the rituals of the Law of Moses were kept. The next verse says, "*Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.*" In other words, Isaiah

1 expands the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. The multitude of their sacrifices makes a way to find those who have faith in God and repent.

Returning to Paul's little history lesson, we find out he is in a hurry to get to the time of Saul and David (vv. 21-22). He wants to make sure his listeners understand who the seed of David is, their true Messiah: Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul could have preached the gospel in another way, so why focus on the time of David? Having spent a few verses leading up to his time, he spends almost the rest of the speech talking about David and his seed.

Notice in verse 22, he contrasts David with his predecessor:

And when he had removed him [Saul], he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, "I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will."

That predecessor was Saul's namesake, and if you think about it, we have here another example of the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. King Saul was just like Saul of Tarsus; There are several examples of him engaged in a ritualistic mindset, enough for Samuel to ask him, "*Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?*" (1 Sam 15:22).

David, on the other hand, is like the tax collector. When you read what Paul said of him—"who will do all my will" (v. 22),—you wonder if you take it from a legalistic point of view. David's

sin with Bathsheba stands out as a stark reminder that he did not always do God's will. And yet, because of his confession and repentance, David, rather than Saul, went home justified.

And so, in verse 34, Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah: "*I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.*" The context of these words helps us understand God's attitude towards David and the tax collector. Here's the full verse from Isaiah:


Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. (Isa. 55:3).

It is because God made an everlasting covenant with David that He continued His steadfast, sure love for him, despite his sin. At the core of God's character is His faithfulness. God was faithful to David because he was a man after God's heart, which means he was loyal to Him. That's the kind of relationship God is looking for. Not one based on our ability to keep a list of rules and rituals, but one where our faith in God and loyalty to Him means He is pleased to forgive us for those times when we fall short.

In next month's article, we will start delving into the phrase "*the righteous shall live by faith*" by first going to the origin of the words in the prophecy of Habakkuk.

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.



BOOK REVIEW

STUDIES IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

By Shawn Moynihan

HAVE you ever really considered what Jesus was trying to help us accomplish when he instituted the Breaking of Bread all those years ago with his disciples? Is it the Last Supper? Or the First Supper?

Bro. Shawn Moynihan's book entitled, *Studies in the Lord's Supper* takes us on a journey through the Bible, showing us just what Jesus was teaching and what it means for us. This event was very important to Jesus, and he was passionate about it. Bro. Shawn provides us with a close look at the institution of this Passover feast with the apostles by examining the Passover that Moses initiated. He also supplies us with a good discussion about the timing of this meal. He expounds on all the symbols of Christ's body: the cup, the grapes, the bread and the peace offering used to celebrate our relationship with God and the fulfillment of that symbolism in Christ's death and resurrection.

There is a full section dedicated to celebrating the night of "this passover" in the four gospels. He displays how we can be so much closer to God and

Christ when we participate with each other in this blessing—the necessity of preparation for it both physically and most importantly—spiritually. He brings us back in time to the early ecclesias, looking at how they celebrated and discussed the issues that arose about the way some were performing it. He also brings us forward through the centuries, looking at the ways the ritual has changed. Finally, we are brought to the marriage supper of the Lamb, which we long for.

It is worth the read, and God willing will provide you with a deeper relationship with God and His son every time you engage in this most important part of our memorial service—sharing with our brothers and sisters around the world on a weekly basis—joyfully, reverentially with a deeper understanding of this precious gift which Jesus invited us to follow with his example of longing to eat it with all our heart.

Book Reviewed by:

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STUDIES IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

By Shawn Moynihan

THE Tidings is pleased to announce the publishing of a new book by Bro. Shawn Moynihan, *Studies in the Lord's Supper*.

Following is chapter 19 of Bro. Shawn's book, which we are providing here as a preview. We believe it gives the sense

of how well-researched and insightful this new work is for our community. You may obtain your copy of the book through Amazon.com.

You can find the link to this book and many others on our website at:

www.tidings.org/publications

EXCERPT FROM "STUDIES IN THE LORD'S SUPPER"

SHOWING THE LORD'S DEATH

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. (1 Cor 11:26).

Paul tells us that every time we participate in the Lord's Supper, we "shew" (KJV) Christ's death until he comes. Practically speaking, what does this mean for us when we participate in the Lord's Supper? By unpacking the component parts of the phrase "ye do shew the Lord's death until he come," we can deepen our understanding of these very familiar words.

Shew

Versions of the Bible usually render the word translated "shew" [*katangellō*] in the King James Version as either "proclaim" or "tell." *Katangellō* literally

means to "declare down" and has a strong sense of public sharing. Vincent states that the word means "to proclaim with authority, as commissioned to spread the tidings throughout, down among those that hear them, with the included idea of celebrating or commending."¹

To attempt to capture the word's meaning, some dynamic translations render *katangellō* as "you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again" (NIV). *Katangellō* is used seventeen times in the New Testament. It is usually translated as "preach" in the King James Version. Given the focus on preaching in Acts, it is no surprise that *katangellō* is used many times in this book (Acts 4:2; 13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17, 21; 17:3, 13, 23; 26:23). Whether in the

synagogue or on Mars Hill, *katangellō* was the public proclamation of the Gospel. In Philippians, Paul uses the word to capture all the ways that Christ is preached, “*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached [katangellō]; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice*” (1:18).

In terms of helping us understand 1 Corinthians 11:26, the most relevant occurrences are the two other times that Paul uses *katangellō* in 1 Corinthians:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring [katangellō] to you the testimony of God. (1 Cor 2:1).

Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach [katangellō] the gospel should live from the gospel. (1 Cor 9:14).

From the way that *katangellō* is used, both throughout the New Testament and in 1 Corinthians, we can confidently infer that Paul was using this word to describe an act of public preaching.

By taking up the Bread and the Cup, we are preaching about Christ’s death. Three key questions emerge from this inference: What is the content of the preaching message? How is the message delivered? Who is the audience for this preaching? The celebration of Passover helps us answer these questions.

Passover and the “Cup of Proclamation”

Passover was clearly on Paul’s mind as he was writing to the Corinthian ecclesia about the Lord’s Supper. As part of his discourse on the Lord’s Supper, Paul grounds the partaking in Passover, “*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*” (1 Cor 10:16). The “*cup of blessing*” was the third of the four Passover cups. Similarly, by describing the partaking of the Bread and Cup as a “*proclamation*,” Paul is referring to the second cup of Passover, the *Maggid*, called the “*cup of proclamation*.”

The second Passover cup was called the cup of proclamation because it was at this point that the person leading the Seder told the story of Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Several commentators have noted the connection between *katangellō* and the Hebrew practice of *Haggadah*. The *Haggadah* (literally, “the telling”) is the historical explanation of the events and meaning of Passover; the connection between Passover and the Lord’s Supper informed many translators’ decision to render *katangellō* as “tell.” In the table below, we also see the strong parallel between the command to “shew” the story of Passover and the command to “shew” Christ’s death, as embodied in the KJV’s translation of *katangellō* as “shew”:

Passover	Lord's Supper
<i>And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt.’ And it shall be for a...memorial between thine eyes.</i> (Exod 13:8-9 KJV).	<i>In remembrance of me...ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.</i> (1 Cor 11:25-26 KJV).

This part of the Passover celebration was deliberately a teaching time, in fulfillment of God's requirement that the story of deliverance be shared with the next generation of God's family:

You shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households." (Exod 12:25-27).

As the text indicates, the learning was not to be through passive hearing, but rather interactive participation marked by questions and answers.

We have a good understanding of what the content of the "proclamation" was like at the time of Christ. Rabbi Gamaliel (Paul's teacher) commented extensively on this topic, and his commentary was preserved in the *Mishnah*.² Gamaliel taught that the story must emphasize three things: the lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs. He also stated that the "telling" should emphasize that participants must understand that God is saving them, just as He saved the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt: "In every generation, a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt." Gamaliel insisted that the participants understand that salvation was not an abstract thing whose only impact was on a long past generation; rather, the Passover demonstrated that the God of Israel continues to save.

We also have a good idea of how the lesson was to be delivered. Gamaliel asserted that the emotional content of the "telling" should be marked by joy, praise, and thanksgiving: "We are bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt, to extol, and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our father and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a feast-day, and from darkness to great light, and from slavery to redemption; so let us say before him the Hallelujah!" This sense of overflowing joy made the Maggid the natural introduction to the Passover celebration's first music; the first two Hallel Psalms (i.e., Psa113-114) were sung immediately after the "telling"

We also know the audience for the proclamation. The audience was the family of God, from the youngest to the oldest. All were engaged in the telling of God's redemption of His people from the bitter bonds of slavery. The Passover was exclusively for the family of God; to participate in the celebration, a Gentile had to become adopted, entering the family through the covenant of circumcision (Exod 12:43-49).

The Lord's Death

What does it mean to "proclaim," to "tell of" to "preach" Christ's death? Fundamentally, when we proclaim Christ's death, we proclaim our deliverance through the everlasting covenant. This covenant is the Divine plan of salvation, and Christ's death was an essential part of this covenant.

The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes this concept by asserting:

And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb 9: 15).

One commentator on Hebrews 9:15 stated, “Jesus is the covenant-victim of the new covenant, the ratification-sacrifice.”³ We participate in the covenant by identifying ourselves with Christ’s death through baptism: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Rom 6:3).

We can’t proclaim Christ’s death without proclaiming his life. His righteous life made his death the vehicle that enables us to be deemed righteous: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor 5:21). His resurrected life commands us to live new lives now: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:4). By “putting on Christ” (Gal 3:27), we proclaim that our lives are marked by a new relationship with God and Christ, no longer constituted as sinners but instead constituted as righteous.⁴

We are also proclaiming the power of Christ’s resurrection over death. Christ’s death provides us with a way to everlasting life: “The opening of the way to everlasting life was by the death

of Christ, as all the types showed.”⁵ The Corinthian ecclesia struggled with this concept, and Paul devoted a large component of his first letter to helping them understand the impact of Christ’s resurrection. Paul is emphatic:

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. (1 Cor 15:21-26).

Participating in the Bread and Cup means proclaiming Christ’s death and his resurrection.

Until He Comes

Paul connects the proclamation to the coming of Christ. The first-century ecclesia connected attending the Lord’s Supper with the coming of Christ. The *Didache* (a kind of First-Century ecclesial guide) states: “Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the Son of David. If anyone is holy let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.”⁶ The only occurrence of Maranatha in the New Testament is in Paul’s first message to the Corinthian ecclesia: “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.” (1 Cor 16:22 DLNT). Maranatha is an Aramaic word that has been translated as:

- “The Lord has come.”
- “Lord, come”
- “The Lord is coming”

Some commentators have suggested that Maranatha refers to a prayer used by the first-century Ecclesia when it gathered together, especially for the Lord’s Supper. Given that Christ’s model prayer emphasized the coming of God’s kingdom (Matt 6:10), it makes sense that the ecclesia would emphasize this as well. John appears to allude to this practice by using the Greek version of Maranatha to close Revelation: “*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*” (Rev 22:20).

Maranatha’s flexible verb tense suggests a connection to the Divine Name of Yahweh. This is related to God’s plan of salvation because the past, present, and future are woven into the fabric of the Biblical narrative: “Now the book of God is peculiar in this—it narrates the past, the present, and the future all in one volume.”⁷ As the chart below demonstrates, the Bible shows that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. The fact that the Bible uses past, present, and future tenses to describe our salvation shows that the doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is false.

Have Been Saved	Are Being Saved	Will Be Saved
Rom 8:24; Eph 2:4-10; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5; 2 Thess 2:13; Isa 43:11-12; Deut 33:29	1 Cor 1:18; 15:1-2; 2 Cor 2:15; 2 Cor 6:2; Acts 2:47, 4:12; Phil 2:12-13; Heb 7:25; 1 Thess 5:8-10; 1 Pet 3:21; Luke 19:9; Isa 45:20-23; John 3:17; 5:34; 12:47; 1 Tim 1:15	Isa 25:6-9; Joel 2:32; Zech 8:13; 9:16; Matt 10:22; 24:13, 22; John 10:9; Acts 15:11; Rom 5:9-10; 10:9; 10:13; 2 Tim 2:10; 4:18; Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet 1:3-5, 9; 4:18

When Paul exhorts us to “*proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes,*” he is not merely telling us to maintain the practice until it becomes fulfilled in the Kingdom. He is also exhorting us to be mindful that Christ has come, as embodied in his sacrificial body/blood. Paul is also exhorting us to be mindful of Christ’s current work as our High Priest. Paul is exhorting us to look to the future role of Christ and to plead for his return. Ultimately, Paul is challenging us to live now as citizens and ambassadors of the future kingdom that Christ’s return will establish.

Memorial Exhortation: Proclaiming the Lord’s Death Until He Comes

Our unpacking of what it means to proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes leads us to think that it sounds very similar to what we call the “exhortation” given when we partake of the Bread and the Cup. A prominent scholar, Joachim Jeremias, believes that the proclamation served exactly this function for the first-century church: “the ‘proclamation of the death of the Lord’ at the Eucharist... must have had the form of a recitation of the words of interpretation followed by an exposition.”⁸

The exhortation at the Lord's Table is the time to preach to the family of God. It is a time to tell of our redemption, to proclaim that the Son's death—and life—has made us truly free (John 8:36). It is the telling of our own personal redemption. Paul recognized this, building on his teacher Gamaliel's assertion that "In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt" to proclaim, "*I have been crucified with*

Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal 2:20). Most of all, it is a joyous proclamation that celebrates the work of Christ in the past, in the present, and in the future: "*Maranatha!*"

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¹ Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1887)

² The Mishnah (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933)

³ W.H. Boulton, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hyderabad: Printland, 1994)

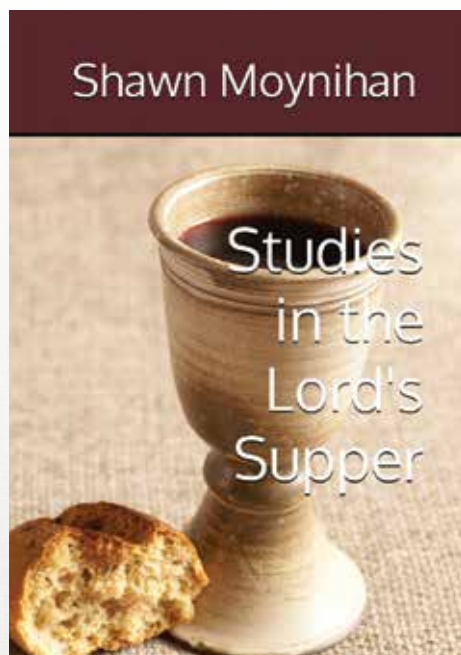
⁴ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1849/ Electronic edition: 2013)

⁵ John Carter, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1939/Electronic edition 2015)

⁶ Didache, earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html

⁷ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1849/ Electronic edition: 2013)

⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1966)



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SAME SEX ATTRACTION AND THE CHURCH: THE SURPRISING PLAUSIBILITY OF THE CELIBATE LIFE

Reviewed by James Robinson

THIS book offers a plausible solution to the problem of how human beings who are sexually attracted to their own sex can live a life in Christ. It also explains how it is possible to faithfully live a celibate lifestyle, whatever your sexuality, and how a Christian community can support those who are trying to do so. If you are same-sex-attracted, single, or just trying to support someone else who is facing these challenges, you are going to find a lot to help in the pages of this book.

The author of the book, Mr. Ed Shaw, is a pastor in the Church of England, Evangelical Alliance. He is not a Christadelphian. His book contains many statements Christadelphians will consider theologically problematic, including references to heaven as the reward of the righteous. While these are not the book's focus, the author clearly believes in many of the errors of Christendom, and I wouldn't

recommend the book to anyone whose faith might be shaken. What makes this book so powerful is that, despite his doctrinal errors, Mr. Shaw clearly believes the Bible is the inerrant word of God, and he is trying his best to follow what it says. Although he personally is sexually attracted to other men, he has chosen not to indulge in his sexual desires but instead has elected to live a celibate lifestyle. One of the things that makes this book persuasive is that it's written by someone living what he is preaching. He is facing head-on all the difficulties and heartaches that self-denial brings. However, despite all that, he not only believes the lifestyle he has chosen is right but that it is the best possible lifestyle for someone with same-sex attraction. This is not a book by someone who is laying down precepts for someone else to follow. It is a book by someone who is explaining why he can live right now the way he does and why it's possible

both physically and intellectually to do so. Lord willing, someday, we will have books written by Christadelphians in the same position, but until then, this is the best book on the subject I have read.

I came across this book as a result of my involvement with the movement, “Navigate by Faith.” (navigatebyfaith.org) We’d been busily researching the topic, and one of the resources we found was livingout.org, a website of people who, in their own words, “experience same-sex attraction and yet are committed to what the Bible clearly says, and what the church has always taught, about marriage and sex.” They use the term “same-sex attraction,” rather than “gay” or “lesbian,” because those terms are used to describe an identity. Their identity is in Christ, not in their sexual orientation. Again, quoting their own words:

“If anyone is in Christ,” writes the Apostle Paul to Christians in Corinth, where some had been converted to faith in Christ from a background of same-sex practice, *“he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). For me, part of the “old” that “has gone” is this idea of identifying myself and describing myself according to my sexual attractions. If I were to hold on to that label “gay,” as if it’s somehow intrinsic to who I am now, then by denying myself a same-sex relationship it would feel as if I’d be denying who I really am (an accusation some of my gay friends already level at me). If my true identity is in Christ,

however, then denying myself a same-sex relationship seems like a much more positive outworking of my commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

I’d previously read several other books on the topic, but this one is the best that I’ve come across so far. Perhaps this is not surprising—as he says in the book, Mr. Shaw has also read the same books I’ve read, and more, and found them unsatisfying. The majority of books on this subject fail to explain how the gospel message is good news to the same-sex attracted. That’s why Mr. Shaw wrote his book, with such a focus on the concept of “plausibility.” He laments that it has become implausible to tell a person in a gay relationship who has heard the call of the gospel, that he or she needs to separate and live a life of celibacy. The reason is not that the gospel message is wrong, but because the church (meaning the mainstream Christian churches) has lost the gospel. The church itself has made a large number of missteps, been deformed by the influence of the world around it, and has “made Jesus’ way sound like a bad deal rather than the best way for any human life to be lived.” As Christadelphians, we would completely agree with Mr. Shaw’s analysis that the church has lost the gospel message, although we typically focus on different issues. This is another reason why I found the book so interesting. The missteps he identifies made by the mainstream churches are ones that Christadelphians may also inadvertently stumble into. These missteps are not ones we typically teach as first principles. He lists the following

errors churches make, which also serve as chapters in the book:

1. "Your identity is your sexuality."
2. "A family is Mom, Dad, and 2.4 children."
3. "If you're born gay, it can't be wrong to be gay."
4. "If it makes you happy, it must be right!"
5. "Sex is where true intimacy is found."
6. "Men and women are equal and interchangeable."
7. "Godliness is heterosexuality."
8. "Celibacy is bad for you."
9. "Suffering is to be avoided."

For each one of these "missteps," he describes how the church has gone astray, what God's true teaching on the subject is, and, of course, why what God says is right. Even for a Christadelphian like me, several of his points were quite convicting. For instance, I didn't realize just how much we've become afraid of intimate (but non-sexual) relationships between people of the same sex. This is often to the point where some condemn David's relationship with Jonathan or Jesus' with his twelve apostles. Another is just how ingrained our society's demonization of suffering has become. While the book's focus is, of course, Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction, the missteps he identifies have ramifications beyond that particular conflict. I think even those not currently dealing with issues regarding same-sex attraction will find the book interesting and useful. Certainly, Mr. Shaw has an excellent

treatment of why God gave us sexual desire in the first place. (Spoiler: it's really to help us understand God better) This is a theological question almost anyone who has gone through puberty has asked. He also finishes with a couple of chapters on why the traditional teaching of Scripture about how sex and marriage is "plausible" and why the new interpretations that have become so popular lately are not.

Despite being a short book (only 172 pages), *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* packs highly relevant material. For anyone looking for a plausible answer to the question: "Why should a Christian choose not to have sex with the person they love?" this book is it. Those who live a celibate lifestyle right now, whether attracted to the opposite sex or not, will also find value in this book. It would be helpful, as well, for anyone who would like to be a support to those struggling with their sexuality in their walk. The chapters themselves are independent and digestible, which makes the book quite feasible as a set of Bible classes. I have personally led classes on this topic several times. To anyone trying to understand how the gospel is truly "good news" for people who are attracted to their own sex, I heartily recommend the book and the website (<http://livingout.org>) of which Mr. Shaw is an editor.

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COSTA RICA BIBLE SCHOOL

By David Collister

I always look forward to the yearly Bible School in Costa Rica. I'm not too fond of the flight down since it is usually a red-eye flight, leaving just after midnight and flying all night. But the enthusiasm and spirituality of the group and the enriching experiences always make it worth it.

The night before the Bible School began, we met at the ecclesial hall for an introductory evening and were blessed to witness the baptism of Kenya Santamaria, daughter of Bro. Ronald and Sis. Roth Berly Santamaria. Bro. Ronald is the recording brother of the Costa Rica Ecclesia. It was a beautiful event, culminating in delicious tamales and the warm fellowship of brothers and sisters from all over the Americas.

The next day, we left for Bible School. The Costa Ricans are hard workers and do an excellent job planning the many activities, considering the many different age groups, from the very young to the elderly, and providing enriching spiritual experiences for all. In fact, in their usual way, those who planned the Bible School integrated the "Crossing the Desert" theme into many aspects of the weekend.

This year, the decision was made to use a different campground than in years past, with a quieter main hall than the previous one (located near a main road). Most of the group met at the ecclesial hall on the morning of December 30th and boarded the bus to make the half-hour trip to the campground, while several went by car. The campground was interesting, with one building containing a large main hall and a dining hall where the camp staff made delicious meals for the group of over 80. The sleeping quarters consisted of a long building with several rooms, each with about ten bunk beds and a bathroom. However, there was no heated water in most of the cabins, so the cold showers were for the brave of heart. Another feature of the campground was a fairly large collection of farm animals, something especially interesting for the children and the basis of an activity on the theme of the Bible School.

This year's group included about 50 Costa Ricans, 20 Salvadorians, and brothers and sisters from several other countries, including four from Canada, six from the US, and one from Bolivia, Honduras, and Peru. Each year, Costa

Rica and El Salvador host Bible Schools on the last two weekends of the year. One of the two countries invites visitors from other countries to attend, while the other holds a smaller school, mainly for its own members. This year it was Costa Rica's turn to host the visitors, and thus, the large number of attendees from other countries.

I was asked to give the four main classes and an exhortation around the theme of the weekend. The first class considered how God manifests His presence in the cloud and fire. I followed this theme through the Bible and showed how God protects His people from their adversaries, providing light to His people and darkness to their enemies. The second class looked at how God patiently teaches His people to trust him, both Israel in the wilderness and believers through the ages. Class 3 focused on the war with Amalek and examined God's dealings with the enemies of Israel. The fourth class followed Israel to the Promised Land and considered the mission of the twelve spies. The exhortation looked at the "rest" God has promised in the future, and even gives to His followers in this life in a limited fashion.

Bro. and Sis. Jeff and Victoria Hibbs from Canada were visiting Victoria's family in Costa Rica, and Bro. Jeff gave classes to the young people on the subject of Daniel. The classes were very well received, with the young people benefitting from Jeff's enthusiasm and knowledge. Sis. Marcela, a very energetic sister from Honduras, gave the classes to the children. Because of the blessings of Zoom, she is a regular teacher in the online Costa Rican Sunday School and is well known and loved by the children.

Other activities added to the weekend included games to bring the brothers and sisters together in fellowship and to help them to get to know each other better. It also included a campground tour to see all the animals. This was especially fun for the little ones, but many adults enjoyed it too. On New Year's Eve, after a musical presentation by the Salvadorian group and the little ones, as well as a skit including some hymns by the Costa Ricans, we all made our way out to a bonfire where we enjoyed fellowship, snacks and hot chocolate as we waited for midnight. Just before midnight, we had a prayer thanking God for His blessings, asking for His continued guidance, and praying for the peace of Jerusalem. After this, we welcomed the New Year with hugs and best wishes and then made our way back to the cabins to sleep. On Sunday morning, we were blessed to witness the baptisms of Karen Arias and her daughter, Francela Ulate, before participating in the Memorial Service.

The Bible School concluded with a final presentation, including photos of the weekend, a talk, and a final activity. After this, we made our way to our cabins to pack before heading home. Since the Salvadorians and others were not leaving the country immediately, there were several opportunities to continue fellowship, with some meeting up for meals and other activities. All in all, everybody was spiritually uplifted by this wonderful event.

*David Collister,
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EL SALVADOR BIBLE SCHOOL

By Jim and Jean Hunter

BIBLE school activities began a few days before the formal event. As the out-of-town visitors arrived, they were taken on trips to the beach, to volcanoes, and to special dinners. Newly baptized Bro. Cristian Mamani came from Bolivia, Bro. Nahuel Carmona from Peru, Sis. Marcela Castellanos from neighboring Honduras and Bro. Dante Berbetti from Phoenix, Arizona. In addition, brothers and sisters Jorge, Encarnación, Victor, and Marina, bussed in from Guatemala. On the eve of the school,

a meet-and-greet dinner was held at the San Salvador Hall, allowing the Salvadorans who could not attend the school itself to get to know the foreign visitors. Early the next morning, we undertook the trek north to our usual venue in La Palma, a picturesque



town in the hills near the border with Honduras. The trip was much slower than normal due to road construction, but eventually, all arrived safely.

Bro. Jorge García of the Sonsonate satellite ecclesia gave four uplifting adult classes on the Letters of Peter, while the men's class and the Sunday exhortation were given by Bro. Sergio Armas, also from Sonsonate. The senior young people's classes were given by visiting brethren Dante and Nahuel, aided by Bro. Alejandro Alfaro of San Salvador. There were about twenty in the group, and it was lovely to see their enthusiasm. Sis. Marcela organized the games after each class, giving out as prizes the coveted Hershey's kisses brought from the US!

Sis. Jean led the intermediate classes on "The Birth of Jesus—the Real Story," provoking some excellent feedback as the group was encouraged to follow the example of Jesus in the temple when he was a young boy, by asking good questions!

The young people presented a dramatic skit that included a toddler who obediently stayed limp in his mother's arms during the Tenth plague! This was followed by the evening bonfire and



Bro. Jorge García, from Sonsonate, El Salvador

hymn sing until late into the evening.

The weekend ended at the San Salvador Hall with another couple of hours of chatting and leave-taking, fueled by fruit salad and doughnuts.

Most of the Salvadoran young people, the visitors from South America, and a few older brothers and sisters flew down to the Costa Rica Bible School over the New Year's weekend. We are thankful that everyone had a safe and uplifting experience in both schools, and pray God might continue to bless and strengthen the family in the faith that is growing in Latin America.

*Jim and Jean Hunter,
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Thoughts on the Way

An Exhortation for Exhorting Brothers

THE Sunday morning exhortation should be more than an exposition, more than a word study, more than a class on first principles, and more than a talk about the signs of the times. These sorts of presentations all have their places among us. But the exhortation is primarily an introduction to the service of the bread and the wine and an aid to our remembrance and self-examination.

The exhortation should emphasize God's holiness and His purity, as well as His love. It should emphasize the great responsibility of our calling to serve Him. It should not be the place to criticize other churches or criticize one another. Instead, the exhortation should encourage, comfort, heal, and strengthen one another.

In fact, the Greek words which are translated "*exhort*" or "*exhortation*" mean exactly that. A survey of how the Greek words (*paraklesis* and *parakaleo*) are used in the New Testament reveals that 95% of exhortations in the Bible involve positive encouragement, while a mere 5% have to do with negative criticism.

Above all else, the exhortation should show us Christ. Wherever our thoughts and words take us as we contemplate God's message, there we will find Christ. He is the central character in the Bible and the person who we should keep at the forefront of our minds and our hearts.

Our Sunday service should be a memorial. It is not a sacrifice, but it memorializes—that is, it helps us to remember—the one perfect sacrifice which Christ offered to his Father on our behalf. It is one way in which we remember the act that gave us the most wonderful gift imaginable, the divine grace and mercy which Paul called "*the unsearchable riches of Christ*." (Eph 3:8 KJV).

*Do this, whenever you drink it, in **remembrance** of me.* (1Cor 11:25).¹

The bread and wine primarily help us to remember the sacrifice itself. This is expressed in Hebrews 10:12-14:

When this priest [that is, Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he

waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

In this brief passage the writer to the Hebrews brings out several very important points:

- Christ, and not any Levitical priest, can offer this unique sacrifice.
- Christ's sacrifice is absolutely effective for all time, as well as for all people who believe in him.
- Christ's sacrifice occurred only once; it cannot be repeated, and it does not need to be repeated.
- We are made "perfect" (i.e., complete) in holiness, having our sins forgiven "for all time," that is, forever, by this one sacrifice.
- However, this "perfection" is not achieved all at once. It is achieved by a continuously ongoing process, in which we work together with God and His Son. By this partnership of effort we "are being made holy."

This final point—how we are being made holy—stresses how important it is to meet together and take the bread and wine. It is the primary means by which we can work together with our heavenly Father and our Savior to continue the process by which we are finally made both "perfect" and "holy." It is not optional; it is an absolute necessity and must be repeated time after time. This is why the writer to the Hebrews adds this in the same chapter:

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:22-25).

If we are to live up to the New Testament pattern, we should be a family gathered around a table, partaking of a meal while remembering an absent member. It is an uncomplicated act, an act of loving companionship. It is an act of warmth and friendship and familiarity, not an act of pomp and ceremony. If the exhortation has done its work, then we will leave the Memorial Service feeling and acting as though we have been changed for the better:

When they [the high priest and the other priests] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13).

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version, unless specifically noted.

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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

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

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