

# TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 11, December, 2023

## DANIEL'S PRAYER

There is something very compelling about Daniel's prayer in chapter 9. The language is poetic and beautiful, and the prophet's love for God and His ways shines through.

But there is something very strange about it also. Why would Daniel, a faithful and godly man, confess over and over to sins which he did not commit?



Building faith in the  
Christadelphian community.

# TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 11 / December, 2023



## IN THIS ISSUE

<b>Editorial</b> —246, <b>Dave Jennings</b> .....	2
<b>Life Application</b> —Daniel's Prayer, <b>Nancy Brinkerhoff</b> .....	8
—Conservatism and Liberalism, <b>Dev Ramcharan</b> .....	14
<b>Prayer</b> —The Fellowship of Prayer, <b>Dave Jennings</b> .....	18
<b>Exhortation and Consolation</b> —A Message Both Old and New, <b>Tim Drepaul</b> .....	23
—People Who Know Jesus, (3), <b>Rick Hill</b> .....	26
<b>Bible Studies</b> — Words I Hope I Never Hear Again (4), <b>David Levin</b> ....	28
—Getting to Know our God and Jesus (3), <b>Sue and Jim Styles</b> . . .	34
<b>First Principles</b> —Preaching First Principles in a Post-Christian World (3), <b>Richard Morgan</b> .....	40
<b>Preaching and Teaching</b> —Guadalajara and Octolan, <b>David Collister</b> . . .	46
—An Invitation to the 2024 Caribbean Youth Camp, <b>Ben Drepaul</b> .49	
—2023 Heroes Day Fraternal in Jamaica, <b>Antonia Giordano</b> . . .	51
<b>Thoughts on the Way</b> —A Nursing Mother, <b>George Booker</b> .....	53

# 246

*By Dave Jennings*

## 246.

**T**HAT'S the number of separate Baptist denominations. How is it possible for a denomination to have 246 different identities? How long did this take to happen? What led to so many divisions? What can we learn from the Baptist experience that might help our community find a way to unity?

Baptist heritage is that of a persecuted and disinherited sect, a group striving for religious liberty. They were historically deeply committed to the autonomy and authority of the individual congregations. Baptists trace their roots back to just over 400 years ago, beginning with the separatist pastor John Smyth in Amsterdam. Roger Williams established the first Baptist church in the North American colonies in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1638. Over the years, preachers such as Charles Spurgeon and Jesse Mercer became leaders in Protestant theology. Bro. John Thomas, initially a Baptist, interacted with Charles Spurgeon, who drew thousands to his sermons. Since those days, Baptists make up 15.3% of all Christians in America, second only to the Roman Catholic Church. Baptists aggregate their US membership to be in excess of 4.2 million, with over 43,000 churches. Canada has 97,000 members, with 930 churches.<sup>1</sup>

William H. Brackney wrote about the challenges faced in North American Baptist churches. He described the strong desire of Baptists to progressively show more concern for doctrinal uniformity and “conventional” authority. Baptists organize into conventions, a collection of like-minded churches that cooperate

to meet a common goal, though they still retain local autonomy. James E. Wood, Jr. wrote of a challenge to modern Baptists.

The danger for Baptists is that their changed status, today powerful and privileged, may so separate them, both culturally and socially, from the circumstances of their early history as to alienate them from some of their noblest and most distinguished principles, such as religious liberty and the separation of church and state.<sup>2</sup>

Christadelphians might be surprised to see the significant alignment of our beliefs to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.<sup>3</sup> Since 1689, however, there have been noteworthy departures by the Baptist groups from the overall truths of their initial confession. Baptists today are divided on such issues as eschatology (the events of the Last Days), speaking in tongues, Bible interpretation, participation in the Lord's Supper, which version of the Bible to use, the role of women in marriage and the church, and even (believe it or not!) the necessity of water immersion baptism. So, when one refers to the Baptists, one must ask, which one?

### Importance to Christadelphians

We started this article by expressing some shock at the many denominations in the Baptist faith. How could a group that once embraced such a large portion of truth become so divided over the years? But the actual value of this brief discussion is not about the Baptists. It is about Christadelphians. We are seeing diversity in beliefs on some issues among a portion of our members and

a few of our ecclesias. How can we deal with these differences in a Scriptural way and not become a collection of Christadelphian “denominations” similar to the Baptists?

We share several cultural similarities with the Baptists. Christadelphians were founded on a firm belief in the autonomy of individual ecclesias and a rejection of any hierarchy other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Some might feel compelled to seek uniformity of understanding and standardized practices. But this was not a requirement of first-century fellowship or even a goal of the apostles. It was to agree on the “*doctrine of Christ*,” which we have long ago considered to be the first principles of our faith. Our pioneering brothers and sisters never intended to overlap into a uniformity of interpretation on other matters.

Ultimately, our DNA, our “noblest and most distinguished principles,” have been about brothers and sisters resolving differences around an open Bible. We don’t rely on church “luminaries,” committees, or magazines to determine how to apply Scriptural principles. All interpretations must be openly discussed and challenged based on the guidance of the Scriptures alone. Personal “feelings” or human logic are usually opposed to the sound principles of our God. We don’t avoid discussion and consideration by unilaterally dismissing different views. When we castigate others because they may see things differently, we reflect our secular culture, not that of a discerning spiritual mind. We see this all around us in the media, politics, and other fleshly pursuits, not in men and women of faith.

Christadelphians, like the Baptists, have also embraced the authority of individual ecclesias in decision-making. This aspect, of course, cannot happen in a vacuum. Decisions by ecclesias must be made with the courage to follow the Scriptures and the humility to honor and respect the views of others. This attitude is the basis of the doctrine of the body of Christ. We need each other. We don’t have to see everything the same way or practice our worship identically. However, there can be consequences for promoting outlier decisions, especially ones that polarize positions. Sometimes, these interpretations can cause great discord and become malignant to the body of Christ. It may be that such positions will retard free and open exchange within the community. Paul’s counsel about eating meat offered to idols was the loving submission of one’s personal liberties for the spiritual well-being of others.

A risk to unity is when non-first principle autonomy leads to unhealthy conflict, envy, and strife. (Jas 3:10-16). This polarization tends to drive “like-minded” people and ecclesias to organize together and avoid others formally or informally. This situation accounts for much of the division in the Baptist congregations. Because some Baptists saw a doctrine or a practice differently, they divided into “conferences” of like-minded churches. That worked temporarily until some like-minded churches found additional issues they disagreed with. That led to further splits. It can become an unending downward spiral.



Humans are driven to divide naturally. Our default can be to retreat to a comfortable fellowship, where there is trust and unanimity of thought in a smaller circle.

Here's what Brackney wrote about Baptist divisions:

As more Baptist congregations sprung up in virtually all sections of the United States, a wide variety of styles and structures emerged to characterize Baptist life and ministry. Some were confident socially in their urban contexts, while others drew careful boundaries around their fellowship. Some kept simple worship styles and lacked music or even regular preaching. Some were isolated either by location or by intention as close-knit families.<sup>4</sup>

The 20th century brought rifts to North American Baptists. To capture different groups of thought, “labels” became prevalent. Terms were applied, such as conservative, premillennialist, fundamentalist, or Landmarkist (the belief that the Baptist denomination traces an unbroken chain going back to the first-century believers). These labels served to cause silos between groups.

Humans are driven to divide naturally. Our default can be to retreat to a comfortable fellowship, where there is trust and unanimity of thought in a smaller circle. We have seen this in Christadelphian ecclesial behavior regarding marriage and divorce, the teachings on atonement, the age of the earth, and even some prophetic interpretations. Even if we are “formally” in fellowship, there is often an unofficial separation in operation. This modus operandi cannot be the will of our Lord. He and his apostles regularly taught the need to seek unity around the basic truths of the gospel. The gospel is about finding a way to love your brother and sister, even when they may not have the same mindset or practice as you.

### Public Awareness

Another lesson from the North American Baptists is the heavy influence of luminary men, such as Charles Finney, Benoni Stinson,



Andrew Fuller, and Robert Hall, Sr. Added to this was the unique influence on Baptist thought by extraordinarily wealthy members. John D. Rockefeller taught Baptist Sunday School. President Grover Cleveland was a Baptist. Powerful business people like William Montgomery, William Colgate, and William Bucknell conveyed a certain notoriety to Baptists but also brought baggage. Baptists became connected in the public eye with the business practices of these men. Their disregard for women, blindness to poor working conditions, pay, and child labor tarnished how the public saw Baptists. It led to a “gospel of wealth” that was embraced by some as meaning those who worked hard and faithfully served God should expect material blessings.

We have few examples of such wealth in Christadelphia, though we may put certain speakers in our community on pedestals, a position to which they likely do not aspire. However, there may be another connection for us to consider. These men, who were very visible public figures, were on display as icons of what the Baptist community represented. Today, with a few keystrokes, we can also send public messages about our community. If we choose to behave in an unChristlike manner online or to immerse ourselves in political debates, we can also tarnish the public view of who we are. In fact, we have never been more visible today as a community. Each of us is

responsible for not bringing reproach to our body.

### “Scholar” Influence

The increased influence of secular scholars came in conjunction with the opening of Baptist universities such as Baylor University, Liberty University, and Wingate University. An issue that might sound familiar to Christadelphians today is what occurred with liberal Baptists, who introduced “higher critical understanding of the Bible.” This movement included such teachings as “the origins of the Pentateuch, the multiple authorship of Isaiah, naturalistic interpretations of the parting of the Red Sea, and Jonah’s whale.” Additionally, some questioned the miracles of Jesus and added the interpretation of doctrine through religious experience.<sup>5</sup> Accepting human “scholarship” outside the Bible may sound appealing to some, but it often leads to fruitless pursuits. Christadelphians accept the veracity of Scripture, especially when a doctrine is mentioned multiple times in the Word.

For example, if one chooses not to believe in a real fish that swallowed Jonah, we then must conclude that Jesus was also fooled about this, for he refers specifically to Jonah being three days and three nights in the belly of the whale. (Matt 12:40) Inserting “scholarly evidence” into the sound teaching of the Scriptures makes a fundamental assumption that one cannot understand the Scriptures by

For unity, we must be willing to sacrifice our preferences for music, dress, style of worship, and other non-essential areas.

the Scriptures themselves. A threat we must avoid in our community.

One last learning from our Baptist friends. In North America, African American Baptists represent over 15.7 million congregants. The origins of their separation lie in their beginnings in eighteenth-century slave communities. “Of all Baptist groups, black Baptists are perhaps the most baptismic of all, blending freedom and religious experience.”<sup>6</sup> For these early slave converts, forming a new denomination was a way to be a Baptist within a culture much different than their white counterparts. “Black Baptist congregations still sing boisterously, shout, respond to exhortation, and prophesy.”<sup>7</sup> Renowned ministers from African-American Baptist churches include names such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, ex-NFL star Reggie White, Adam Clayton Powell, and Al Sharpton.

### **A Call to Unity for Christadelphians**

Is it possible for Christadelphia to be united, even though we originated from far different cultures and perspectives? Can the pages of truth speak equally to us all? None of us would want to entertain the idea of having Christadelphia broken into groups like the Baptists. To avoid that consequence, we must embrace differences in areas outside of the

doctrine of Christ. For unity, we must be willing to sacrifice our preferences for music, dress, style of worship, and other non-essential areas. We must all diligently study topics on which we differ to see if our thoughts are indeed first principles or vestigial traditions. To be dogmatic without this intellectual honesty is to become like zealots. If we don’t work on this, we may find further divisions.

Unity is a divine principle as important as what we believe. We are all committed to the wonderful blessing of our common faith. Can we learn from the Baptist experience (and others not noted here) that we must not let different thoughts, different cultures, and different leaders divide us? We have but one leader, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Our culture is a heavenly one, where we place our only enduring citizenship. It is our Lord who walks among the golden candlesticks. We are his ecclesias, and he is shepherding us. He knows our work. If we call on him when we experience disunity, he will show us a path to restoration.

When our Lord returns, may we be one, not 246.

*Dave Jennings*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics*. Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project. Retrieved 2020-10-10.

<sup>2</sup> Brackney, William H., *Baptists in North America: An Historical Perspective*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith (with Modern Features), [www.1689londonbaptistconfession.com](http://www.1689londonbaptistconfession.com)

<sup>4-7</sup> Ibid, Brackney



LIFE APPLICATION

# DANIEL'S PRAYER

*By Nancy Brinkerhoff*

**T**HERE is something very compelling about Daniel's prayer in chapter 9. The language is poetic and beautiful, and the prophet's love for God and His ways shines through.

But there is something very strange about it also. Why would Daniel, a faithful and godly man, confess over and over to sins which he did not commit? Obviously, repentance and forgiveness are important in the life of a believer. But I cannot repent for your sins, and you cannot be forgiven for mine. What kind of person even tries to confess the sins of others in his private prayers? What good did Daniel think his beautiful words would do?

Perhaps there is more to the old prophet's prayer than we first thought. The first step in understanding this prayer is to consider people's possible reactions when they become aware of the sinfulness of their community.

*Then I turned my face to the LORD God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. (Dan 9:3).<sup>1</sup>*

### **Daniel's Other Options**

What do people typically do when they recognize their community's sins? The most common reaction is to simply walk away from the organization. Many people reading these words will likely have seen this happen in their circles. And perhaps some readers have left a hostile community to be where they are now.

In Daniel's case, walking away was a real option as well. Of course, he could not have wholly abandoned his Jewish identity. But there, in Nebuchadnezzar's court, it would have

been all too easy to live life increasingly as a Babylonian and less and less as a Jew. And, reading between the lines in the book of Daniel, it seems that many of his contemporaries did exactly that. But walking away from his faith was not Daniel's way.

What other options are there for a faithful individual in a sinful community? While it is true many leave, many also stay. And some justify doing so by consciously or unconsciously choosing to minimize or downplay the problems they see. Nobody is perfect, right? And there is always some other group we can point to whose sins and problems are worse than our own.

This option would certainly have been one for Daniel as well. Whatever sins his people had committed, surely they paled compared to the idolatry and excesses of Babylon. Babylon, the very symbol of everything against God from the beginning! If Daniel wanted to feel better about his community, it would be easy to compare Judah's sins to Babylon's and conclude that there was not much to repent. But this was not Daniel's way either.

And there are other options. Some attempt reform, too often finding themselves discouraged and frustrated like Elijah. Others hunker down and try to ignore the problems they see, allowing bitterness toward their ecclesia to consume them slowly.

We are curious to know if Daniel attempted other paths. He may have tried to reform the group of Jews in Babylon, though the more significant part of his life's work was

with Gentiles. We only know that in prayer, he avoided two extremes. He did not see himself as outside the community, avoiding its sinfulness. He did not attempt to whitewash the community's problems and failures; his prayer shows him fully aware of the magnitude of his people's sins.

But still, we are left with the question—were they his sins to confess? Did Daniel himself have anything to repent of? At first glance, the answer seems to be no. Daniel is one of the few characters in the Old Testament with no recorded sins. And this was not just a selection bias on the part of the inspired narrator. We know that when Daniel's political enemies searched for corruption, they found nothing. For how few politicians would this be true? Certainly, Daniel was a human who did miss the mark, but overall, his life was characterized by godly behavior. How could he be in any way guilty of the sins he mentions in his prayer?

Perhaps Daniel understood better than we do what it truly means to be a part of a sinful community:

*We have sinned, and done wrong, and acted wickedly, and rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and rules. We have not listened to Your servants the prophets... We have rebelled against Him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in His laws... We have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities, and gaining insight by your truth.*  
(Dan 9:5-6, 9-10, 13).

### Our Blind Spots

There are so many ways a once-godly community can fall away. In the Old Testament, the northern kingdom of Israel called themselves worshippers of Yahweh but accepted wildly corrupt doctrines and practices. In Judah, proper worship took place at the Temple, but actual faithfulness to a single God never seemed to stick. Later in New Testament times, Pharisees rejected idolatry and cared deeply about God's law, yet their hearts were so far from God that they crucified His son.





Like a fish that doesn't know it's surrounded by water, we always swim in ideas and habits we never even think of challenging. We pick up those negative views of God, those harmful patterns of thought or speech, those unspoken priorities. We can't help it.

Readers can likely think of many more historical and modern examples of groups that started faithful but descended into ungodliness. Each one is slightly different, avoiding some errors while ignoring or even embracing others. Mistaken attitudes towards God, negative ways of interacting with others, misaligned priorities—each community has its blind spots.

And, of course, it is easy to see the blind spots of others. We look around at other families or churches, or we look back at previous generations or historical figures steeped in the attitudes of their time. And we smugly assume we can see so much better than they. But somehow, we fail to question what others might see in the assumptions shared by our own families or communities.

And, if we have been raised in or shaped by those flawed communities, we will share those assumptions in some way, too. Like a fish that doesn't know it's surrounded by water, we always swim in ideas and habits we never even think of challenging. We pick up those negative views of God, those harmful patterns of thought or

speech, those unspoken priorities. We can't help it. If we are part of the group, we become part of the problem before we even know what the problem is. By the time we are aware enough to start looking, our blind spots will have caused harm to ourselves and others. Even when our eyes are opened in one way, we tend to overreact, remaining blind to the further problems we create. We may not be the biggest offenders, but we can't help offending. It may not have started with us, but it is part of us.

So, when Daniel looked around at the flaws of his community—the rebel spirit, the refusal to listen, the carelessness around the law—he recognized that, in some way, those attitudes had shaped who he was as well. He may not have been the biggest offender, but he could not help offending. It may not have started with him, but it was part of him. Scripture does not record how Daniel's blind spots affected those around him, but the prophet would surely have begun to notice them.

In fact, it is possible to see in the record traces of a genuine attempt to avoid the very sins Daniel mentioned

in his prayer. Even as a young man, he displayed a deep concern for God's law and a respectful attitude towards authority, exact opposites of the sins he mentioned. At what point did Daniel gain the self-awareness to realize the negative legacy he had inherited from his associates? We don't know. But we can see him as a young man determined to change the pattern. And, later, we see him as an older adult acknowledging privately to his God that he still considers those flaws in his community—and, apparently, in himself. It may not have started with us, but it is part of us.

So, is there any hope for us and our flawed ecclesias? Daniel has an answer for this question, too:

*For our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a byword among all who are around us... For your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary which is desolate... Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy... Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name. (Dan 9:16-19).*

### **Not Because of Us**

So far, our consideration of Daniel's

prayer has been rather discouraging. Our families and communities are deeply flawed. We inherit their negativity and blind spots whether we intend to or not. When we become aware of it, we are already part of the problem. What hope is there in our mess?

Part of the solution is individuals like Daniel, who begin to see the negative assumptions they have inherited and choose to be the one who breaks the cycle. But we have spent enough time with Daniel to know he did not trust in making better human decisions. His hope was in his prayer.

*"Your people have become."* (v. 16). First and foremost, Daniel's hope was in his identity as part of God's people. In fact, this was precisely why he could not walk away from the community in the

first place. Flawed as the people were, Daniel knew that God would not break His everlasting promises and that his community was still God's people.

*"For Your own sake, O Lord, make Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary."* (v. 17). Of course, Daniel was trying to change his behavior. But he did not ask for God's blessing because of what he—or anyone else—deserved. Daniel begged for restoration for God's own sake. God had chosen these people, that city, that sanctuary.

*"We do not present our pleas before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercy."* (v. 18). Here it is.

**Daniel's only hope,  
our only hope, is  
God's great mercy.  
We can—indeed, we  
must—practice self-  
examination to search  
out our individual  
blind spots.**

Daniel's only hope, our only hope, is God's great mercy. We can—indeed, we must—practice self-examination to search out our individual blind spots. And, like Daniel, we need to develop the humility to repent of them, even when others have offended far worse than we have. But we can never change enough, never self-examine enough, never repent enough. However, like Daniel, we can come to the glorious realization that we don't have to. It never depended on us in the first place. It always depended on God's great mercy.

*"Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by Your name."* (v. 19). If there is any hope for our flawed families and communities, it is for God's sake: because of His great mercy and our identity as His people. As modern-day believers, we are not only grafted into this ancient, troubled, yet beloved

family, but most of us also belong to organizations that literally call ourselves by the name and title of His son. (Christadelphians, Brethren in Christ.) Daniel's hope is our hope as well.

That is why the insight that the old prophet brings to members of sinful groups is so profound. Daniel's example leads us to question our reactions to the sinfulness of our communities. He encourages us to examine how those sins and blind spots have become part of our habits and identities. And most of all, he inspires us to change our perspective about the problems we see.

May we each learn to love our God and our communities better as we bring our sins to Him in prayer, trusting in His great mercy and our identity as His people.

*Nancy Brinkerhoff,  
Denver Ecclesia, CO*

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

*Daniel inspires  
us to change our  
perspective about the  
problems we see...*





# CONSERVATISM AND LIBERALISM

*By Dev Ramcharan*

REPRINTED FROM THE SEPTEMBER 2004 *TIDINGS MAGAZINE*

**L**abels are distasteful to us because of their superficiality, their failure to comprehensively describe the diverse realities, complexities, and variations of human life. And yet, though flawed, they may help us to discern aspects of the tendencies, movements, and interactions we apply them to. In some areas of the brotherhood there is a kind of cold war that exists between what one might label conservatism and liberalism. Taking a moment to reflect on this might help us to endure through the heated disagreements that can break out among us and build a better understanding of views different to our own.

## **The Conservative View**

Conservatives want to conserve, to preserve what has been handed down through the generations and thus ensure a continuity and consistency of existence. In-depth Bible study, leveraging the riches of our early writers and those who followed them and preserved their line of Biblical exposition is a core focal point for conservatives. Speakers in conservative ecclesias learn the ropes of exegetical exposition early. Stating and explaining what the Bible teaches are the points of emphasis. Matters of devotional and life changing application are sometimes less developed. If conservatism is our

bent, we may tend to focus on doctrinal purity, and to have a penchant for formalism — the structures of form and appearance — sometimes at the expense of content. We focus on dressing the "right" way and on saying and believing the "right" things. We can act like we view personal failure and fragility as spiritual malfunction, to be quarantined and "solved" lest the whole flock be infected by a person's outbreak of "leprosy". This way of viewing people's problems, or their problematic thinking, can render us incapable of expressing the loving compassion and patience that some kinds of problems require of us. We can be harsh and condemning toward those who fall into moral ditches, but age and experience reveal our own, and our children's frailties. Thus, it was the old Pharisees who were the first to turn and walk away from the woman they took in adultery.

### **Conservatism in Action**

In our effort to conserve and to preserve our beliefs and organizational traditions, we can become rules-focused, rigid and mean spirited, perpetually suspicious and ready for contention and debate. We can, in extreme cases, become obsessed with the definition, categorization and unending search for doctrinal declension or sin in others. And we can be excoriating when we believe we detect it, either in another's life, his reasoning, or in his intentions. We hit, and hit hard, when we perceive that someone's teaching is what we consider

wrong or even different from the norm. We can be like the Lord's men, who had a love of strife (Luke 22:24).

Is it possible that we need to learn to release our fearful obsession with sin and to refocus on love for each other? Can we strengthen what we have inherited by changing our (perhaps unconscious) "sin search" paradigm to one of "service search"? If my ambition is to be like Christ, to serve with love and compassion, then this changes my whole emotional orientation toward you. Yes, we still need to address quirks, twists and diversions in teaching, and we must acknowledge the exceeding sinfulness of sin when it emerges. Still, our whole approach will be one of friendship, of fellow feeling toward those who have fallen, as Christ has shown with us, when we were wretched and without hope, dead in our sins, full of leprosy.

Conservatives need to remember to love, even the erring. Slashing, bitter, accusatory contention is not indicative of love or of wisdom. It indicates, ultimately, a misapprehension of the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Liberal Point of View**

Liberals are often warmly pastoral in their orientation. They embrace the wounded and the flawed sheep with a generosity that is uniquely theirs. They create ecclesias where many broken ones go to find healing and acceptance. Sometimes, the emphasis for liberals is more on preserving emotional warmth and comfort in the ecclesial environment, with less of

an emphasis on rigorous Bible study and presentation. In extreme cases, the want of solid Bible grounding can lead to a kind of spiritual drift that indicates the need for better anchoring. Liberals want a diversity of voices. If this is our orientation, we want to be inclusive, to treat people with respect, even if we might disagree with them. Liberal inclusiveness is opposed to the inherently exclusive tendency of conservatism. They can react with distaste and with horror against what they see as the restrictive straitjacketing and obsessive, empty formalism of their conservative brethren. They do not, contrary to conservative suspicions, dislike rules or structure. What they hate is what they see to be the hypocrisy which battles and brawls in defense of God's truth and yet fails to acknowledge and to demonstrate God's love, which is fundamental to His truth.

Liberals often are people who have been profoundly hurt by the insensitive hardness of their conservative brethren toward those the latter have deemed to be moral, doctrinal, or formalistic deviants. Liberals have a tendency, inclined as they can be to inclusiveness, to welcome too great a diversity of views. A multiplicity of opinions might be seen as of equal value and worthy of consideration. In extreme cases, a cacophony of diverse and conflicting views can lead to the conclusion that we can't be certain about many things therefore we can just find a way to peacefully allow all views to live together in the ecclesia. This is not helpful to ecclesial health and unity and can endanger

its sustainability. Not all views are of equal value or relevance. Some are harmful and destructive when thought through to their ultimate conclusions and outcomes. The Bible is our final arbiter in all matters of opinion. Deep and continuous engagement with the Biblical text is fundamental to ecclesial strength and health. We weaken our hold on the Truth when we are not thus engaged, and fail in our desire to heal and help the flock we are members of. If ideas or preferences do not align with scripture, they need to be rejected, not tolerated, no matter how much affection we may have for those who espouse these. And this reality can lead to sober, reflective and uncomfortable dialogue which should not be avoided.

### Living Together

*"Love one another,"* he said in the upper room. We often fail to comprehend what a difficult challenge he set them. It was a command, not a suggestion. Liberals and conservatives need to learn to work together, and to lower their suspicious distrust of each other's intentions and motives. Was Christ a liberal? Was he a conservative? You would be hard pressed to answer that question. No simplistic label applies to him. Did he call liberals and conservatives to be his disciples? It would seem so. How must Simon Zelotes, the extreme nationalist, have gotten on with Matthew, whom Simon would (but for the call of Jesus) have considered a traitorous, Roman minion? To them both, and to us all, he said *"Love one another, as I have loved you."*

Christ's ecclesia (i.e., his disciples) consisted of liberals, conservatives, and moderates, all together. When brothers

and sisters of diverse perspectives learn to work together, they help to build healthier ecclesias. These can grow in ways that are not easy for ecclesias created in support of a liberal or conservative crotchet, ethos or personality. It is not always spiritually helpful for us to migrate to an ecclesia (conservative or liberal) comprised of people who all share our specific orientation or view on a particular issue. Those kinds of ecclesias are founded often on a negative principle and sometimes implode as a result. We need our thinking and our assumptions to be challenged so that they can become better, more balanced. This happens when we learn to respect and tolerate each other, in an ecclesial environment where there is a mixture of personalities and points of view.

### **Our Own Bent Rooted in Our Past**

In Christ's ecclesia in the gospels, liberals and conservatives had to walk away from their assumptions and prejudices to be one in Christ Jesus. Can we do the same? Have we the courage to do it? Will conservatives and liberals rend the body of Christ in their zeal for its defense? I have been thinking, observing myself, about the degree to which a person's tendency toward either conservatism or liberalism is conditioned by his/her experiences in life, especially in childhood. So much conservative thinking and behavior seems a fear reaction against the unstable, unpredictable randomness of the environment around us, and our own individual and powerful propensities. We control to feel safe.

We feel safer with clear definition, with classification and with schedules and practices which change only if improvement is certain. No doubt a tendency toward liberalism is also rooted in our past. Here the reaction is a fear of being controlled, demonstrated by a deep-seated reaction against the suppression of the individual in the interests of others.

Although liberalism and conservatism can be viewed as reactions to how we have been treated, we need to develop the empathy to understand not just our own mindset but those of brothers and sisters whose thinking may be unlike our own. One might amplify the Lord's words in that upper room without doing damage to the sense he intended: "Love one another, as I have loved you, in all your diversity, your different points of view and your individual struggles. I am giving my life for all of you. So choose to love one another."

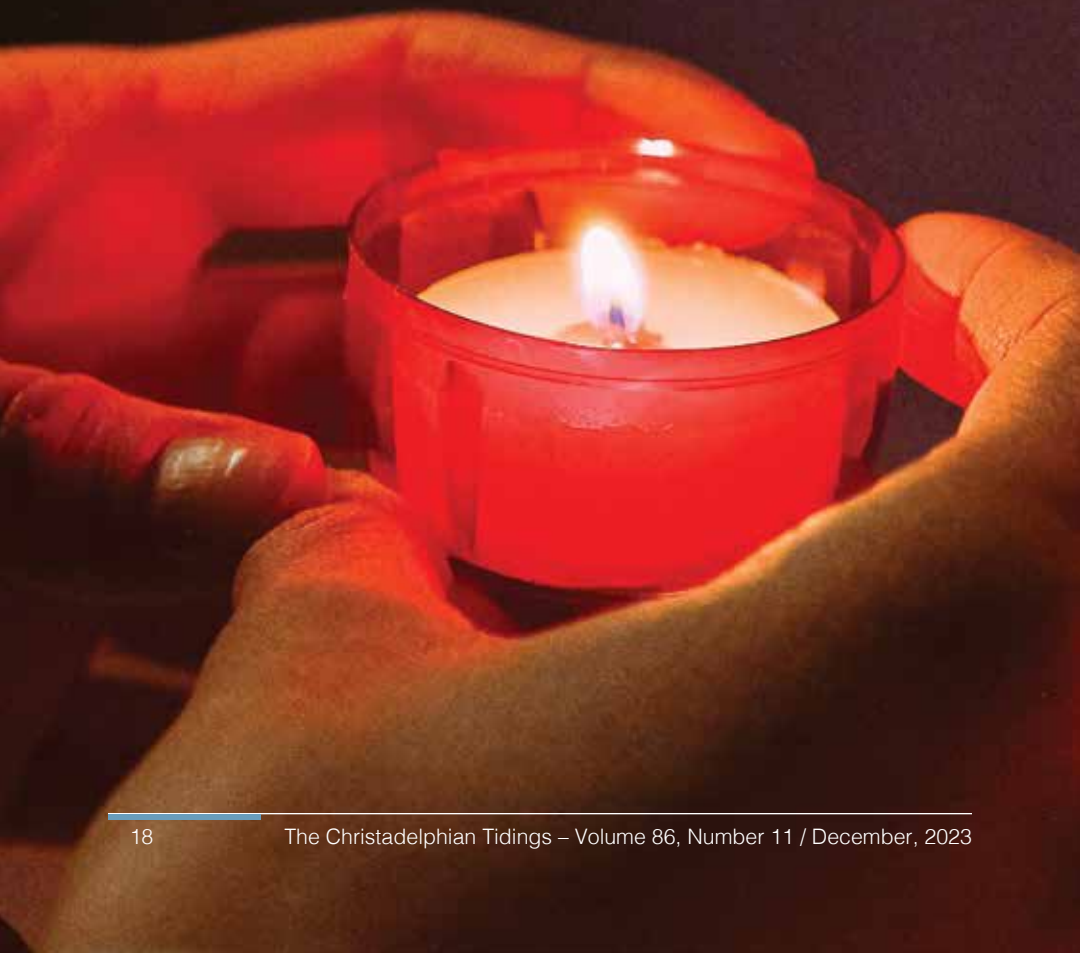
*Dev Ramcharan,  
Toronto West Ecclesia, ON*

SPECIAL SECTION: PRAYER

---

# THE FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER

*By Dave Jennings*



**I**N the early 2010s, Sis. Mary Kay and I participated in a wonderful Bible class in Southern Orange County, CA. The class was comprised of brothers and sisters from several ecclesias in the general area. After a few years, we prayerfully concluded we had sufficient resources to lead public seminars in the area. The reception to the advertisements was highly encouraging, and we were greatly blessed with students. It was common to have as many as 70 attendees, with follow-on classes drawing a dozen or more. By the grace of God, two lovely sisters were baptized from this effort.

One of the students in the class, John, invited us to his community church to speak to his pastor about delivering the Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar for his congregation. This development brought us great joy, as his church had over 500 members. What happens if we take the seminar to a group of that size? The prospects were exciting.

The only time we could meet with the pastor was on a Wednesday night when his congregation held its monthly prayer meeting. I went, hopeful that this might be a watershed event in our preaching. I found the meeting itself very curious. The congregation broke into groups of about a dozen, spoke about specific prayer needs, then joined hands and prayed, with each person contributing to the prayer if they chose. Special prayers were also offered at the front of the room for those who wished their prayer needs to be kept confidential. In that case, an elder of the church prayed with the one or two people who had the prayer request.

When the meeting was ending, John asked me to come to the front to meet the pastor. He was an engaging man, probably about ten years younger than me. He asked about the seminar and what its intentions were. Then he asked me what my biggest concern was about the seminar. I paused momentarily, then said we get large groups to come, but few stay through the entire educational process. He shared he had a similar experience and reminded me that the Lord Jesus drew large crowds, but in the end, most fell away, too.

Here's the part I will never forget. With only me and him at the side of the room, he asked if I would like him to pray for me and our seminars. Together, we stood facing each other, heads bowed and hands on each other's shoulders, praying to God for the success of the outreach. To be honest, I felt a bit uncomfortable at first. It was different, maybe even a little too intimate. But as I thought about it while driving home that evening, I realized that this was exactly what we needed to do more often in our ecclesias. I learned an important lesson that evening.

By the way, the seminar was never an option with John's church. But the experience was most profitable.

### Christadelphians and Prayer

Harry Whittaker had strong opinions in his book, *Reformation*, about Christadelphians and prayer. He stated that if we were honest, we would have to admit that we aren't a "praying" community. Maybe you feel his opinion was extreme? However, if someone asked you to describe our community to a new friend, you might



select our commitment to Bible study or our lay clergy. But prayer might not be one of our top defining features.

Baptist minister Charles Spurgeon wrote, “A prayerful church is a powerful church.” No doubt this is true. When we read about the core activities of the first-century church, prayer was always mentioned (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 12:12). Paul reached out to ecclesias and individuals to “*help together by prayer for us.*” (2 Cor 1:11). He appealed to the Roman Ecclesia to “*strive together with me in your prayers.*” (Rom 15:30). Praying along with Paul was seen as entering into the actual work, not a side activity. The Apostle concluded his last visit to Ephesus with an emotional “*kneeling down*” and praying with them all. When the ecclesia prayed together over their deep concern for Peter and John, who were in prison, the “*place was shaken,*” and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 4:31)

In our formal method of worship on Sundays, each prayer has a targeted purpose. We pray in thanks over the bread or wine. We pray for God to bless our memorial service. We petition God’s comfort for the sick and needy. It is rare when we organize prayer outside of our routine. I have observed that many feel uncomfortable with prayers where hands are held or done outside of the normal worship service. It is so rare that it seems like a novelty when it does happen.

Yet, in Scripture, we have many examples of prayers made with groups of people for unique situations. Imagine the impact for the disciples of listening to Jesus pray to his

Father the words of John 17. Or try to picture what it was like when Solomon gathered all of Israel to pray and dedicate the temple. These were unforgettable moments, Such prayers united believers in fellowship, fusing them in purpose and spirit.

I remember several Truth Corps experiences over the years where we completed the day’s work in a “prayer circle.” After discussing the day’s events, the joy, and the disappointments, we would hold hands and take turns contributing to the prayer. These prayers brought a certain dedication to our work and helped us to feel closer and more connected to our God.

### Fellowship of Prayer

On an individual level, we are truly seeking an unbroken fellowship with our Lord Jesus. We want to have him involved in all aspects of our lives. We want his guidance on our big decisions, but we also know there is no issue too small for our prayers. A mistake I have made is thinking that I mainly needed to pray for the big things I couldn’t control or had little idea of how to address. It seemed disingenuous to pray for guidance on things that I already felt I had the answers to!

But then I was re-reading *A Life of Jesus* by Melva Purkis. Specifically, his comments about the fish catch, recorded in Luke 5, struck me. Peter was happy to accept the Lord as his spiritual leader and rabbi. No man had spoken words like him. But when Jesus instructed him to let down the nets after a terribly frustrating night where they caught no fish, I suppose the experienced fisherman must have

doubted this carpenter could tell Peter much about his trade. Let's let Bro. Purkis summarize the learning here:

*Peter was willing to acknowledge the leadership of his new master in spiritual paths, but surely Jesus had nothing to teach him in his daily tasks. Ah, Peter, how wrong you are! How wrong is every disciple who fails to acknowledge Jesus as the Master of every walk of life and every place of experience. Unless our surrender is complete, we shall toil all night and catch nothing.<sup>1</sup>*

We are invited to include our God in all areas of our lives. When we are around a conference table at work, and we hear inappropriate language, we can pray to God that he will guard our lips and strengthen us not to participate or even laugh. We can take it to the LORD when we feel anxiety over a jury summons. When we are struggling with raising our children, we ask the LORD to give us peace of mind and grant us wisdom.

### Prayer as Witness

Have you noticed how often, after a major tragedy, people gather together for a vigil to pray? Often these are televised events where the grieved family receives support from the community. Obviously, this has a comforting effect on the family, which has been swallowed up with sorrow.

I wonder if we might consider public

prayer as a way to petition God on an issue and as outreach in the community. In the US in 2020, there were public outcries over blatant social justice violations, such as with George Floyd, who died in police custody in Minneapolis. As a community, we debated our role when we see such injustice. Should we join in the protests? Should we refrain? Was it appropriate for us to do nothing? Some brothers and sisters felt conflicted that they were not speaking out against injustice.

I wonder if we  
might consider  
public prayer  
as a way to  
petition God on  
an issue and as  
outreach in the  
community.

What if we saw such troubling events as an opportunity to publicly demonstrate how we take our concerns to God in prayer? What if we announced that we would be meeting at the local City Hall to lead prayers for a stricken family? Or to offer a prayer for those abused as well as the police? Currently, the world around us is deeply concerned about the war in Israel and the potential for an expanded military event. Should we advertise in the local paper that we will be meeting at a public park to unite in prayer for the peace of Israel and the Palestinian people?

Turning to God in prayer and inviting others to join us demonstrates to the public something different from our doctrine-oriented seminars and outreach programs. Since we truly believe praying to our God is the most important activity, it models turning to

our God for intervention and comfort. It also encourages the public and our children to rely on our God for all matters—those within our control and those outside.

### Summary of Prayer Series

This article concludes our year-long review of some aspects of prayer. Bro. David Lloyd encouraged us to use an informal way of spending time with our God regularly. Bro. Darren Tappouras challenged us to understand what issues we can have complete confidence that God guarantees He will answer. Prayer is real and powerful, and God is at work in our lives today. The focus of God's activities in our lives is in the arena of the "inner being," which we review daily. Bro. Dev Ramcharan exhorted us that prayer has great value to the believer, bringing real benefits to those who regularly make it part of their life. Bro. Robert Prins described the six-month prayer challenge as a useful effort by ecclesias wishing to raise their spiritual dedication and

reliance on God. Bro. Shane Kirkwood examined the prayer life of Jesus Christ and the powerful lessons we can learn from his example. Bro. Shawn Moynihan discussed the tangible benefits of praying for others and how it strengthens fellowship and changes our view of each other. Finally, Bro. Duncan Kenzie looked at the intimacy of our relationship with God and how we are encouraged to approach Him as our loving Father.

We do hope you have enjoyed this series. Prayer life is an effective measure of our spiritual life. May we all draw closer to our Heavenly Father, thanking our Lord Jesus Christ, who has enabled us to "*draw near with a full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*" (Heb 10:22).

*Dave Jennings*

<sup>1</sup> Purkis, Melva, *A Life of Jesus*, The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Hall Green, Birmingham, UK, 1964.

# A MESSAGE BOTH OLD AND NEW

*By Tim Drepaul*

**O**NE of the greatest influencers ever to walk the earth was not peddling merchandise to customers for a monetary profit. This teacher was preaching the gospel message concerning the Kingdom on earth. It was the Lord Jesus Christ!

In Matthew 10, Jesus sent his apostles to do the work of preaching. What equipment did they have? No pencils, clipboards, or laptops. What Jesus gave them was the power to cast out unclean spirits; he gave them the power to heal the sick and cure people of their diseases.

How do organizations today convince their potential customers that the product being sold will benefit them?

Some big corporations pay large sums to advertise their products on television or in magazines. They debate strategies to create awareness. In a hospital setting, for example, the sales rep would demonstrate how their product can be useful to the medical staff. From working in the emergency room, I know the pitch for new products is often that they would be beneficial for both the staff and the patient since one of the goals of hospitals is patient safety. How would they get people interested in what they have to offer?

The apostles had a specific charge, and that was to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (v. 6). Their main message was “*the kingdom of heaven*

*has come near.*" (v. 7). This message needed to be heard. By Jesus telling the apostles to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, he was indeed fulfilling his parable by being the good shepherd searching for the lost sheep of Israel. He includes all of Israel in this, and this seems to be the last call to repentance of the people of God, after having had generation after generation of prophets urging them to repent and turn back to him.

As we read the instructions to the disciples, there is something to consider.

*As you go, proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. "Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep."* (Matt 10:7-10).<sup>1</sup>

So they were to leave all food, money, and extra clothing behind. Jesus told them that *"the worker is worth his keep."* But who were they working for, and who would provide the wages? Is Jesus reminding them that if they work for their heavenly Father, they will be looked after by Him? Remember the Sermon on the Mount?

*So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to*

*you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* (Matt 6:31-34).

This saying could be an exhortation for us, too, if we are trying to do God's will in our lives. He will indeed take care of all the necessary things for us. The prophet Elisha was given lodging as he was on his journey, and food was provided for the Apostle Paul during his missionary work. It requires us to trust that God will provide. Jesus reminds his apostles their mission was to *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* (Matt 6:33).

The message of Jeremiah is closely related to what Jesus was telling the multitudes. It was a call for people to repent and turn back to God. His people persecuted Jeremiah for his bold proclamation of the unwelcome truth about the impending captivity. Jeremiah, quite like Jesus, never lost compassion for the people but kept warning them and praying they would be spared of the impending judgment. This message is exactly what Jesus told the apostles to preach about.

Jeremiah described aspects of Jerusalem's impending destruction. It would be a natural reaction to flee from the obvious doom coming to the city. Jeremiah masterfully used this disaster to appeal to the children of Benjamin to escape from Jerusalem. Tekoa is mentioned here, a town about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. It was not the town itself that Jeremiah was concerned about, but probably the meaning of the word Tekoa. It meant "place of setting

up a tent.” The message was that it was urgent to flee Jerusalem and set up tents in another place, a place out of danger from the invaders.

*This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”* (Jer 6:16).

The advice here is a real challenge to many of us, isn’t it? Most of us want to progress, not relapse. But the people in Jeremiah’s time said they would not walk in the good way. They did not want progress. They were insensitive to sin. We want to press on to new things, not fall back into the old. But do we feel that what has already been understood before us cannot be nearly or equally as important as what has yet to be revealed? We will discover a certain similarity to the idea of the old versus the new. It was the parable of cloth and bottles.

*No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.* (Matt 9:16-17).

When we stop and consider this momentarily, we soon realize that what

Jesus taught in the four gospels was wholly based on the Old Testament. He drew his teachings from the principles laid down years before. What Jesus did was renew the principles by coming back to the basics. Presented in a new, fresh, and vibrant way, he demonstrated how to live these principles himself.

We are trying to proclaim the Truth to anyone who will listen. We are preachers of the gospel, but there is more to it than just speaking. When we are involved in any gospel proclamation, we must demonstrate our acceptance of Christ’s teachings in how we live.

Our responsibility is to share this good news of the Kingdom, and when we teach our families, it should be in a way that is not supercritical of every denomination. People will not want to listen to us when we use that method of preaching. We do not even have to go out to preach; we can do it online, and preaching reaches non-Christadelphians and those in the Truth. It can be spiritually uplifting to read a Bible verse or provide a summary.

We are to be ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:20). We are blessed to proclaim the good news of eternal life. It is a message that is ancient, as well as one that is relevant today. We cannot keep it to ourselves. Jesus commanded the disciples to preach to people about the Kingdom because it is nearer than thought, and we all must be ready.

*Tim Drepaul  
Brooklyn Ecclesia, NY*

---

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





EXHORTATION AND CONSOLATION

PART 3  
PEOPLE  
WHO KNOW  
JESUS

*By Rick Hill*

**I**T is so important to know Jesus and that Jesus knows who we are. In John 10, Jesus talks at length about being the Shepherd. He said, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*” (John 10:27-28) <sup>1</sup> When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. (John 10:4).

Let’s look at a third example of a saint that Jesus knows. We will discuss a brother who was an inspiration to his ecclesia and to the community in which he lived. His influence was so powerful that the mayor gave him the key to the city, and he was mayor for a day. He touched many lives.

He was a very humble and honest man. He never gave an exhortation, but he spoke with his actions. Despite the long distance he traveled, he came to church every Sunday. He gave generously to any cause that the ecclesia was engaged in. He owned a market in a small lakeside town. The people came from far and wide to his store. If they could not afford to pay, he gave it to them on account (which they may have never paid). He would make free deliveries to folks who had no other way of getting their groceries.

He was wealthy, although you would never know it. He, his wife, and his elderly mother lived in row houses. He actually owned the whole block and

rented it to those who would otherwise have no other place they could afford. If you needed a job, he would make up work for those who could find no other work.

He had some tragedies in his life. His granddaughter was run over in front of his house. It damaged his daughter’s faith, but he and his wife remained faithful and accepted God’s will.

You know people like this. They grace your life and make it beautiful. They show us a better way to live. They give what they can and expect nothing in return. They live by faith and follow their shepherd’s voice. He knows them.

*Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.* (Luke 6:37-39).

Please share any stories of the saints you know and who Jesus knows.

Please email to [rga49.hill@gmail.com](mailto:rga49.hill@gmail.com)

*Rick Hill,  
Picton Ecclesia, ON*

---

<sup>1</sup> All Scriptural citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

PART 4

# WORDS I HOPE I NEVER HEAR AGAIN

*By David Levin*

---

*Christadelphian Cliches, Misquotes,  
Pat Phrases, Wrested Scriptures, and  
Legalistic Formulas*



**Citing Numbers 14:21 as a proof text for the Kingdom on Earth,**

**“Time and Chance,”**

**“He who shall be manifested in a multitude of mighty ones.”**

**T**HIS month's installment takes on three more longstanding Christadelphian sayings with more history than Biblical accuracy. Let's start with a veritable foundation of our faith, Numbers 14:21.

This venerable verse, a Christadelphian standard for generations, has acquired status even beyond its use as a proof text for the doctrine of the Kingdom of God on earth. It is a banner text, a flagship verse for a fundamental Bible truth. How could anyone cavil with its use?

**What's wrong with it?** It's not about the Kingdom Age. That's what's wrong with it. Context directs it elsewhere.

**What's at stake?** The practice of careful Bible exposition.

**How can it be fixed?** Use Isaiah 11:9 instead to make the point of God's Kingdom on earth, and possibly Habakkuk 2:14, though the latter context is difficult to establish. Apply this verse as its context dictates.

**Discussion:** Widely quoted and just as widely misused, this verse suffers from being a form of red herring. It says what we know is true and what we want it to say. In reality, though, its scope is limited; it does not address a global manifestation of the Kingdom.

The context is the return of the twelve scouts mandated by Moses to survey the land ahead of the Israelites' occupation. All twelve agree it's a fruitful and

agreeable place to settle, but ten advise against taking possession on account of the inhabitants. They conclude, “They're giants. We've got no chance against them.” Joshua and Caleb hold the minority opinion. They faithfully maintain that the Israelites will inherit the land if they trust God. The ten persuaded the Israelite camp to their pusillanimous perspective, even to the point where the Israelites were ready to stone Joshua and Caleb.

With yet another rebellion brewing, God proposes to wipe out the Israelites with pestilence and start over with Moses. Moses pleads to God that his name and power will be sullied if He (God) cannot complete His stated mission of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and into their land.

God relents and pardons the Israelites. Nonetheless, there's a stiff punishment. They will all die in the wilderness of Sinai. Only after a forty-year purging will their descendants cross the Jordan to fulfill God's promise. God smites the ten faithless spies with a plague, and they perish on the spot.

The declaration “*All the earth shall be filled with the glory of yhw*” is an aside in all this drama. The thrust of God's proclamation is the consequences of unfaithfulness. However, despite the refusal of the Israelites to move forward, God's purpose will not be thwarted. The land of promise **will** be filled with God's glory.

Note that “*earth*” in verse 21 is the same word as “*land*” in verse 23. The context **demand**s it be restricted (as is often the case) to the immediate land of promise, Canaan, later Israel. Giving proper heed to context, there is no way

that “*earth*” can mean the entire globe. Further, there is no reason why God would invoke far-reaching plans in this scenario.

Likewise, the “*glory of yhwh*” also has a contextual restriction. It is what the Israelites saw, primarily God’s manifestation in the pillar of cloud/fire, as it appeared at the tent of meeting (v.10). The unfaithful **had seen** “*my glory and my miracles which I did in Egypt*,” therefore they **will not see** the promised land. God pardons their sin, but the consequences abide. His guiding pillar would lead Israel into this land, but they wouldn’t be there to witness it.

Careful regard to context and key words is the same procedure we regularly employ when others cite Scripture, such as Isaiah 14, to support erroneous teachings. We can’t forgo careful exposition when a verse taken *prima facie* supports our teachings.

God’s will **will** be accomplished when our Lord comes again, and his full glory will fill the entire earth. That’s still true. But don’t use Numbers 14:21 as your proof text.

### Time and Chance

This direct Bible quote (Eccl 9:11) is often used to express that God directs only the big events in our lives; the smaller daily affairs “just happen.”

**What’s wrong with it?** There is no chance that’s what this verse means, regardless of how Providence works. Both the immediate context and the overall context of Ecclesiastes preclude that view. Also, the English word “chance” is misleading here. The Hebrew word has no connotation in any of its senses of “randomness.”

**What’s at stake?** A lot, or not much at all, depending on how the idea “*time and chance*” = randomness fits in with your understanding of how God controls (or not) human affairs.

**How can it be fixed?** Disconnect the phrase “*time and chance*” from any conception of “stuff happens.” It means something like, “In the long run, your earthly striving will come to naught.”

**Discussion:** The phrase “*time and chance*” occurs only here in Scripture, and outside of Scripture, does not seem to have gained much traction as an idiom for “random stuff happens.” It is not listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. The Hebrew word translated “*chance*” occurs in only one other place, 1 Kings 5:4, where it is translated “*evil occurrent*” (KJV), “*evil occurrence*” (NKJV), “*disaster*” (NIV), and “*misfortune*” (ESV). The cognate verb occurs in some forty places, with various meanings, but all centered on the core notion of meeting or encountering. In no instance is there even a whiff of randomness. Each instance does imply an intentional act.

All this is to say that there is no lexical support for “*chance*” implying chance in the sense of an unintentional, random, “just happened” event. So, how did “*chance*” get into the Bible?

The word itself predates the KJV. It is found in the Geneva Bible of 1569. However, that edition also had a marginal note cautioning the reader not to take this verse as a lapse in Providence. Possibly, the nuance of “chance” was along the lines of “perchance,” that is, something that might or might not happen, and if it does, it is with someone’s intention.

## Context

The overall context of Ecclesiastes is the vanity of human pursuits. This is taught in metaphor, the personal experience of the Preacher, the endless cycles of nature, rhetorical questions, and aphorisms. Specifically, in 9:11, the Preacher gives five (see last month's article in this series) examples of people who would apparently succeed, but "*time and chance*" happen to them all. Moreover, in verse 12, he says they don't know when this will happen.

world has to **seem** random to us; that is, the righteous will sometimes die young, and the evil will prosper. But only for a time. Serve God and keep His commandments, and all will be well with you in the end.

## "He Who Shall Be Manifested in a Multitude of Mighty Ones"

This interpretation of the divine designation of Yahweh Elohim has been around longer than the name Christadelphian. Because of its pedigree, it seems sacrosanct.

The "time and chance" warning is about the vain pursuits of humanity... Serve God and keep his commandments, and all will be well with you in the end.

They are like fish caught in a net or birds in a snare.

Fish don't get caught "randomly." The fisherman intends to catch them, likewise with the birds and the fowler. Applying that to the examples, the Preacher says that even when it looks like your strength or wisdom is getting you someplace in life, God might have other plans. It might come upon you unexpectedly, but it's not a matter of pure random chance. And even if you do succeed, in the long run, what do you gain?

In other words, the strong man might win the battle, or God might intervene. But even if He does, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his life?

The "*time and chance*" warning is about the vain pursuits of humanity. The

But it's still a wild and fanciful concoction with no basis in Hebrew.

**What's wrong with it?** There is no possibility that a native speaker of Hebrew would ever come up with this interpretation. It abuses both the divine name and the title of God. Moreover, there is no contextual indication to manufacture this interpretation.

**What's at stake?** A community's integrity as serious Bible students.

**How can it be fixed?** Adhere to a much simpler and Biblically sustainable understanding of this designation for God.

**Discussion:** The designation *Yahweh Elohim*, or *yhwh elohim*, (Hebrew orthography has no capitals, and the vowel pointing of *yhwh* is peculiar) —combines a personal name with



a title, as in “President Smith.” The divine title, *elohim*, meaning “God,” occurs in the first verse of the Bible to unmistakably indicate the single Creator of the universe. This title is used exclusively throughout the creation account. In chapters 2 and 3, where the creation account focuses on the humans and their interaction with God, the combination *yhwh elohim* occurs exclusively, with one notable instructive exception in Eve’s discourse with the serpent.

In Genesis 4, we first encounter *yhwh* alone, without *elohim*. At this point, the text has firmly established that *yhwh* and *elohim* both designate the singular creator God, one by title, one by name. This stylistic feature both ensures a monotheistic tone of the creation account and, at the same time, reveals that the Creator of the universe is also a personal God with a personal name who interacts with what and whom He has just created.

### **Elohim**

The “*el*” part of *elohim* almost certainly indicates power or might, “*im*” is a plural form, so there is that—but there is nothing to indicate a “multitude.” Despite what appears to be a masculine plural ending, there is no indication in Genesis that *elohim* means anything other than a singular Creator in this context. The word appears as a sentence subject thirty-five times in the creation account, thirty-four with a singular verb. The one exception (*let us make* is plural) is in the context of family and procreation. Hence, angelic reference is precluded.

This word does occur a few times later where it could mean “*judges*” or “*gods*” (lower case, as pagan gods). In no case in hundreds of occurrences could it mean “mighty ones,” much less “a multitude of mighty ones.”

In the creation account, *elohim* is established as a singular Creator God who accomplishes His will directly via His word and creative power.

### **Yahweh**

Disregarding pronunciations of what the Hebrew consonants *yhwh* might indicate, it is safe to state that the divine name is a form of the Hebrew verb of being. It is very likely the name intends to convey the idea of eternal existence. Possibly the name means “he who is, was, and will be,” except that Hebrew tenses don’t work the same as we are used to in English.

In the mid-nineteenth century, with early Christadelphians opposing the nonsense notions of orthodox Christianity, particularly the doctrines of the Trinity and the immortal soul, the doctrine of God’s manifestation became a ready tool to express just who God was and what intentions He had for His creation. Locating this idea within *yhwh elohim* would have been a great coup, but it’s fanciful thinking, not realistic exegesis.

*David Levin,  
Denver Ecclesia, CO*

//

*Fish don't get caught "randomly." The fisherman intends to catch them, likewise with the birds and the fowler.*

*Applying that to the examples, the Preacher says that even when it looks like your strength or wisdom is getting you someplace in life, God might have other plans. It might come upon you unexpectedly, but it's not a matter of pure random chance.*

*And even if you do succeed, in the long run, what do you gain?*

PART 3

# GETTING TO KNOW OUR GOD AND JESUS

*By Sue and Jim Styles*

## God's Punishment vs. Discipline

**SOME** of us have grown up with a relationship with God, much like Job and his friends. We viewed God as an austere judge, watching our every action, keeping track of all our failures, and ready to punish us for our sins. This view is a total misunderstanding of the merciful, loving relationship our God wants to have with us. Our

heavenly Father loves us and wants us in His family forever. He sends His angels to guide us into His eternal way of life so we will learn to live more like Him. He sent His Son and was willing to put him through all the pressures of false accusations and a torturous death to draw us away from sin and become more like him. So why does our loving Father sometimes bring troubles and trials into our lives?

It's certainly not to punish us! The Merriam-Webster definition of punish reads:

- 1a: to impose a penalty on for a fault, offense, or violation.
- 1b: to inflict a penalty for the commission of (an offense) in retribution or retaliation.
- 2a: to deal with roughly or harshly.
- 2b: to inflict injury on: HURT."

Did you notice all these uses of the word "punish" are connected with extremely negative penalties or retaliation? Do you think our God treats us like that? This idea came from pagans and some Christians who believe God is angry at all of us for our sins and wants to make us pay. But it is not the loving God of our Bible. An angry God who wants to punish leads to a fear-based relationship with God, not a loving, trusting relationship. As John reminds us:

*"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:18-19).<sup>1</sup>

After meditating on and appreciating the love God has for us, we need to re-examine why He sometimes brings difficult trials into our lives. He

challenges our faith through extreme, dire circumstances because He loves us, and He knows that these rough situations of life can cause our faith to grow and mature so we will be ready for immortality. It's not punishment; rather, the Bible describes it as instruction, discipline, chastening, or training. All the challenging experiences of our lives we find devastating and discouraging are carefully designed by our loving Father and His angels to change, mold, and train us to become His immortal children.

Sadly, Job had to learn this the hard way so he would no longer see God as watching his every move, wanting to punish him for all his sins. When Job finally realized that everything was designed to instruct him and save him as well as others from going down into the pit, he said: *"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* (Job 42:5-6).

Understanding God's relationship with us will change our relationship with Him. We will no longer fear what He brings into our lives, viewing it as punishment, but rather completely trust that God is disciplining and training us to become His children.

**He challenges our faith through extreme, dire circumstances because He loves us, and He knows that these rough situations of life can cause our faith to grow and mature so we will be ready for immortality.**

Look at how Paul presents this in Hebrews 12:

*It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* (Heb 12:7-11).

Do you see the difference between punishment and discipline (or training)? God doesn't come after us to inflict a penalty or retribution for all our sins. He forgives our sins and works to train us to become more like Him so *"we may share His holiness."* (Heb 12:10). Everything God brings into our lives is positive, designed for our good and the good of others. It's like having a coach or teacher who talks to us about something we did wrong and then works with us to improve our lives. Who wants to play for a coach who keeps track of all our mistakes and then punishes us with extreme exercises to make us pay? That doesn't develop a loving, trusting relationship that provides for growth and improvement. Thankfully, *"God shows his love for us*

*in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom 5:8). God didn't make us pay, but instead, He developed a plan to change us, forgive our sins, and turn us into His children.

The implications of this topic are huge. God is the model we use for learning how to raise children and work with people in our ecclesias. If God doesn't punish us but trains us, we should have the same attitude and use the same language when raising our children. We don't punish them, but we show them the mercy of our God and then discipline or train them to change their ways. The same is true about how we treat our ecclesial members who fail through the weakness of the flesh. We don't make decisions about how to punish them, but we extend God's mercy and forgiveness while at the same time helping them to become more faithful to God's ways. If we talk about punishing our children or ecclesial members, they may come to believe God is punishing them throughout their lives, which is very depressing and discouraging. This topic can change the way we treat other people and hopefully help them understand the God we worship. We learn to treat them the way God treats us, but this only works if we correctly understand how God does treat us.

God has always been motivated by His love for all His children. The angry God concept of pagans and some Christians has crept into our Bible translations because many of the translators believed it. The translators of the NIV and other versions even went as far as to render Isaiah 53:5 as *"the punishment that brought us peace*

was on him” because they believed God made Jesus suffer the punishment we deserve. These same translators chose to translate this Hebrew word over 30 times in Proverbs, Isaiah, and Jeremiah as “instruction,” “discipline,” or “chasten.” How sad and misleading is that!

The angry God concept of pagans and Christians has also slipped into our community by our adopting the belief that God needed to provide Jesus as our intercessor between Him and us, so he could beg and plead with God to forgive us! Even our green hymn book has three hymns that refer to Jesus’s pleading with God, or being our Advocate (238, 249, 262), as though God needed Jesus to beg Him to forgive us and not wipe us out! We must come to better understand and know our God and His son, Jesus!

God has always wanted to forgive us, and He provided His son “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” (Acts 3:26). He employs His angels every day as “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.” (Heb 1:14). As Paul developed in Romans 8, Jesus doesn’t intercede between God and us. He intercedes between our mind of the spirit and our mind of the flesh, to help us in the war against us. That is the same battle Jesus fought in the garden when an angel strengthened him, and he defeated the devil by praying to God, “Not my will, but yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42). God doesn’t

need or want Jesus to intercede between Him and us. He already loves us and wants to forgive and save us more than anyone! But as He grows a spiritual mind in us, we feel the intensity of the battle with sin and appreciate that the spirit of Jesus can at times strengthen our spiritual minds to choose God’s will, not our own. As Paul reminds us:

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* (Rom 8:26-27).

This intercession is not to change God but to change us! We are the ones who

need help to overcome and choose God’s will, just like Jesus in the garden. We must be strengthened to resist the sin our minds want to enjoy. This need is why the spirit intercedes “according to the will of God.” (Rom 8:27). God wants to help and strengthen us in the battle with sin. This help gives us the confidence that we “know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28). Jesus told his disciples, “In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have

God is the  
model we use  
for learning how  
to raise children  
and work with  
people in our  
ecclesias.



*believed that I came from God.”* (John 16:26-27). Jesus doesn’t need to ask his Father for us because God already loves us and wants the best for us. Here is the explanation John Carter presents in his book on Paul’s letter to the Romans:

You might still be thinking that Jesus is our mediator and stands between us and God to change God, but that idea also came from Pagans and Christians. Jesus is never referred to as “our mediator” in the Bible. He is three times mentioned by Paul as the “mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15; 12:24) just as Paul shows that Moses was the mediator of the old covenant (Gal 3:19-20). In the same way Moses communicated and taught the old covenant to Israel (Deut 5:5,28-30), Jesus is God’s mediator of the new covenant because he has communicated and taught it to us, both with words and by living it throughout his life. This has nothing to do with pleading with God to change His mind, but it is all about God providing a new covenant based on faith through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Make no mistake: God will punish the wicked! This concept appears all through the Bible. But we sometimes blend the passages about God

punishing the wicked with how God treats His children. God did punish the wicked, unrepentant Israelites who refused to follow His ways, and He made them pay for their sins. But when dealing with His true sons and daughters, He disciplines and instructs them so they will change their ways and receive His mercy. Notice how Paul separates the believers from those who will receive God’s punishment at Christ’s return:

*Since indeed God considers it just to **repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted** as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the **punishment** of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.* (2 Thess 1:6-9).

Most of the Old Testament is about God working with the community of Israel, a mixture of believers and unbelievers. Usually, the Jewish community had far more wicked unbelievers than believers. Therefore, God often had to bring punishments on the people because most of them were wicked. This situation is why, in the parable of

**We must be strengthened to resist the sin our minds want to enjoy. This need is why the spirit intercedes “according to the will of God.” (Rom 8:27). God wants to help and strengthen us in the battle with sin.**

the wedding feast, *“The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”* (Matt 22:7). We may make the mistake of confusing God’s dealings with the Jewish community with how God deals with His children today. Our ecclesias are comprised of believers who willingly chose to be baptized and enter a covenant with God. That was not true of national Israel. When the Babylonians destroyed Israel, God punished many of the wicked, unbelieving Jews. But when some were taken captive to Babylon (like Daniel and Ezekiel), these were referred to as “good figs.” (Jer 24:5). Their removal to Babylon was not a punishment for them. However, it would appear that way to those without understanding. Instead, it was God’s way of saving His remnant.

If we are not careful, we might make the mistake today of thinking God is punishing either ourselves or our ecclesia because of the challenging circumstances we are going through. In fact, He is working to save us, and we can have confidence that all things will work together for good in the end. This idea is why there are not as many references to “punishment” by God in the New Testament (only five in the NKJV), as in the Old Testament. It’s not because the God of the Old Testament was a vengeful God, versus the New Testament God being loving. We know He is the same loving God. Still, He was

dealing with national Israel, a vastly different community through most of the Old Testament, as opposed to the New Testament ecclesias and our ecclesias today.

Let’s try to be more careful about how we discipline and talk to our children, grandchildren, and ecclesial members. We don’t want to give the impression we are punishing them or exacting some retribution payment. It is our responsibility to teach them about the love of God and then show them the great love, compassion, and mercy He has for us by how we treat sinners who are trying to live like Jesus but fail. Suppose we choose to raise teenage children with a fear-based relationship. In that case, it will eventually backfire, and our teens may walk away from the Truth because they never understood the love and compassion of our heavenly Father and that in everything, He works for our good so we may share His holiness. Our awesome Father greatly desires us to join His family forever. Let’s get to know Him better so we can truly demonstrate His eternal way of life to all we interact with in our lives today and understand why He brings some sad and challenging events into our lives today as He trains us to prepare for immortality in His family.

*Sue and Jim Styles,  
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

PART 3

# PREACHING THE FIRST PRINCIPLES IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

*By Richard Morgan*

**I**N Acts 17:19, Luke records that the Athenians “took [Paul] and brought him to the Areopagus” also known as Mars Hill. It is likely he was arrested as a Socrates redivivus, with the same language of him being brought as when the people “seized [Jesus] and led him away” (Luke 22:54) and “brought him before Pilate.” (Luke 23:1). Paul’s subsequent speech, therefore, was a defense of the charge against him of introducing “foreign divinities” (Acts 17:18) to Athens. Paul also mentioned the resurrection, and the Areopagus council had a saying that “When a man dies, the earth drinks up his blood. There is no resurrection.” (Aeschylus, Eum. 647-48, quoted from Winter, “Introducing the Athenians to God,” p. 47.)

As a *katangeleus* (“preacher,” v. 18) teaching about new gods in the same vein as Socrates, the Areopagus tribunal would have Paul defend himself based on three burdens of proof:<sup>1</sup>

1. Sponsor must claim to represent a deity (Paul does so in v. 22-23).
2. He must prove that this deity is eager to reside in Athens (Paul does so in v. 24-29).
3. The deity’s residence in Athens must benefit Athenians as a mark of its goodwill (Paul does so in v. 30-31).

However, despite their history with Socrates, the Athenians were not averse to something new, as verse 21 attests—“Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” The Athenian historian Thucydides confirms this when he writes about them that they

are “despisers of what is familiar [while] worshippers of every new extravagance.” (Hist. 3.38.5).

We live in a world today beset by the Cult of the New. New ideas, new gadgets, new experiences—they are what people strive for. We can present the true gospel as something new, or at least fresh as well. In our post-Christian world, many people have never even heard of the various people and events of the Bible. Ask someone on the street who committed the first murder, Cain or Abel, and there is a fifty percent chance you will receive a muffled “Abel” response. The Truth is new to many people who have never heard it. Our challenge is to present it in a fresh way that is palatable to Biblically illiterate people who are antagonistic toward organized religion.

This idea of “new” also lends itself to an interesting Bible echo. Remember that Paul, newly arrived in Athens, was provoked by the forest of idols. We saw how that matches God’s response to idolatry in Deuteronomy 32. In that same passage, we read this:

*But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. (Deut 32:15-17).*

These “new gods” are described as “demons” in verse 17. Likewise, the word for “divinities” in Acts 17:18 is

*daimonion* in Greek—the word for demons. Apart from *theos*, the word commonly used for the main gods of the Greek pantheon, they would use *Daimonion* as a title for the smaller gods. The Athenians thought he was talking about new demons by talking about Jesus and Anastasis.

Also, note that the beginning of verse 17 is quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:20 in a passage where Paul equates demons with idols.

With these things in mind, let's get into Paul's speech before the Areopagus tribunal. He began with what could sound like a compliment or rebuke, depending on your point of view: "So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.'" (v. 22).

The word translated "*religious*" is *deisidaimonesteros*, which literally means "fear of demons." It is translated here "*religious*" because that's exactly what the fear of demons was for the

devout people of Athens. It was being religious by worshiping the many small gods of the Greek pantheon. However, it is an ambiguous term and can also be translated "superstitious," which is what it probably sounded like to the Epicureans and Stoics. They would have nodded their heads in agreement with Paul. The people of Athens were superstitious.

The philosopher Theophrastus, the successor to Aristotle, wrote a book called *Characters*, which consisted of a series of stereotypical character sketches describing the people of Athens. Each chapter focused on a different caricature—the Flatterer, the Buffoon, the Arrogant Man, and so on. One of the chapters is titled *Deisidaimoni* (the word Paul used)—the Superstitious Man. In the chapter, Theophrastus outlines the typical superstitious person who, for instance, "will go to the interpreters of dreams, the seers, the augurs, to ask them to what god or goddess he ought to



pray. Every month, he will repair to the priests of the Orphic Mysteries, to partake in their rites.”

Both the Epicureans and Stoics agreed with this negative assessment of superstitious people. Lucretius, for instance, an Epicurean poet and philosopher, wrote this:

It is no piety to be seen with cowered head bowing again and again to stone and visiting every altar, nor to grovel on the ground and raise your hands before the shrines of the gods, nor to drench altars in the blood of animals, not to utter string of prayers. (*On the Nature of the Universe* 5.1194-1203).

The Epicureans’ primary philosophical motivation was bringing tranquility by alleviating humanity’s superstitious fear of the gods. But the Stoics also hated superstition. Zeno, their founder and the Stoic philosopher Seneca said temples and altars should not be built for the gods. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote this:

You are a fragment of God; you have within you a part of him. Why, then, are you ignorant of your own kinship? Why do you not know the source from which you have sprung?... You are bearing God within you, you poor wretch, and know it not! Do you suppose I am speaking of some external God, made of silver and gold? It is within yourself that you bear him. (*Diatr* 2.8).

Paul agreed with much of what Epictetus wrote despite not agreeing with his pantheism. He will go on to say God can’t be represented by silver and gold (v. 29) and that, in a sense, we do bear God within us as his offspring (v. 29), being made in his image and likeness.

Despite the quotes above that represent the philosophical ideals of the Epicureans and Stoics, both groups, even in criticizing superstition, joined in the practice of cultic worship. For instance, Diogenes Laertius, quoting Epicurus, wrote:

[The wise man] will take more delight than other men in state festivals. The wise man will set up votive images. (*Lives* 10.120).

Cotta on the Epicureans wrote:

I have known Epicureans who reverence every little image of a god...so as not to offend the Athenians. (Cicero, *Nat.* d. 1.85).

In his speech, it becomes evident Paul wants to establish common ground with the Epicureans and Stoics. Still, his aim is also to show that Christianity is a more consistent and superior expression of the philosophical knowledge of the divine.

Paul took his opportunity to turn his arraignment into a polemic against Athenian idolatry by remarking that “As I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” (v. 23).



There's a legend regarding the existence of several altars to the Unknown God in Athens, based on a story about the Cretan philosopher Epimenides, who Paul quoted in Titus 1:12—*"One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'"* Athens was struggling with a plague, so they hired Epimenides to come to the city to stop it. Epimenides' solution was a masterclass in superstition. He instructed the Athenians to let a flock of sheep loose in the city. If one lay down, they would mark the spot with an altar to the Unknown God. They did so, and, as the legend says, the plan worked, and the plague was stayed.

The altars also became a catch-all for the Athenians. Afraid of offending any gods they were unaware of, they would use the altars to venerate unknown gods. Paul took his opportunity to make known what they had previously been ignorant of—the God of the Bible.

There's an echo here with Isaiah 45, where the prophet says, *"They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save."* (v. 20). The prophet then challenges the idolaters to *"Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together!"* (v. 21) which, ironically, Paul is doing to defend the one true God as he stands before the tribunal. The verse

*Superstition is evident  
in organized religion.  
Ritualism, and the  
need to appease God by  
attending services, saying  
prayers, and making  
offerings, are rife in most  
churches of the world.*



goes on to say, “*There is no other god besides me,*” which is what Paul is going to preach, and then in the next verse, “*Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other*” (v. 22) which is, again, precisely the spirit of Paul’s appeal.

So, Paul will explain who this God of the Bible is. In Acts 17:24, he says he is “*The God*”—*ho theos*—using the definite article to explain that this is the only true God.

Our world, in many ways, is no different from Athens. Superstition is everywhere. It is seen frequently in sports, for instance, but also generally in daily life. Research done in universities, supposedly the seats of the most rational-minded people in the world, tells the story that superstition is natural to everyone. It is also evident in organized religion. Ritualism, and the need to appease God by attending services, saying prayers, and making offerings, are rife in most churches of the world. And it’s that kind of thing more and more people object to. While ignoring the fact that they, too, are naturally superstitious (just like the Epicureans and Stoics), they object to the formal religiosity of what they perceive as out-of-date Christianity. God doesn’t exist at all (Epicureanism), or he is to be found in nature and inside all of us (Stoicism), not in the four walls of a stuffy church building.

As Christadelphians, we can find common ground with these kinds of people. Ritualism and its outworking in superstitious behavior was a thing of the Jewish people of the first century. Still, Jesus and the apostles, including Paul, preached against it and established the New Covenant in Christ based on loftier principles than rituals and offerings. While our ecclesias are set up in a very organized fashion, we need to distance ourselves from the formal ritualism that defines most religions. We are right to speak out against icons and images, apses and altars, and the many areas of religiosity that can override the need for the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. We can find common ground with the modern-day Epicureans and Stoics we meet. We can even, as Paul did, use the writings and philosophies of the world to illustrate that there are people on the right track, that we can agree with them, but that as trustees of the true gospel, we can fill in the gaps and lead people to the one true God of the Bible.

*Richard Morgan,  
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

---

<sup>1</sup> See R. Garland, *Introducing New Gods: The Politics of Athenian Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1992) 18-19.

# GUADALAJARA AND OCOTLAN

*by David Collister*

**B**RO. Dennis Paggi and I traveled to Mexico to visit the brothers and sisters and give a study weekend study. Bro. Dennis has visited Mexico several times, but it was my first time. Dennis and I recently accepted the position of link team for Mexico, replacing Bre. David Lloyd and David Jennings, the links for Mexico for over twenty years. Their work is greatly appreciated.

We flew to Guadalajara and were met by Bro. and Sis. Gabriel and Cynthia (Paiva) Lopez, as well as Bro. Juan Sanchez from Monterrey, Mexico, who had come down for the study weekend. The warm, dry weather was quite a change from the cold, wet weather we left behind in Southern California. Upon arriving in Ocotlán, we stopped by the hall that the ecclesia was recently able to rent. It had been used as a

storage area for furniture refinishing and repair. Extensive cleanup has begun. The building is quite large and is well suited for the ecclesia, providing a foyer area, a main hall, and a room in the back that serves as a kitchen and a Sunday School room.



*The Hall in Ocotlan, Mexico*



*The brothers and sisters in Ocotlan, Mexico*

After a quick look around the hall, we walked a short distance to our hotel, just one block away. Cynthia had made reservations for Dennis, Juan, and me to stay there. It gave the three of us the chance to chat and catch up. We enjoyed exploring Ocotlán in the afternoons, discovering where things were located in relation to our hotel.

The Mexican brothers and sisters have struggled through the last few years with the same restrictions and difficulties experienced by everyone throughout the pandemic. Like many others, they were hampered in face-to-face meetings and had to curtail and modify many of their previous methods. Fellowship was limited to online meetings and a few social interactions in person. However, some good has come out of it. The brethren have adapted to Internet preaching and can reach people they previously would not have been able to through Zoom Bible classes and other apps. Bro. Juan will begin some preaching using his new iPad. Bro. Gabriel holds a number

of Bible classes online with various contacts and is very enthusiastic about spreading the gospel. Currently, besides the members in the Guadalajara area, including the Guadalajara and the Jalisco Sur ecclesias, there are a few brothers and sisters in other parts of the country, including Tijuana, on the border with California, Monterrey, Campeche, Yucatan and Chiapas at the south end of the country. All of these brothers and sisters can meet virtually, but Bro. Juan (Monterrey) and Sis. Damaris Cuevas (Campeche) were able to make the trip to participate in the study weekend.

The theme for the weekend was the topic of conversion, and used Daniel chapters 1-4 as the basis for the classes. Dennis and I decided to split up the classes, each doing one class on both days. Dennis began the series on Saturday morning with a look at Daniel 1, focusing on the conversion of Daniel and his three friends. In the afternoon, I gave a class on Daniel 2, which examined the way God chose to reveal



himself little by little to a pagan, Gentile emperor, who probably wouldn't be the type of person we would think to be a likely candidate to follow and worship the One True God. The third class was the exhortation on Sunday morning, in which Dennis looked at Daniel 3. He drew lessons from the account of Daniel's three friends, demonstrating their remarkable faith in refusing to compromise their worship of God despite the possibility of a terrible death sentence. After the Memorial service, I gave the final class on Daniel 4, focusing on Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. Conversion is a life-long process for all of us. We have some good examples of how God works in people's lives to

allow them to come to the knowledge of Him and His salvation and to follow Him and His son, Jesus Christ.

Though it was just a week before Easter, and thus a time for family gatherings, we had 10-15 members at the hall and another 5-10 via Zoom. Overall, the weekend was spiritually uplifting, and the ecclesia made everyone feel very welcome. We appreciated the opportunity for warm fellowship and sharing some special moments with the brothers and sisters in Mexico.

*David Collister,  
Verdugo Hills Ecclesia, CA,  
Co-Link to Mexico*



*Memorial Service in Ocotlan, Mexico*



# AN INVITATION TO THE 2024 CARIBBEAN YOUTH CAMP

*by Ben Drepaul*

**P**LANNING for the 16th Triennial Christadelphian Youth Camp, to be held, God willing, in Trinidad from August 10-17, 2024, is now well underway. We thank our Heavenly Father for the prospects of a successful event and continue our prayers that the event will bring honor to His Name.

In the 1960s, camps were held locally only in Guyana. Bro. Ashraf Ali suggested we expand into the

Caribbean to get our young people to know each other and study God's word together. Annual local camps were already being held in some countries, but no joint Caribbean venture. Bro. David Simpson from the UK thought it was a wonderful idea, and with the financial backing of the CBMC in 1979, the first Triennial Christadelphian Caribbean Youth Camp was held in Mount Grace, Tobago, from August 15-24.

Families from Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago came with their children and other young people in their care. The boys slept in the hall on mattresses on top of benches, and the girls slept in a giant tent at the back of the hall. The speakers were Bre. Anderson Daniel, Ashraf Ali, and Clive Drepaul. It was an amazing event. In the morning, the aroma of sausages frying in the kitchen awoke the boys, who took turns in the two showers getting ready for the day. The agenda was simple, but the classes were quite deep. At the end of the week, like all the following camps, there were tears as the young people realized they would not see each other for quite a while! (This was way before the Internet and FaceTime, and phone calls were quite expensive.)

In the years to follow, the Christadelphian Caribbean Youth Camp Committee (CCYCC) was formed, with representatives from the four Caribbean countries and

eventually North America to assist in promoting, planning, and managing the event. The camp was held every three years in one of the four Caribbean countries, except for 2021, when a virtual event was held due to the pandemic.

This then brings us to 2024. The CCYCC will conduct a site visit in November to prepare for the camp.

In keeping with the mission of this triennial event, we hope that young people from the Caribbean and all parts of the globe will take advantage of this opportunity to build their spiritual level, be encouraged in the regular reading and study of the Bible, develop stronger preaching skills, and strengthen their friendships in the brotherhood as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus.

*Ben Drepaul,  
Brooklyn Ecclesia, NY  
CBMA Link for Trinidad and Tobago*



# 2023 HEROES DAY FRATERNAL IN JAMAICA

*by Antonia Giordano*

**T**HE October Heroes Day Fraternal in Jamaica was a wonderful gathering, despite the fact that after several months of drought in this part of the island, the skies opened in a deluge just as two buses filled with believers were unloading their charges. But it didn't dampen our spirits too much and altogether, sixty brothers, sisters, children and babies gathered from all over the island in the beautiful hillside setting of Round Hill for fellowship and spiritual food. Once the rain eased up and the ravenous young brothers learned that snacks were available downstairs, we started running cookies and watermelon up to the older members settling into the hall while we waited for the stragglers.

Nathan and I travelled during this visit with Bro. Jim and Sis. Rhonda Seagoe of the Mariposa ecclesia in California, and Bro. Jim led the studies on the topic of "Growing in Christ." I confess, the

morning had me pretty busy greeting latecomers, holding babies, and reading to little girls in the library so I didn't hear too much of it, but the classes seemed to give everyone plenty to talk about during the discussion groups. Lunch and memorial service rounded out the day. Bro. Keith Kinlocke followed up with a lovely tribute to a few individuals who had made a special effort to be there: Sis. Maxine, who never misses a fraternal; Sisters Ali and Sandra, who'd travelled nearly four and a half hours from Port Maria in a taxi full of kids; and senior Sis. Janetta of Argyle Mountain who hadn't been able to attend a gathering in several years. The Jamaican ecclesias have shrunk drastically over the past few years, due in large part to emigration, and the remaining believers on the island are strengthened greatly by the sense of community that comes from being with each other in a big group during these



events.

From Round Hill, we travelled on to the home of Bro. Leroy and Sis. Loraine Johnson in Clarendon. There we enjoyed their company for a couple of days and took the chance to visit a few older members who live locally. This was the first opportunity we'd had to spend time with Bro. Stanley and Sis. Judith Frazier, and it was such a delight. Bro. Stanley is a very gentle, humble brother and full of care and concern for his ecclesia and the things of the Truth. After doing the first reading, we asked if he'd like to do a second. His reply? "What else do I have to do besides read the Bible?"

Sis. Rhonda's last visit to Jamaica was back in 2008, when she spent a great deal of time visiting all the ecclesias with Bro. Martin Shirley. She was so disappointed that he wasn't able to make it to the fraternal in Round Hill, but absolutely thrilled when the chance arose to see him during our final couple of days. We spent these days in the busy tourist town of Ocho Rios, a convenient location to bring together the scattered group of sisters that

remain of the Port Maria ecclesia. We discovered that Bro. Martin lived fairly close and was able to pay us a visit on our last morning. The afternoon was filled with a visit with Sisters Shauna and Ali, and a discussion of the drama unfolding in Israel and Gaza.

It was a hot and busy trip, as Bro. Jim and Sis. Rhonda will attest. But as always, it was a joy to be with our brothers and sisters. During each subsequent visit, our friendships with the Jamaican believers grow and deepen as we get to know each other better, but ever since Bro. Nathan and I started visiting in 2015, it's been our shared faith and hope that has bound us together. The brothers and sisters in Jamaica love visitors, and if you'd like to know more about what a trip there might involve, please do reach out ([antoniagiordano@gmail.com](mailto:antoniagiordano@gmail.com)). We'd love to help you make it happen.

*Antonia Giordano,  
Norfolk Ecclesia, VA  
CBMC Co-Link for Jamaica*



*Bro. Jim and Sis. Rhonda Seagoe with Sis. Antonia at the Heroes' Day Fraternal*

# *Thoughts on the Way*

## **A Nursing Mother**

**S**AUL of Tarsus was a “great man.” We might call him “an up-and-comer” among the young scholars and rabbis in Israel. Saul was so zealous for the Law of Moses that he dedicated his life to searching out and capturing Jews who had left their places in the synagogues and the temple and who had followed a teacher from Nazareth in Galilee called Jesus. And, once those “heretics” were “brought to justice,” Saul also oversaw their executions according to the dictates of the Law. He was standing nearby to observe when Stephen, a preacher of the new religion, was stoned to death (Acts 7:57-8:1).

Saul continued to throw himself totally into his mission, dragging more and more of the disciples of Jesus to prison. Then, one day, on his way to Damascus to arrest more believers, a great light from heaven suddenly flashed around him, and he fell to the ground. The light blinded him, but he heard a voice and felt the presence of a man standing over him. He heard the words: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” All Saul could muster was a question: “Who are you, Lord?” The answer came immediately, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (Acts 9:1-6 ESV).

Still blinded by the fierce light, Saul was led to Damascus and settled into a house, where he fasted and prayed for several days, trying to find some logic or reason in his recent experiences. Saul had been a great scholar, and as he prayed, it became clearer and clearer to him: Jesus, whose followers Saul had killed, was truly a man sent from God. And sitting in that darkness, his mind must have gone from one Scripture to another until he began to understand the awesome fact that Jesus, whom his associates had crucified, was the Messiah and the Son of God, whom the Father had sent to redeem Israel.

Then a disciple of Jesus, called Ananias, came to the house where Saul was and placed his hands upon Saul so that his vision returned to him. When he could see well enough, Saul got up and was baptized. From that moment, he was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, even as he also carried a heavy burden:

*Last of all [that is, all the witnesses to the resurrected Christ]... he [Jesus] appeared to me... For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Cor 15:8, 9).<sup>1</sup>*



Despite his shock on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus must have recognized the voice of Jesus, quite likely, a voice that he had heard before, in and around Jerusalem. Before his temporary blindness, he must have caught a fleeting glimpse of Jesus' face that he had seen before in Jerusalem.

Thus, the Apostle Paul (his new name) had heard his Savior, looked into his eyes, and felt the wonderful gift of God's grace. From this point onward, he lived under the sheltering arms of that love:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20).*

Saul, now known as Paul, had been reborn. The distinguished rabbi no longer expounded the intricacies of the Law of Moses, except insofar as

to point out where that Law helped to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, the great teacher went everywhere to tell everyone about his Savior's pure and perfect love and the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Along the way, he faced up to his past sins, and in doing so, he became an example to the worst of all sinners. Those who were weighed down by their guilt realized that if Jesus Christ could save a man like Paul, then he could save any sinner!

Paul was a living example of the height and depth of God's love, which he sought to put before all mankind. He wrote to the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica:

*You know that we dealt with you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (1 Thess 2:11-12).*



This Greek word for “loved” (*homeiromai*) is very rare.

It does, in fact, mean “love,” but it especially means  
“to yearn for or long for.”

Throughout the rest of his life, Paul considered his associates and assistants as his sons and daughters, while they surely thought of him as their father.

However, we have not exhausted the limits to which Paul extended himself to his fellow believers. In the same letter to the Thessalonians, he also wrote:

*Just as a **nursing** mother **cares** for her own children, so we **cared** for you.* (1 Thess 2:7-8).

The word “*nursing*” describes a woman feeding a baby at her breast. And the word “*cares*” (*thalpo*) means to keep warm, as a mother bird covering her young with her feathers (cp. Deut 22:6). It is also used for the love of Christ the bridegroom, who “*cares*” for his “bride: (Eph 5:29-31).

Paul paints a beautiful picture. A mother is suckling her baby in the warmth of her breast, with her love pouring out upon her child even while her milk nourishes the precious new life.

How fascinating to think that Paul, the learned rabbi, the author of Romans and Ephesians, the wise and eloquent teacher of Jews and Gentiles alike, could think of himself and his converts in this way. But he did:

*Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad, and rejoice with all of*

*you. So you also should be glad and rejoice with me.* (Phil 2:17-18).

*I will very gladly spend and be spent for you.* (2 Cor 12:15 ESV).

Paul continued:

*Because we **loved** you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well* (1 Thess 2:8).

This Greek word for “loved” (*homeiromai*) is very rare. It does, in fact, mean “love,” but it especially means “to yearn for or long for.” Some scholars tell us that it refers to the tenderness and devotion a mother feels toward her baby, a tenderness expressed in cooing and whispering intimacies, the “baby talk” of a mother with her infant.

This manner, says Paul, is the only way to convey the gospel to others. It must be given along with our hearts and souls. It must be given with passion, with love, with life itself. How else could we preach the gospel of the God who “*spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.*” (Rom 8:32)? How else could we preach the gospel of Christ, “*who gave himself for our sins*” (Gal 1:4), who “*poured out his soul unto death*” (Isa 53:12 ESV)?

George Booker,  
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN  
**TIDINGS**  
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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

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

**Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Committee:** Alan Markwith (Chairman), Joe Hill, John Bilello, Peter Bilello, Linda Beckerson, Nancy Brinkerhoff, Shawn Moynihan, Kevin Flatley, Jeff Gelineau, William Link, and Ken Sommerville.

**Christadelphian Tidings Editorial Committee:** Dave Jennings (Editor), Section Editors: Nathan Badger (Life Application), TBA (Exhortation and Consolation), Jessica Gelineau (Music and Praise), Steve Cheetham (Exposition), Richard Morgan (First Principles), Dave Jennings (Teaching and Preaching), Jan Berneau (CBMA/C), George Booker, (Thoughts on the Way, Q&A), John Bilello (Letters to the Editor), Jeff Gelineau (News and Notices, Subscriptions), Melinda Flatley (Writer Recruitment and Final Copy), and Shawn Moynihan (Books).

**Subscriptions:** The **Tidings** Magazine is provided **FREE** for any who would like to read it. The Magazine is available in PDF Format online at **tidings.org**. If you would like to order a printed subscription to **The Tidings** you may do so simply by making a donation to cover the printing costs. The suggested donation for printing and shipping to the US is **\$70.00**; (we ask for a minimum donation of \$50.00.) Foreign countries are higher, see [www.tidings.org](http://www.tidings.org).

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

**The Christadelphian Tidings** is published on the 15th of the month for the month following. Items for publication must be received by the 1st of the month. Correspondence to the editor, Dave Jennings at **editor@tidings.org**. Publication of articles does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine as set forth in the BASF. Letters should be sent via email to **letters@tidings.org**. Please include your name, address and phone number. The magazine reserves the right to edit all submissions for length and clarity.

©2023, **Tidings Publishing Committee**. In the spirit of Christ ask for permission before reproducing any material. Contact us at **editor@tidings.org**



Check out the *Tidings* Podcasts on Spotify!



Make your multitasking more spiritual! Listen to one of our helpful and interesting podcasts while you exercise or work.

- **Tidings Magazine** - Articles from the magazine
- **Faith Moments** - Paul Zilmer's Blog
- **Good Christadelphian Books** - Listen to serialized chapters of books the Tidings has published

To make a donation or to subscribe, visit us at

**WWW.TIDINGS.ORG**

The brothers and sisters who write for *The Christadelphian Tidings* do so on a voluntary basis, and the magazine is provided FREE to any who would like to read it. The magazine is available in digital formats online at [www.tidings.org](http://www.tidings.org).

If you would like to order a printed subscription to *The Tidings*, you may do so simply by making a donation to help cover the printing and mailing costs. The suggested donation is US\$70.00, and minimum donation is US\$35.00. (Check online for rates in other countries.) If you can afford to donate more, please do so in order to help out those that cannot afford to.

The Christadelphian Tidings of the Kingdom of God  
First Class Postage paid at Simi Valley, CA  
Send address corrections to:  
**The Christadelphian Tidings**  
567 Astorian Drive  
Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941

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

