

INCLUDES **SPECIAL SECTION ON *PERSONAL WITNESSING*** (Page 24)

TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 9, October, 2024



POLITICS AND THE BELIEVER

*Human government is not the
solution to the world's problems.*

*No human leader will solve
the problems created by sin.*

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 9 / October, 2024



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E D I T O R I A L

GIRD UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND

*We shouldn't read Scripture
as a means of proving
what we have already concluded
is correct.*

SEVERAL important hallmarks of Christadelphia have survived over our 170-year history. One of them is a commitment to regular and robust Bible reading. Reading the Scriptures is a non-transferable, non-delegable practice.

There have been concerns for many years about the diminishing number of our community engaged in daily Bible readings. Sixty years ago, Bro. Edgar Wille wrote to *The Christadelphian* magazine Editor about the shared conclusions of the Oxford Conference participants in 1964:

The general view was that the practice [daily Bible reading] is seriously on the decline in our midst, to the point where, maybe, less than half of us follow it.

The brothers and sisters at the Oxford Conference that year were delighted when the conference re-introduced the daily readings into the agenda. It exhorted and uplifted them. Here's the conclusion of Bro. Wille's letter.

Various suggestions were made on how the daily readings might be lifted above the level of a "chore." A sheet of paper divided into three, and at least one useful point gleaned from each reading written thereon each day, need not take long and would focus attention. Reading aloud in family groups was often difficult but was worth the effort where it could possibly be contrived. If brethren and sisters made a point, when they met, of saying to one another: "Did you notice in yesterday's readings?" Godly conversation would be encouraged, and we

should be kept on our toes. Exhorting brethren could help us by normally basing their words on the day's or week's readings. Bible classes could stimulate us by becoming, in many cases, less formal, with brethren and sisters sitting in a circle discussing the Word. We came away from Oxford determined to spread the message far and wide: "Back to the daily Bible readings!" Back to the spirit of the Psalmist, "*Oh, how love I thy law! It is my study all the day.*"¹

We must admit that "life" seems to get in the way of regular reading and contemplating the Scriptures. It did with me for many years. It was my loss. Long work weeks, ecclesial responsibilities, raising children—all invaded time I should have invested in personal reading. Daily responsibilities can easily gobble up the time required to read the Bible individually or with our families. But this choice is made at our peril. The intake of Scripture, like the gathering of manna, was always intended to be daily. We'll finish this article with some ideas that might help us all re-commit to Bible reading with an eye for better comprehension.

Reading the Bible With The Right Attitude

Bro. Len Richardson wrote a few years after Bro. Wille about "how" we read.

We like to think of ourselves as "the people of the book," and it is probably true (though not necessarily so) that Christadelphians are more familiar with the Bible than most other communities. Our system of daily Bible Readings is a good one, and although doubt is sometimes

cast on the degree to which it is adhered to nowadays, in the writer's experience, most brethren and sisters still "do their readings" quite regularly. But this should not blind us to the fact that, even whilst preserving this time-honoured custom, our attitude towards the Bible may still be far from right. We may read the chapters regularly, and be far away in our hearts all the time.

How do we regard the Bible? As a divine textbook or as the living Word of God? It is fairly easy, and perhaps not so uncommon as it should be, for the Word of God, "wholly inspired and infallible," to become more like an arsenal of proof-texts to be used as "ammunition" against other people's ideas. More than once zealous brethren who have discovered a more unusual verse to combat

The Scriptures assist us in developing the skill of critical thinking. It is what the Bereans embraced.

a particular heresy have described it as "a good piece of ammunition against the personal devil," or preexistent Christ, or something similar. This is quite all right, so long as it does not lead us to think of the Bible, however unconsciously, as a piece of Christadelphian literature, whose chief function is to support our ideas rather than to enlarge our minds in God's. It can so easily, then, become a source of pride or a subject of prejudice.²

There is an important exhortation for us, as Bro. Richardson suggests, to read the Scriptures without biases and preconceptions, and with an open mind. We shouldn't read Scripture to prove what we have already concluded is correct. The Scriptures assist us in developing the skill of critical thinking. It is what the Bereans embraced. When they heard the expounding of Scripture, they "*received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*" (Acts 17:11). What's remarkable about those in Berea is that they didn't merely accept the words of Paul and Silas, they took the time to go back to the Scriptures to verify the message. As they went to very familiar passages, they could see, with the help of the apostles, what they had previously missed. This result was only possible because they had open, prepared minds, and let Scripture be the referee over what was right or wrong.

Committing to critical thinking and Bible reading is essential. Even in the presence of Spirit gifts, Paul directed the Thessalonian believers:

Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22 ESV).

Other versions help to instruct us on what this requires.

- KJV – "prove all things"
- NASB – "examine everything"
- JB Philips – "By all means use your judgement, and hold on to whatever is really good."

We don't have the blessing (or challenge) of the gifts of tongues or prophecy in our ecclesias today. Paul's message was that no matter what you see or hear, test it! Even in the presence of Spirit gifts.

Engagement Today

Sometimes, I see troubling behavior in our ecclesias. While a brother leads a class or gives an exhortation, Bibles lie unopened in the audience. In some cases, Bibles aren't even brought to the meeting! There is a lack of verification of what is being preached. This situation is not how the Truth has flourished for many years. The standard is not to listen to an exhortation like we would watch a movie. It is not entertainment. There is an accountability to learners and presenters to carefully follow what is being presented, check the verses cited, and assess the speaker's message. This accountability makes us all better and protects us against false teachings that might unintentionally arise. The Apostle John instructed first-century believers:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1).

It is common these days to hear external citations from Internet sources shared in an exhortation or Bible class. I sincerely doubt any of us would intentionally teach incorrect doctrine. Yet we might unwittingly do so by quoting such sources without adequately analyzing or assessing

them by Scripture in advance. Before we introduce these ideas to others, we must test them.

I am certainly not against the use of electronics. I see an increasing number of brothers and sisters using their laptops at meeting as a replacement for a hardcopy Bible. These devices have the potential to enable some great analysis and assessment in the moment of what is being said. There are many convenient Bible study programs available today. Some use their smartphones. But we must be honest about the risks of these devices. These same devices can also be a great source of distraction. I sometimes hear the familiar sound of ESPN updates coming through during meeting. The "ping" of a new email or text message received. These are highly likely to divert our attention. There is value in Bible study tools (real-time) on electronic devices. However, there must be a high awareness of the possible threats to concentrated Bible study. And for the fantastic point that the brother just made at Bible class—how will you capture that? Do you have a notepad, a Bible margin, or a special place on your electronic device?

We have seen dramatic shifts in reading habits in the past years. It is a misconception to think that younger people read books less.³ In fact, the opposite is true. Young people read more than their predecessors ever did. But is there a difference in content read on a physical, hardcopy book versus on a screen?



The *Smithsonian* magazine commented on this recently.

Books were good at developing a contemplative mind. Screens encourage more utilitarian thinking. A new idea or unfamiliar fact will provoke a reflex to do something: to research the term, to query your screen “friends” for their opinions, to find alternative views, to create a bookmark, to interact with or tweet the thing rather than simply contemplate it. Book reading strengthened our analytical skills, encouraging us to pursue an observation all the way down to the footnote. Screen reading encourages rapid pattern-making, associating this idea with another, equipping us to deal with the thousands of new thoughts expressed every day. The screen rewards, and nurtures, thinking in real time. We review a movie while we watch it, we come up with an obscure fact in the middle of an argument, we read the owner’s manual of a gadget we

spy in a store before we purchase it rather than after we get home and discover that it can’t do what we need it to do.

Screens provoke action instead of persuasion. Propaganda is less effective in the world of screens, because while misinformation travels fast, corrections do, too. On a screen it is often easier to correct a falsehood than to tell one in the first place; Wikipedia works so well because it removes an error in a single click. In books we find a revealed truth; on the screen, we assemble our own truth from pieces. On networked screens everything is linked to everything else. The status of a new creation is determined not by the rating given to it by critics but by the degree to which it is linked to the rest of the world. A person, artifact or fact does not “exist” until it is linked.⁴

We need to pause here and recognize that no special “holiness” is associated with the mechanism we read from—

whether hardcopy or electronic. In Bible times, most did not have a personal copy of the law and prophets. They were dependent on their hearing in synagogues and other locations.

What seems important is that all the skills listed in the *Smithsonian* article have value for Bible readers. The more contemplative and analytical value of reading from a hardcopy Bible is a big part of critical Bible reading. But so are the skills of determining patterns, making connections, discussing them with respected friends, and having an action orientation. The mechanism we use to read isn't the issue. How we read is important, as well as how we prepare our minds to take in the Word.

The words of the Apostle Peter are helpful here. He described how the prophets “*searched diligently*” to understand God’s plan. Believers are now blessed to see the fulfillment of these prophecies and the many places in Scripture where the Lord’s sufferings and resurrection were revealed in advance. He further said that even the “*angels desire to look into*” the plan of God. The Scriptures are the Divine revelation of God’s plan, and the best minds of men and women search it diligently. Peter instructs the believers to have the same passion for the Scriptures.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13).

Girding up the loins means being prepared. It is Passover language. We must be ready to go on a journey and be fully led by our God. But this is about girding up the loins of our minds, being ready and prepared. So, when we are sitting in meeting or in a circle with our family reading Scripture, the point is to gird up the loins of our minds. Connecting with this is having a pencil and paper handy (or the electronic equivalent). But it certainly means we must be fully engaged. Ready to learn and prepared to assess.

Earlier in this article, we said we would share some thoughts about making Bible reading consistent and more effective. Here are a few ideas.

- Join a Bible reading group. This action can be done in a room together or as a virtual reading group. There is immense value in reading with others and sharing questions, thoughts, and reflections. If you can’t do it every day, form a group that meets consistently—say once a week.
- Read from the Bible with your children. While it is nice to show videos to our children about Bible stories, these can be supplemental. But when your children are old enough to read, have them read the stories with you. Begin teaching the skills associated with reading the text and developing a mental picture of the story.
- Ecclesias and Christadelphian gatherings need to reinforce the practice of regular Bible reading. When the daily readings are used

at the Sunday Memorial Service, they reconnect all of us to the important journey of reading all of Scripture. It's even more powerful when the exhorting brother takes his comments from the readings. It would be good for us to recommit, as Bro. Wille said, to share together what struck us as we read from Scripture this week.

- Read from other Bible versions. I have been a King James reader for many years, but when I hear others read from newer translations, it often opens up the passage's meaning in a way the KJV does not. The same goes for any of us who read only one version. Employing multiple versions is an important analytical tool for critical Bible reading.
- When you come to a place in Scripture where you have a

question, make sure to write it down. Consider making a list and keeping such questions at the rear of your Bible to be investigated later.

Lastly, I will share a comment Bro. David Levin recently wrote about “doing the readings” as a warning against legalism.⁵ There may be some value in just being exposed to the three reading portions daily. But speeding through them without critical thought is not what God expects from us. We would be better served to read less and spend more time contemplating and analyzing. Let's not be trapped in ritualistic practices that fail to engage the mind. Instead, may we spur one another along toward girding up the loins of our minds. Our survival as individuals and a community are at stake.

Dave Jennings

¹ Letters to the Editor, *The Christadelphian* magazine, 1964.

² Richardson, L.W., “The Importance of Right Attitudes: Our Attitude to the Bible,” *The Christadelphian* magazine, 1970.

³ Zickuhr, Kathryn and Rainer, Lee, *Younger Americans Reading Habits and Technology Use*, Pew Research Center, September 10, 2014.

⁴ Kelly, Kevin, “Reading in a Whole New Way,” *The Smithsonian*, August 2010.

⁵ Levin, David, Words I Hope I Never Hear Again, *Tidings* magazine, Volume 87, April 2024.



"THE OPENING OF THE PRISON"

*Whether our faults have brought us to prison
or our allegiance to God,
God assures us that even in prison,
we can turn to him, and he will hear and help us.*

By Nathan Badger

CAN you imagine spending thirty-two years in prison? Or any time in prison? For most of us, this is not a typical life experience.

I visited Trinidad and Tobago (TT) in early August to attend the Ecclesial Bible School. One of my wishes was to finally visit Bro. George Constantine in the Maximum-Security Prison. My dad and mom met him in prison several times, and the depth of the letters he regularly sent them moved me. So, I

was thankful on this trip that my mom and I were granted the opportunity to spend forty-five precious minutes with him in the prison.

Bro. George was incarcerated in 1991 and, at 32 years old, was sentenced to hanging. By 2024, he had spent almost half of his 62 years behind barbed wire, bars, and concrete. Bro. George provides a fascinating and moving testimony of his experience in the [YouTube link](#) at the end of this article

(I highly recommend you watch this!). In 1996, he learned the Truth behind bars when he completed Bible courses advertised in the local newspaper by Bro. Marcus Heaster in the UK. Later, in 1997, brethren in Trinidad baptized him at a prison pool. In 2008, the Privy Council commuted his death sentence, and gradually, the prison granted him special privileges and teaching jobs within the prison in recognition of his exceptionally good behavior.

I was really looking forward to meeting George in prison. But we were greeted with much better news the day after we arrived. George's life sentence was nullified only hours after we landed, and he had been granted his full and unconditional release. I would not be seeing Bro. George in prison. Instead, I could sit beside him, talk and laugh freely, hug him, and even do some hiking and birdwatching together!

After years of faithful support and visits, the Trinidad and Tobago brothers and sisters were ecstatic at his release. The theme of the 2024 Bible School was “The Jubilee Year”—a year in which Israel was to release slaves and those in bondage and allow them to rejoice in their new-found freedom (Leviticus 25). Surely this was not a coincidence. And yet, no Bible study could have moved us more than an actual demonstration of God's grace—the release of a God-fearing prisoner right before our very eyes. Bro. George was finally free! It was the year of his release and a time to rejoice!

Imprisoned

While in Trinidad, I spent several days with Bro. George. He talked freely about his mistakes that led to prison, the difficulties of being incarcerated in several notoriously dangerous Caribbean prisons, the “freedom” he had found in his Bible, and the



relationship he was actively building with his God. His new freedom was exciting but would be a challenge!

Our visits kept me up at night. As I mulled over George's testimony, I was reminded of several Bible characters who also experienced the horrors of prison: Joseph, Jeremiah, Samson, Daniel, Micaiah, Hanani, John the Baptist, Peter, John, Paul, and Silas. Even our Lord was arrested. Each of these was committed to prison under false accusation, for proclaiming the Gospel, or for an unwavering observance of God's values and standards. They "*suffered for doing good... according to the will of God.*" (1 Peter 3:17). Their faith, perseverance, and willingness to endure persecution and humiliation for God's sake is inspiring to us. Furthermore, it is evident that the sincere testimony of some even led to the conversion of fellow inmates (Acts 16:25; 33-34). Over the years, many other of Christ's brethren and sisters have been unjustly incarcerated and even died in prison because they were not ashamed of the Gospel.

At the same time, some people have found themselves in prison and suffered there for "*doing evil*" (1 Peter 3:17), perhaps as "*a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal.*" (1 Peter 4:15 NIV). Hoshea, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, and even Samson are Bible examples. Those were imprisoned for violation and disregard of social values and laws, many of which also mirror God's morals, laws, and even commands to

"submit to human authority." (1 Peter 2:13 NIV). Frequently, their behaviors are rooted in addictions, mental health challenges or reckless disregard for the lives of others.

It is encouraging that some prisoners, including followers of Christ, have reformed their lives after having "hit rock bottom" behind bars. Perhaps they knew the Truth before landing in prison and reframed their sentence as an opportunity to reconsider and change the direction of their lives. Or, perhaps, like Bro. George, they learned the Truth while in prison and reset their life compass to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Whatever the case may be, if we should find ourselves in prison for our crimes, it is an opportunity to reflect on the course of our life, submit ourselves to our sentence and period of probation, prove ourselves as honest and God-fearing citizens, reach out for help to overcome the "demons" that may have brought us here and realign ourselves with our God.

Whether our faults have brought us to prison or our allegiance to God, God assures us that even in prison, we can turn to him, and he will hear and help us. After many years, God brought Joseph out of prison. Jeremiah prayed to God, and Ebedmelech rescued him from a miry pit. God's angels orchestrated dramatic prison breaks for Paul and the apostles. Manasseh repented in prison, and God restored him and showed him grace. Psalm 107 reminds us that God can and has "*redeemed*" (v. 2) many from prison:

Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High... then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them... He brought them out of darkness... and burst their bonds apart. (Psalm 107:10-16 ESV).

“The Opening of the Prison”

Bro. George’s experiences also reminded me of an encouraging “prison promise” that God shares with all of us. In Isaiah, we learn of a special “servant” that God would create “*to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.*” (Isaiah 42:6-7 NIV).

God expands on the role of this servant in Isaiah 35:2-6 and Isaiah 61. In these prophecies, it becomes evident that “prison” here (and elsewhere) is not just a literal, physical prison but also figurative for anything that may “entrap” or bind us in this life, including mental distress, emotional darkness, sin, and other life challenges that hold us captive:

The LORD hath anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn. (Isaiah 61:1-2 ESV).

Who is this servant? Who has the power to release us from literal and figurative prisons? We know this is the Lord Jesus Christ because he combines pieces of these verses and sends them to John the Baptist while he languishes in his figurative prison of dark doubts and fears within Herod’s literal prison (Matthew 11:2-5). The implication was encouraging to John—Jesus was now fulfilling these “prison promises,” and John was, therefore, to “*be strong, do not fear,*” because “*your God will come... to save you.*” (Isaiah 35:4 NIV).

Strangely, but not coincidentally, Jesus leaves out Isaiah’s mention of the prison and prisoners in his message to John. Why? These words did not need to be underscored to a man already in prison. Their absence spoke volumes. John knew Isaiah’s “servant” prophecies well, and he would have filled in these missing pieces with great excitement. Jesus was the servant sent to open the prison to those who were bound—including himself! With tears of joy, he would have leaned on these verses and thanked God for this hope. Though John died in prison, Jesus’ words reassured him that neither God nor Jesus had forgotten him. He had faithfully completed his role as a forerunner for Jesus and would be “released” from his physical and fleshly prison in the Kingdom age.

These are also encouraging verses for us if we feel “imprisoned” by circumstances in our life, especially if we find ourselves in a literal prison. Through the freeing work of Jesus, the ultimate Year of Jubilee is already here, which Isaiah aptly describes as “*the year of the LORD’s favor.*” (Isaiah 61:2 ESV). Like John, if we call out to God while in these dark prisons, and align our lives with Him, we can find, favor, help and release through His servant and Son.



Bro. Nathan with Bro. George

Questions with Bro. George

My chats with Bro. George generated many questions. We spent some quiet time together on the last morning of our visit, and he graciously answered a number for me. With his consent, I have shared a few of them below:

- 1. You mentioned that drugs and alcohol contributed to your ending up in prison. What appeal would you offer to young and old?** If you are struggling with drugs or alcohol, admit it, and please get help. If you are already struggling with life challenges, these could easily pull you in, and only one try could get you hooked! So, it's best to stay completely clear of them—especially drugs.
- 2. What Bible character inspired you the most in prison?** Definitely Joseph. Unlike myself, he had done nothing wrong to be there. But he kept his faith in God, and God took care of him and eventually elevated him from prison.
- 3. What helped you get through 32 years in prison?** a) Putting faith in God. b) Being obedient to how God wanted me to live my life. c) Developing a desire to please God. d)

Incredible support and prayers from brothers and sisters worldwide—many of whom I have never met.) e) Keeping myself constantly and constructively occupied. For example, I worked as a teacher and maintained the gyms in the prison. I stayed out of drinking, doing nothing, homosexuality, and trafficking drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and cell phones, which are high-value contraband in prisons. f) Praying and reading—usually at night, around two or three in the morning when the prison was quiet, and during the day when possible.

- 4. What do you feel God was teaching you while in prison?** I believe God put me in prison as an opportunity to change my life. Placing me there was merciful—I still had life, I still had a chance, and I wanted to take this chance and make the most of it. During this time, God taught me obedience and how God wanted me to live my life. But also how to love our “fellow man”—the worst of the worst, people who used you just to get something, who behaved, spoke and thought in awful ways. But I had to learn how to work with them, care about them, and still serve God. This was a tough challenge!
- 5. How did you work through the loneliness of prison?** Prisoners surrounded me, but I was still very lonely at times, partly because I was trying to live a different life. I would talk to God. Visits from brothers and sisters were immensely helpful. I would write letters. At times, I wrote to up to thirty people and often received the most mail of anyone in the prison.

6. What prompted you to follow up on the ad for Christadelphian Bible courses in the prison newspaper?

I was just beginning my spiritual journey when I saw the advert (the size of a postage stamp). After several years, I saw Christianity and then the courses as a tool to support my spiritual life. I had been looking at various branches of Christianity, and the courses confirmed that Christadelphians believed in what the Bible taught. I completed seven courses in 1995 and 1996, and then the last question was, “Do you want to be baptized?” By that point, I resolved that this was the direction in which I wanted to point my life, and I was baptized in 1997.

7. How did you come to accept your original sentence—that is, to be hanged on Death Row? First, I had to admit I had done wrong and accept the consequences. But, for some reason, I always believed I would not be hanged for my crime, even though I painfully watched nine of my fellow prisoners hanged. As I began my spiritual journey, I had a growing confidence that God would help me, and my faith really grew after my sentence was converted to a life term.

8. Later, after you were converted to a life sentence, you were granted an opportunity to be released because of your good behavior. How did you deal with the many delays in your release? This was the greatest test of my faith. It dragged on for years. God was really stretching my faith and perseverance. Prayer was a powerful help. I would talk to God and remind myself that God was more powerful than the judge. I had confidence and

faith that God would eventually release me if it were His will. In the meantime, I saw my incarceration and hearings as opportunities to show I had changed and was sorry. I did everything in my power to show myself a different man. I completed all my rehabilitation; I did not commit a single offense in 32 years, and it was well-recognized and respected that I had a perfect record while I was in prison. Other prisoners with even minor blemishes on their record are still in prison. At my final hearing, the judge commended me for following the law, my repentance, being an example to other prisoners, and taking every available opportunity to be rehabilitated and released.

9. How will you adjust to life outside of prison? Yes, leaving prison for a drastically different world is a huge adjustment. But I am not scared about this. God has always provided and will continue to provide and supply for my needs. After many years of help from brethren and sisters, I look forward to becoming more self-sufficient and getting a job to support myself. But I can trust in God to help me with this next step.

10. Is there anything else you would like to add? I am very thankful for all the support and prayers of my brothers and sisters. My only remaining sibling, my brother, passed away recently, so I have no close family left. But God has given me a new family in the Truth. I know most brothers and sisters do not know me, but I hope and pray they will come to accept me. A dear brother once reminded me that I will need to earn trust, and some will hesitate to trust me. Like with the Apostle Paul (Saul),

some may be suspicious or even bitter. I will need to accept negativity and awkward remarks. I know we have the same hope and faith and await Jesus's return and the Kingdom together.

"Remember Them"

Bro. George's experiences, transformation, and resolve inspire us all. Whether we are in prison rightfully or wrongfully, literally or figuratively, we can take heart that God can still help us in our darkness and will be by our side if we call out to him and align our lives with Him.

If we are not in prison, God's Word reminds us that we can still help those who languish in these poisonous circumstances. Paul encourages us to show "*brotherly love*" and to "*remember those who are in prison as if you were together with them in prison.*" (Hebrews

13:1-3 ESV). Christ motivates us to visit those in prison, just as if we were visiting him when he was in prison (Matthew 25:36). Depending on the circumstances, we could also write letters, pray for them, or provide other forms of encouragement, support, and instruction. By God's grace, we have all been released from bondage (Deuteronomy 6:12). Along with Bro. George and others who have experienced prison, we look forward together to our ultimate release in the Kingdom age.

*Nathan Badger,
Cambridge Ecclesia, ON,
with
George Constantine,
Arima Ecclesia, Trinidad*



A must-watch! Here is a **YouTube** link to Bro. George Constantine's tribute and testimony, as recorded at the 2024 Trinidad-Tobago Bible School: **shorturl.at/xj8LW**

POLITICS AND THE BELIEVER

*2024 is likely one of the most political
years in recent history.*

By Ben McKay



A record-breaking number of the world's population have elections this year—nearly 2 billion voters across fifty countries!¹ Many of these elections are deeply and bitterly divided or not “free and fair.”² Some have the looming threat of violence hovering over them by military juntas, extremist factions, or nearby hostile countries. World superpowers are engaged in proxy wars that could escalate into more significant hostilities, and election results in some countries could spark new conflicts. There is widespread criticism of governments worldwide as the quality of life has visibly decreased worldwide in recent years.³

It is unsurprising to see strong emotions such as fear and anger as people try to make sense of all these things and desire to improve them. These feelings are further stoked by social media and news sources that have learned to profit from and sharply increase these emotions. As people living in these nations, we know these events may drastically impact or completely upend our lives. However, as Bible students and followers of Christ, we are guided by Biblical principles that should make our reaction to these world events markedly different from the world around us, even from many Christians. Two guiding principles come to mind. **First**, we have only one citizenship—in Heaven (Phil 3:20), and we are “sojourners and pilgrims” in this world (1 Peter 2:11 NKJV) as we do the good work given to us until the Kingdom is established. **Second**, “*The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.*” (Daniel 4:32 NKJV). These notions should

bring us great comfort because when we see the failings of the institutions of men and the instability in the world's governments, we can appreciate that God is in control. That does not mean things will be easy, but it does mean that events will lead to the best possible outcome as we approach the return of His Son.

Our Role As Ambassadors

What is our role in these kingdoms if we have only one citizenship? “*We are ambassadors for Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 5:20). As ambassadors, we represent Jesus to the nation around us. We live here temporarily until we are summoned to God's Kingdom on earth. We only have such power as is given to us by our ruler, and we are accountable to the laws and policies of our home kingdom. We are separate from those in the nation around us. Still, we are not isolated because our role is to interact and develop relationships in our host nation to promote the policies and position of our heavenly nation, i.e., the gospel message and God's commands.

Notably, because we are citizens of another country, we choose not to vote or be involved in governmental decisions such as lawmaking in our nation. Voting in a relatively free and fair election is not only a right and responsibility of citizens in a democracy but also a hard-fought luxury denied to people in many countries. And yet, it is one of the freedoms from which we abstain because we have another citizenship. Instead, we choose freedom in Christ. We can share this advantage with others. For example, when people discuss politics with us, it can be a

great way to speak about our beliefs. The Kingdom of God brings real, permanent solutions to the problems of this world. Instead of despairing about the inevitable failings of the kingdoms of men, we can provide hope and a plan for a beautiful world to come.

How Do We Interact With Government?

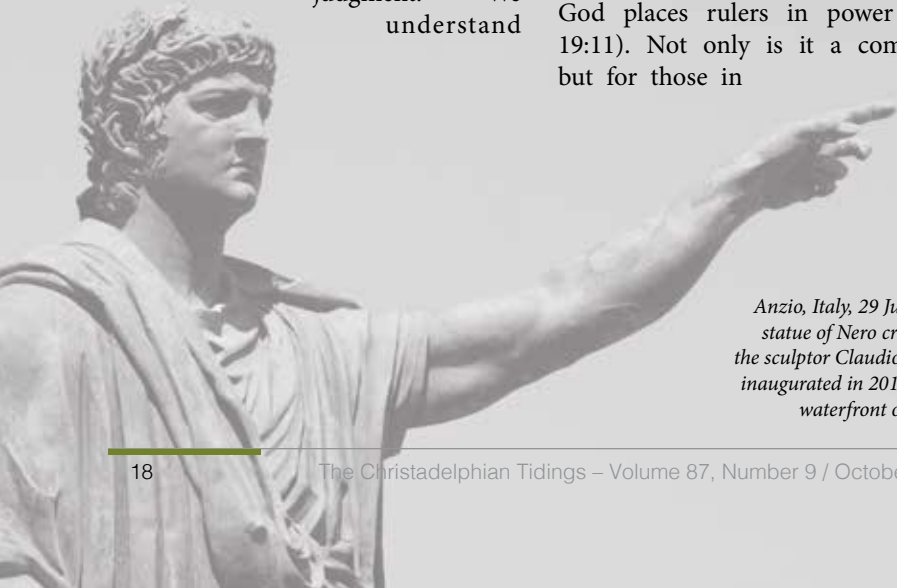
As ambassadors for Christ, how should we interact with the local government? Romans 13 provides us with an answer. Here, we read that we should be subject to the government because its authority is from God (who rules in the kingdoms of men), and so we should do good and not resist its authority (vv. 1-7). In addition, we must pay taxes, customs, fear, and honor to whom they are due. Let's look back to the previous chapter. We also see instruction to be people of peace, patient in tribulation, blessing our persecutors, and repaying no one evil for evil or avenging ourselves. Instead, we should live peaceably with all.

So, we must honor and obey the government. This direct command means we shouldn't criticize it or pass judgment. We understand

government employees are human, flawed, and inferior to the Lord Jesus' leadership, but God has empowered them. We should not mock or speak hatefully of them (e.g., Exodus 22:28; Acts 23:5; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Ecclesiastes 10:20). We should pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2)!

During Nero's reign, Paul instructed the people to obey. Finding a ruler more unworthy of a Christian's respect would be difficult. Nero was certainly a corrupt ruler during a time when the tax collectors were exploiting the people for their own gain; there were injustices against the people and forced expulsion of Jews. Eight years later, Nero burned Rome to the ground, blamed Christians for it, and began persecuting them with brutal and incredibly cruel methods.

Yet, a ruler's worthiness of obedience is not our decision! God puts them in power, and we are commanded to obey them. Their level of corruption and evil does not exclude us from obedience, provided our service to them doesn't directly conflict with God's commands. Similar to Paul, Jesus previously demonstrated an understanding that God places rulers in power (John 19:11). Not only is it a command, but for those in



*Anzio, Italy, 29 July 2011:
statue of Nero created by
the sculptor Claudio Valenti
inaugurated in 2010 on the
waterfront of Anzio.*

democratic countries, it is hypocritical for us to choose not to vote and then criticize the elected officials.

Furthermore, we should diligently pay taxes honestly, promptly, and fully. This means we do not try to avoid taxes in dishonest ways, such as undeclared cash income. We do not grumble about paying taxes. It's not our money—it's from God, and we have been told to pay what we owe (Matthew 22:15-22; Luke 20:22-25). Scripture commands us to pay taxes, for which we receive government services. Because we pay taxes, we may have the notion we have the right to complain about what we

established His Kingdom, and any human government that promises to adhere to righteous values and God's Word will fail to do so.

Human government is not the solution to the world's problems. No human leader will solve the problems created by sin. It is meaningless to attempt to implement laws forcing nations to obey God's commands without their desire to serve Him. God looks for people to obey His commands only if they choose to serve and believe in Him. He wants our hearts, not our blind obedience. If we aspire to make changes to the government and the world around us,

If we want to make changes to the government and the world around us, by far, the best and only lasting change we can make is to spread the gospel message and encourage those around us toward the Kingdom to come

receive for the taxes. But let us disabuse ourselves of this notion because if Paul told the Romans to honor and pay taxes to Nero, along with his exploitative, greedy, and corrupt tax collectors, then there is no justification in any way for complaining about how our taxes are used.

Support For Political Parties And Policies

What about supporting political parties or policies? No political entity with human leadership truly aligns with the will of the Father except for the Lord Jesus Christ. He has not yet

by far, the best and only lasting change we can make is to spread the gospel message and encourage those around us toward the Kingdom to come.

Jesus is the King! There can be no other. Jesus, the disciples, the apostles, Paul, none of them tried to replace the Roman empire ruling over Israel. The pattern established for us is to cast aside the things of this life and gain Christ and citizenship in his Kingdom. Paul confirms this for us:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom

I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ... Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.... For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:8, 16-17, 20 NKJV).

We must not promote political parties or policies in our ecclesias. Politics is a very divisive topic that doesn't belong there anyway. We aim to strengthen ecclesias, not divide them (Titus 3:1-11). Instead, we should seek to promote an apolitical, spiritual mindset and focus our aspirations on obeying the commands we have from God.

We should live peaceably with all men. This purpose means we are not to engage in political violence of any kind, whether against official government, people whose political views we disagree with, or as protestors (Romans

13:1-2). As believers living in “*the times of the Gentiles*” (Luke 21:24; Romans 11:25), our instructions have been to lay aside the sword, take up the cross, and follow Jesus. Jesus demonstrated to us perfectly a life of service and dedication to God that focused on spiritual renewal and growth, not a political revolution. He was a man of conviction who chose to speak out against the wrongs he saw around him, but his focus was to bring people to God, not overturning human leaders. The time to bring about submission to God’s will by the rulers of this world will not come before Jesus returns. Like Jesus, our only revolution is spiritual, which demands all our effort.

Loving Our Neighbor

The raging political issues of 2024 have touched each of us in some way. As we view the news and observe the turmoil, there is an understandable temptation to allow political rhetoric to move us to want to improve things because these issues often directly impact our lives and the lives of others.



Love for our neighbor might motivate us to initiate changes that make their lives better. Our love for God might encourage us to promote Godly values in government and the laws of the land. Or we may have more self-seeking motivation: to improve things for ourselves. These are often matters that inspire passion and intense emotion. However, the urge to help and improve is misplaced in a political context. To combat our natural tendency to become entangled in these concerns, we need to create space by viewing things in a much longer time span. We must realize that God's plan to solve these problems eternally is infinitely more important than "*the cares of this world.*" (Mark 4:19-20).

Instead, let us devote our full and zealous energy to preaching, uplifting our ecclesias, and doing good to our neighbors on both a personal or ecclesial level as an ambassador of Christ and sharing our eternal hope with them. We can have this eternal-life-changing impact on others rather than making changes limited to this fleeting life. This concept doesn't mean we are numb to the problems around us. But our perspective should be very different because we know how temporary worldly objectives are, even when they seem all-consuming and imperative. We should be driven to share this precious gospel with

those around us, hoping they accept the gift. The problems of this world should be a motivating force for us to do this good work! If we are witnessing destabilization in countries around the world, it may be a sign that Jesus' return is drawing close. This reality makes it even more critical for us to help all come to know God before the return of Christ happens—and even less important to try to solve the issues that human governments have failed to accomplish.

If we truly love our neighbor, we will share God's Word and His plan for us with them. To do anything less than that is to do them a disservice. No matter how much we help them in this life (as we have been commanded), if we don't extend our love to impart a knowledge of and desire for God's Kingdom, we are refusing to share with them the greatest gift that any of us can receive. "*Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.*" (Romans 12:21 NKJV).

*Ben McKay,
Cambridge Ecclesia, ON*

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2 Ewe, Koh. "The Ultimate Election Year: All the Elections Around the World in 2024." *TIME*, December 28, 2023. <https://time.com/6550920/world-elections-2024/>

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CONTENTIONS

By Martha Sales



IN considering the influence the ecclesia had on our family during challenging times, we have had very positive as well as negative experiences. When we were in our early teens, we were privileged to grow up in an ecclesia that was a place of warm hospitality, of prayers given with conviction and deep reverence, of Bible talks overflowing with radiant hope for the future, and brothers and sisters eagerly talking about their plans to preach and organize activities that would help and strengthen each other. This environment was genuinely positive and developed in many of us, the young people of that time, our own deep convictions and love for the Gospel message. We looked forward to going to meeting and Bible classes, anticipating encouragement with loving fellowship. From time to time,

there were disagreements and difficult issues to resolve. But overall, the mood and activities were Godly, positive, and hopeful.

However, there was a dark time in our ecclesial past when we became caught up in a controversy. Some of our children were young and impressionable. Unfortunately, at that time, many of the talks were about the issue, and our ecclesia became strongly divided. If one brother gave a talk on his view, there would be others who would immediately and openly disagree. Going to meeting or Bible classes, and especially business meetings, was often with a sense of dread, not with anticipation of encouragement or seeing love in action. The Bible tells us that there will be issues and disagreements for those who are approved to be made

manifest (1 Corinthians 11:18-19). So, controversies are not unique to us and may be something we will face again. But looking back, we realize that no controversy, however vital, should rule the ecclesia. The ecclesia needs to be a place where hope, love, and kindness reign, no matter what disagreements may be present.

At the time, we felt that it was good for our children to see that life in an ecclesia has its ups and downs. Now, we would still agree that if the ecclesia is reacting to issues with a loving, gracious spirit (not tolerating wrong teachings, but answering opponents with gentleness and respect—(2 Timothy 2:23-24), then **it is** suitable for children to see that quarrels can be resolved in a Christlike way. If, however, the disputes are nasty power struggles between strong personalities, be aware that the hostility may put off children and the young in the faith more than the actual controversy. Instead of feeling the Gospel is about real hope and thankfulness to God for our salvation, they may privately determine that it is about squabbling, power plays, and disputes. Be very wary of negativity turning young minds against what we hold dear. Jesus warned us about offending one of these little ones in Matthew 18:4-7.

In times of conflict, if hostility is overflowing, our youth shouldn't witness such discussions. Perhaps controversial issues should only be brought up in private arranging board meetings. Even then, be wary that hostile arguments can also result in the spiritual death of **mature** brothers and sisters.

In times of deep division, it is more important than ever that the ecclesia and the young hear hopeful, positive, encouraging talks about the Gospel message from those who truly love and live it. Consider frequently taking your family to other meetings that have joyful fellowship so your children can hear encouraging talks that have nothing to do with the contentions.

We must adhere to the truth, but how we resolve issues often has more of an impact, for good or bad, than the actual debate itself.

Whatever your ecclesia is going through, it is helpful to be intentional about finding the positives to share with your children. We should greatly value those with firm convictions and a genuine love for God's truth and allow them to influence others for good. Be that voice of encouragement whenever you can. And remember that behind all the "right words" we may find to say, what is most impactful to our children is the spirit that drives our life—our **REAL** hope, our **REAL** love, our **PRIORITY**.

As Paul wrote, *"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."* (Romans 14:19 NIV).

*Martha Sales,
Collingwood Ecclesia, ON*

OUR SUFFICIENCY IS FROM GOD

*“Pray like it all depends on God,
but act like it all depends on you.”*

By John C. Bilello



THE Apostle Paul's letter to the Roman Ecclesia includes a couple of critical verses on the necessity for preaching the Gospel message:

*How then will they call on him
in whom they have not believed?
And how are they to believe in him
of whom they have never heard?
And how are they to hear without
someone preaching? And how are
they to preach unless they are sent?
As it is written, "How beautiful are
the feet of those who preach the
good news!" (Romans 10:14,15).¹*

As Christadelphians, we have met this obligation with public lectures and by personal preaching to friends, relatives, colleagues, and others we may come in contact with. Public witness has taken various forms through the years, ranging from **soapbox** preaching² in city parks to advertised lectures at our ecclesial halls and sometimes delivered at rented neutral venues. Recently, "Learn to Read the Bible Effectively" seminars were used in place of lectures to attract an audience.

Public preaching draws its inspiration from examples given in the Scriptures by speeches delivered by the Apostle Peter at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and the Apostle Paul on Mars Hill in Athens. Both examples attracted an audience! The current problem with our public proclamations is that acquiring an audience willing to listen to our message has become increasingly more difficult. An editorial in *The Christadelphian* magazine in 1989 observed:

Since the advent of popular entertainment, and its commercial exploitation, it has resulted in a

generation who are not prepared to put themselves out for long term benefits. Unless there is something to be gained almost instantaneously, little interest is shown.³

These words were written thirty-five years ago, before the spread of cable TV, satellite TV, and the omnipresent streaming services in North America, which offer thousands of possible TV program choices at any given hour.⁴ To compound the problem, it is clear that when both Apostles spoke to their respective audiences in Jerusalem and Athens, they were dealing with crowds that believed in religion. That is not necessarily a given today! A recent survey taken by the Pew Research Center found that when people were queried about their religion, the reply "None" constituted the largest single group in the U.S.⁵ Hence, if we are to continue as a community to spread the true gospel message, we need to find better ways to address the realities of the current situation. Regardless of the mode of public preaching we use, without personal follow-up on potential contacts, our efforts would fail. Hence, whether we are considering publicly obtained or singular contacts, the road to a successful conclusion is developing our individual abilities to teach the gospel message. Personal preaching has always been one of the most effective ways to gain someone's interest in the gospel message, and given the obstacles that are escalating on public proclamation, it is a mode that we must cultivate more than ever before, lest we find our community fading into oblivion.⁶

The first instance of personal preaching in the New Testament occurs in the opening chapter of the gospel of John.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" [which means Christ]. He brought him to Jesus. (John 1:40, 41).

It is certain Andrew had a sufficient understanding of the Old Testament prophecies to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah. Consequently, Andrew was able to bring Peter to Christ! If we are to be capable of bringing people to Christ, we need to begin with being good Bible students. As the Apostle Paul exhorted Timothy:

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:2).

Also, his message to the Colossians:

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Colossians 4:5-6).

Obviously, this is not an easy task, and we may be filled with feelings of inadequacy, which is perfectly natural. We cannot all be eloquent teachers, but we may be able to find ways that suit our personalities and abilities that can aid us in bringing people to Christ.⁷ That brings us to a second observation about Andrew's personal preaching, namely that Peter was receptive because he must have had sufficient knowledge to appreciate the message (note that Andrew says: "*We have found*"). The challenge for us is how to expose people to the Scriptures so that they will pursue more detailed study. Foremost, we must develop a relationship with a person. Friendship is critical to someone being willing to listen to the gospel (I take it that is what is implied in Paul saying, "*Let your speech always be gracious.*"). Also, the Apostle Peter gives us an important insight on how we should preach:

*But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; **yet do it with gentleness and respect.**" (1 Peter 3:15).*

The challenge for us is how to expose people to the Scriptures so that they will pursue more detailed study. Foremost, we must develop a relationship with a person. Friendship is critical to someone being willing to listen to the gospel..

We need to make an acquaintance aware of the Scriptures—not a given these days. This can be done in various ways. I will describe a few suggested approaches I have observed as follows:

- A brother started a Bible class in his dorm by putting out a sign that said: “Bible studies Tuesday and Thursday 7 to 8 PM. Feel free to learn, argue, or ignore any commentary—no one will be allowed to belittle another person.”
- Another brother liked to go to “garage” sales. In the process, he would drop off some literature, and if the recipient were so inclined, he would start up a conversation.
- If you are hosting a garage sale, have lots of literature to give away to those attending.
- Some started Bible Reading groups where they were employed (I am personally aware of several instances where this has been done quite successfully).⁸
- A sister living in a retirement community started a Bible reading group for senior citizens. She put a sign on the meeting room bulletin board saying, “Time to find out about God before it is too late. Bible studies every Tuesday and Thursday at 7 PM.”
- Some people are just good at starting up conversations with anyone they know and letting them become aware that the Bible has a message of salvation that they should know about. Some people are even capable of addressing people they hardly know. I know of

both a brother and a sister who were admitted to hospitals with terminal illnesses. They had virtually every employee they encountered receive a thorough dialogue on the gospel message of salvation.⁹

- Perhaps the most important personal preaching I have encountered involves teaching someone a brother or sister is romantically involved with but not yet a Christadelphian. The Apostle Paul admonishes us to marry “*only in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 7:39), but that does not preclude dating someone who is not a member of our community. We are not a large group, and one may not be able to find a compatible mate within the household. In such a case it is best to make known one’s beliefs early in the relationship. Delay causes two problems. First, the romantic partner could just believe you are not serious about your commitment to your faith. Secondly, if the information is delayed too long, the passion in the relationship may make it difficult to bring it to an end. Many dedicated Christadelphians have been introduced to the true gospel message after developing a romantic relationship with a brother or sister and being willing to hear about their companion’s beliefs.¹⁰

If you are hosting a garage sale, have lots of literature to give away to those attending.



However, some people are simply not cut out to use any approach that requires them to take the initiative. Being shy is not a sin. Even Moses was a reluctant speaker! (Exodus 4:10). The opportunity to introduce someone to Bible study doesn't have to be from our depth of Bible knowledge but instead can come from our strength of character—**no speech required!**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16).

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12).

People have been drawn to our community simply by observing a brother or sister whose way of life impressed them. That led the person to inquire about their religion. Many stories illustrating how this has happened could be told, but I will recite just a couple so you can get some idea of the possibilities.

- Two young brothers headed off to Sunday's meeting from their apartment in a large complex, dressed in suits and ties and carrying their Bibles. This behavior was so different from so many other young people in that complex, who seemed to party on Saturday nights and sleep in most of the day on Sunday. This led a person in the facility to enquire where they were

going. Eventually, they invited him to tag along. That person is now a brother!

- A sister at work let her colleagues know she didn't want to hear profane language or vulgar jokes. That led them to respect her character and eventually ask about her religion. This interaction is still in progress.

Any business metric shouldn't measure the success of personal peaching. In the end, it is the LORD who will give the increase. It is important that no matter how we attempt to preach, what must underpin any kind of personal or public effort is the necessity for prayer on our part so that our efforts may bear fruit.

The words of Apostle Paul in this regard have always stuck in my mind:

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.” (2 Corinthians 3:4-5).

*John C. Bilello,
Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI*

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

² The expression “soapbox” preacher dates to the 19th Century practice where someone wanting to address a crowd would stand on a sturdy box and speak in a public place. Soap was apparently shipped in sturdy wooden crates prior to suitable cardboard replacements. In my youth, I used this method with modest success. You can still see and hear this practiced at Hyde Park Corner in London, England.

³ *The Christadelphian*, Editorial, November (1989), Vol. 126, p. 424.

⁴ As of this writing, approximately 200 cable or satellite channels, numerous on-demand choices, and 50 streaming services are available in the United States. This presents literally several thousands of program choices at any given hour.

⁵ See npr.org for details.

⁶ We need to do a detailed look at how we can use new technologies to do effective public preaching in the 21st century for future consideration.

⁷ Anthony Whitehorn, Mike Newbold, and Karam Ram wrote an excellent article entitled “Are We Christ’s Witnesses?” *The Christadelphian*, May (2000), p. 173, with insights on preparing to do personal preaching.

⁸ If you want to implement a Bible reading group at work, please send me an email, and I will give you the details that would be appropriate for your situation (there could be restrictions to overcome—legal or otherwise). jcbilello@gmail.com

⁹ In an obituary note published in *The Christadelphian*, vol. 97, (1960), Pg.57: “Bro. Rason was working for the Lord the very evening he died, expounding the Truth to a patient in his room.” Bro. Rason presided at my baptism in 1957.

¹⁰ Sound advice in this regard is given by Bro. John Marshall, in his book *The New Life*, chapter 11 on “Courtship,” pg. 77, Published by *The Christadelphian*, (1987). (This book was first published in 1971, long after I was dating in the 1950s. It would have saved me a lot of angst.)

OUR UNPLANNED JOURNEY

By David Jackson



Last month Bro. Darren Tappouras ended his article, “*Preaching: Ready, Set, Pray!*” by soliciting brothers and sisters to share details of their journey to truth. We were so pleased to receive this one from Bro. David Jackson of the Hutt Valley Ecclesia, New Zealand. It is a testimony about how small comments can lead a willing heart to pursue the LORD.

I sincerely believe that my wife, Rosemary, and I were called out by God. The first step was through a work colleague when I worked in London who out of the blue asked me if I had read the Bible. I said “no,” but I did have a small New Testament given to me by a friend of the family. He then said, “I suggest you read 1 Corinthians 13. It is a lovely chapter.” So, when I got home, I read it. The print was very small, so I wrote the whole chapter down on a larger piece of paper because I liked what I had read. I still have that piece of paper. My work colleague’s name was John, and I never saw him again as he left for a new job. This was step one. After this I also moved to another

job away from London, where my wife and I got married. We were well settled in our life together, we had three children, a new house, and I had a good job. But things were going to change soon, and it started when a work colleague who had emigrated to New Zealand came back on a visit and we were talking about his new life there. He said it was a good life, with plenty of job opportunities. I did not think any more about the conversation until I saw a travel program about New Zealand. I think it was from here that the seed which had been sown by John started to grow. One day I said to my wife, “What would you think about emigrating to New Zealand?” Much to

my surprise she did not say, “Are you mad!” This was step two.

I knew from my job that they had an agent in New Zealand and my boss said he would enquire to see if there were any vacancies. As it happened there were openings in New Zealand, Canada, and Australia. My wife was not keen on Australia or Canada, so we ended up in New Zealand. By the time we arrived, the only vacancy left was in the Hutt Valley outside of Wellington. So that is where we started our new life. This was step three.

My boss turned out to be a Christadelphian, and it did not take him long to find an opportunity to start talking to me about the truth. Fortunately I have always been a bookworm, and one of the books I had read was titled “The 1948 Jewish war of Independence.” This had been a book recommended to me by another bookworm, and it is not a book I would have chosen to read normally. The relevance of this is that there had been another flare up in Israel, and my boss asked if I knew anything about Israel. I said all I knew was what I had read in that book, and I could not understand how they had managed to survive the War of Independence. Well, that was all my boss needed, as I ended up having a thorough introduction into Israel as God’s chosen people. This is step four.

We had found a rental property while we looked for a house to buy, and as it happened there was a Christadelphian family who lived a short walk away. My boss introduced me to the husband, who had agreed to take over discussing

the Bible with me if I agreed. It was at this stage that my wife had become very interested in what I had been telling her, so we both started learning together. The brother would come to our house every Saturday. We would do a reading together, and discuss what we had read. He would answer any questions we had. One of the questions my wife asked was, can our children come to your Sunday School? The brother said that would be fine, and since we had no transport, he arranged to pick up the children and come back later to take us to the meeting. This is step five.

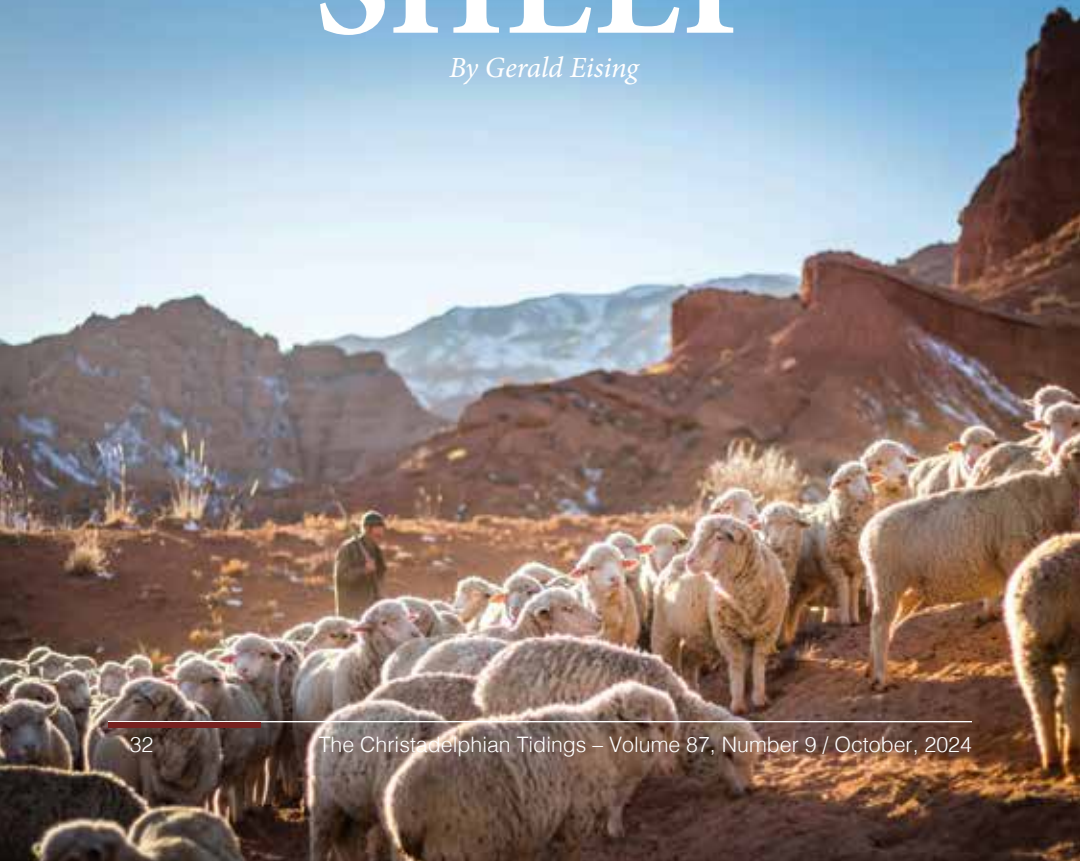
The classes with the brother covered a period of fourteen months of instruction, which led to our baptisms on March 27, 1976. We later had two more children, and all five have been baptized and married into the truth. Of our ten grandchildren seven have been baptized and three are under instruction. So, we have been truly blessed. This is step six.

The original brother who set the ball rolling considered our journey to the truth was a modern-day miracle. When I look back, I am convinced that we were called out by God, as neither my wife nor I had a religious background and never knew what a Christadelphian was. Later in life I did find out that Bro. Frank Jannaway had also lived on the same road as we did in London, and the nearest ecclesia was a half hour away.

*David Jackson,
Hutt Valley Ecclesia, NZ*

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

By Gerald Eising



THE story is told of a mutual improvement class, where it was a night for practicing reading, and the reading was Psalm 23. Two brothers in the class were called upon to read the psalm. Each read it faultlessly, but there was a subtle yet significant difference. The older brother was later asked privately about his reading, which was superior to the younger brother's. The reply was simple but profound. "He knows the psalm, but I know the Shepherd."

Psalm 23 is one of the Bible's most well-known and beloved psalms. David expresses His trust in God's provision and protection in a way that most in his culture would understand. For most of us to gain a similar appreciation, learning more about shepherds and sheep will help. We all do grasp sheep metaphors such as:

- Black sheep (bad person),
- Counting sheep (sleeping aid),
- Sheepish (shy),
- People follow like sheep (blindly following),
- A wolf in sheep's clothing (looks harmless but extremely dangerous),
- Lost sheep (one who has strayed and is at risk).

Sheep herding was a common profession in ancient Israel and was vital to the economy and society. Shepherds were highly valued and respected because of their character and skills. Their jobs required knowledge and wisdom about husbandry, agriculture, meteorology, astronomy, medicine, defense against wild animals, year-

round outdoor living, and herding. Society appreciated their bravery, hard work, and dedication. They were conscientious, tough men, yet very mature. Part of the training for young boys was to spend time with a shepherd. Shepherding was essential to the economy for wool, meat, and milk. Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David were all shepherds.

All We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray

Sheep are among the few animals that require human involvement to survive. For several reasons, sheep need a shepherd.

- Sheep are prey animals and are thus vulnerable to attack from wolves, lions, bears, coyotes, etc. They lack self-defense skills. Have you ever seen sheep growl or show their teeth? Or maybe bark, bite, run fast, shoot quills, or extend their claws? But they do have a few things in their defensive arsenal. When sheep are frightened by noise, such as running water, they will always run away together as a whole group, whereas individually, they are defenseless. Also, sheep kick. An ewe is especially prone to kicking if she is protecting her young. Other than these two defense mechanisms, sheep are like a Snickers bar waiting to be eaten by a wolf if they don't stick together—like an ecclesial family.

Therefore, shepherds like David, who protected his sheep from the lion and the bear, are needed in the ecclesia.

- Sheep are herd animals that need guidance and direction to find food, water, and shelter. Sheep have no sense of direction. They will follow whoever leads them, even if that leader walks off a cliff. Remember the question: “If your friend jumps off a cliff, would you do so too?” Well, sheep would! In Eastern Turkey, about 1,500 unattended sheep fell off a cliff while the shepherds ate breakfast far away from the flock. The first 400 fell to their death in a ravine, but the remaining 1100 did not die because the first 400 broke the fall. The first 400 sheep were a big fluffy cushion for the other sheep! The sheep in the back couldn’t pass the sheep in the front because they were unaware of what was ahead; the sheep in front couldn’t stop because the sheep in the back were pushing them forward. The proverbial “blind leading the blind.” A farmer tells another story about sheep. He said if you have a flock of sheep in a barn, stretch a rope across the door before you let them out. When the sheep come out of the barn, the first few will jump over the rope. If you cut the rope, the remaining sheep will still jump over the “invisible rope” because it’s what the rest of the flock did.

Similarly, how often do we follow someone leading us in the wrong direction or acting foolishly? Or do we imitate them because we think it’s the thing to do? Can you see why the LORD compares us to sheep in the Bible? *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way.”* (Isaiah 53:6).¹ Hence, a shepherd guides his flock to safe and productive areas for grazing and water sources.

- The shepherd monitors the flock’s health and provides medical care when necessary. He performs vital services such as giving medication or treating wounds. When sheep get a wound or a bite, they can’t care for themselves. Other animals lick a wound until it heals, but not sheep. They need a shepherd to tend to their injuries. A salve would often need to be put on their leg, possibly binding the wound. A diligent shepherd would look after the wound constantly until it healed completely.

How many times has our LORD looked after our wounds and treated them? Often, we are brokenhearted and need His healing. As Psalm 147:3 NET states: *“He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.”*



- Shepherds manage a flock's breeding program and ensure the best animals are selected for breeding. This decision improves the health and productivity of the flock over time. Remember the story of Jacob and Laban's sheep (Genesis 31:1-13).
- Sheep often get separated from the flock, especially if they are in an unfamiliar environment or startled by something. If lost, they have difficulty finding their way back because they lack a keen sense of direction (no GPS!). Once again, they need the shepherd's help. At this juncture, the sheep's stupidity ends. Sheep have a remarkable instinct for knowing the voice of the shepherd. Because they are emotional animals, they can detect strangers. Amazingly, they will fear a stranger's voice and flee. They will also stick up for each other when a fight occurs. They can also easily become anxious or distressed and feel grief when other sheep die.

There probably is a breakdown in the analogy here. When the LORD compares us to sheep in the Bible, we find that we aren't always so loyal, we don't routinely stick up for friends, and we struggle many times

to recognize the shepherd's voice. *"Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, to His saints; let them not turn back to folly."* (Psalm 85:8 ESV).

- Sheep grow between two to thirty pounds of wool and need to be sheared, or they will have problems. Their thick wool coats keep them warm in chilly weather, but in warm weather, this can cause them to overheat, leading to heat exhaustion or even death. Unshorn sheep are more susceptible to parasites such as lice, ticks, and flies. Moisture can become trapped in the wool, creating an environment conducive to fungus growth. They can become immobilized by the thickness of wool, leading to starvation or dehydration. Plus, sheep can't get up without help. Sometimes, sheep turn over on their backs (like a turtle) with their legs flailing in the air. There is an old English shepherd term for that. It is called "cast down." A "cast sheep" is a pitiful sight. It will die if the shepherd does not lift the sheep and put it back on its feet. It is entirely helpless to predators around it when in this position. Plus, it could get left behind when the flock moves on.



How many times have we been “cast down” or “flailing on our backs”? *“He will tend His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”* (Isaiah 40:11 ESV).

- Sheep will settle for less. When thirsty, they will stop at a dirty puddle right in front of them instead of going for the clean still waters twenty feet ahead of them. Sadly, they are content with filth as long as it satisfies them in the moment. Also, they will stink and never even know it. Truthfully, they lack discernment and judgment and don’t even know what is good for them.

Are we so different? We often see a dirty puddle (sin) and go straight for it because we think there is life in it. We believe we will be refreshed, but we become poisoned and stinky!

We are His Flock

Hopefully, this information will help us better understand the comparison of our LORD’s relationship with His people outlined in Psalm 23. Sheep are very dependent upon a shepherd, just as we are with our LORD. The first step in having a relationship with God is accepting that we need His help. This mindset is called “humility.” The Scripture refers to us as sheep, not as lions. We need our LORD’s help, or like sheep, we will suffer.

So, what can we learn from Psalm 23? *“The LORD is my shepherd I shall not want.”* (ESV) Our LORD will guide,

direct, feed, heal, and protect His own. Our LORD is with us as our provider and protector, so we shall not want. *“He makes me lie down in green pastures.”* The LORD provides physical and spiritual substance, refreshment, and rest. *“He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake.”* (Psalm 23:3 ESV) When we face difficult situations, or sin causes us to lose our way, the LORD is there to restore us. The phrase *“for your Name’s sake”* emphasizes that the LORD restores and guides His followers. Not just for their own benefit but also for the sake of His own reputation and honor. It reminds us that all our actions and experiences should ultimately center on honoring and glorifying the LORD. *“For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.”* (Psalm 25:11 KJV). *“Help us, O God of our salvation for the glory of Your Name; You will deliver us and forgive our sins for your name’s sake.”* (Psalm 79:9 ESV). *“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven for His Name’s sake.”* *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and staff, they comfort me.”* (1 John 2:12 ESV).

Life can be difficult when we walk through the darkest valley, which represents times of trial and hardship. The LORD is with us. David acknowledges that he does not need to fear because the LORD is with him, and His presence and guidance bring comfort and reassurance. The rod and staff represent the power and defense of the LORD. The rod used by a shepherd was a sturdy wooden pole

that was used as a weapon to fend off wild animals. We know young David used the rod because he told King Saul about the incidents in which he kept his father's sheep from the lion and the bear. The staff was a long, thin pole frequently hooked at the end and was primarily used to guide the flock. Sheep are infamous for straying; once they are not under the shepherd's close supervision, they can get into all kinds of problems.

Sound familiar?

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." The LORD prepares a table before us, even in the presence of our enemies. This represents the LORD's provision and care, even in difficult circumstances. Our LORD anoints us with oil, which is a symbol of blessing and provision. And the "table" also reminds us of the Table of our Lord, with the bread and wine. *"Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* (Psalm 23:6 ESV) David concludes by expressing his confidence that the LORD's goodness and lovingkindness will follow him all the days of his life. Thereby, he will continue to experience the LORD's care, provision, and protection. The Psalm ends with the hope of dwelling in the house of the LORD forever, Eternal life in the LORD's presence. Psalm 23 can also give us comfort by posing these questions to ourselves each day:

- Do You Want Faith?—The LORD Is My Shepherd.
- Do You Want Assurance?—I Shall Not Be In Want.
- Do You Want Contentment?—He Makes Me Lie Down In Green Pastures.
- Do You Want Peace?—He Leads Me Beside The Still Waters.
- Do You Want Life?—He Restores My Soul.
- Do You Want Divine Guidance?—He Guides Me In The Paths Of Righteousness For His Names Sake.
- Do You Want Confidence?—Even Though I Walk Through The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death.
- Do You Want Courage?—I Will Fear No Evil.
- Do You Want Companionship?—For You Are With Me.
- Do You Want Comfort?—Your Rod And Your Staff, They Comfort Me.
- Do You Want Providence?—You Prepare A Table Before Me In The Presence Of My Enemies.
- Do You Want Favor?—You Anoint My Head With Oil.
- Do You Want Happiness?—My Cup Overflows.
- Do You Want Blessings?—Surely Goodness And Mercy Will Follow Me All The Days Of My Life.
- Do You Want Immortality?—And I Will Dwell In The House Of The Lord Forever.

Gerald Eising,
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IN TIMES OF CRISIS

By Robert Prins

WHEN we experience major crises in our lives, we often try to overcome them in big ways. A job loss, relationship breakdown, sickness, or financial crisis may lead us to make a drastic change in our lives. Sometimes, those major changes are the right thing to do. But let's have a think about the crisis that Zedekiah and his nobles were going through when Jerusalem was about to fall to the Babylonians. The siege of Jerusalem was a big event. It was completely life changing. It seemed as if the only ways to solve it were in big things—waging war, a massive alliance, or the intervention of God.

God wanted change, too. He didn't want the Babylonians to win and destroy His people. But the strategy God gave Judah to overcome was not

in the big events, big decisions, or big changes. Here is what God wanted:

*Execute justice in the morning,
and deliver from the hand of
the oppressor him who has been
robbed, lest my wrath go forth like
fire, and burn with none to quench
it, because of your evil deeds.
(Jeremiah 21:12 ESV).*

This was no massive military plan to win a war, but a small change to each individual's way of life that would have brought about a major change in their circumstances. All too often, we look to the big answers to our crisis when we really should be looking at how we live and our relationship with God.

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PART 4

NOAH: SAVING YOUR FAMILY IN A DARK WORLD

By Dennis Bevans

IF you like math and/or numerology, this article is for you. As a community, we generally accept some basic numerology. Some take it too far, in my estimation, but the basics are so obvious they get our attention. This article is by no means intended to be an exhaustive class on numbers, and there are certainly more qualified (and interested) brethren to tackle that. Still, a few that routinely get my attention are as follows:

- 5 grace (hand of God),
- 6 man (creation day—666),
- 7 completion (generally of a covenant—days of creation, Noah’s story),
- 8 new beginning (day 7+1),
- 12 Israel (tribes), and
- 40 generations (generally referring to judgment—wilderness wandering, the temptation of Jesus).

The focus of this article will be on the completion of the covenant regarding Noah, and to do that, we will highlight the use of the number 7 throughout the chapter. Remember, in ancient Hebrew, there is no punctuation, so emphasis is provided by repetition.

In Genesis 7:1, Noah is declared righteous by grace (Genesis 6:8). With a population estimate in the millions, perhaps closer to a billion, that is an astounding declaration. Considering the protracted life span and absence of birth control, the math gets pretty tough very quickly on any reasonable extrapolation based on child-producing years. Noah's righteousness is before God and not self-righteousness. In fact, 2 Peter 2:5 states Noah was "*the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness,*" giving us a clue as to what type of life he led. Remember #8 from our introduction above? Noah and his wife were one in marriage; therefore, they combined were the 7th and 8th (completion of the covenant and a new beginning), making this union a marvelous type of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note the condemnation of the world as ungodly. There was no room for God when their time was consumed with eating, drinking, and marrying. God takes "*no pleasure in the death of the wicked,*" and there is sadness when the wicked are slain, but God gives us free will to serve him or serve self. This

is His process. Many are called, but a precious few are chosen, telling us that the cost of redemption is very high. For us to be called to a knowledge of His truth and offered an opportunity to be included in His family, there are thousands upon thousands of others who chose self-service and death. This is a righteousness we cannot earn. Our righteousness is really our emulation of God's righteous attributes in our service toward him.

"*Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens*" is the start of Genesis 7:2. This is evidence that there was a law from God before the Law of Moses. Clean animals are those acceptable for food, and those acceptable for sacrifice are included (not all clean animals are acceptable offerings). This is actually very logical and practical. If these are edible, you need more than one pair, or you will wipe out a species at each BBQ or feast! In Hebrew, the male and female are the words to describe the man and his wife. This verse is the only one in Scripture where these words are used to describe animals. The RSV calls these **seven** pairs, and the Hebrew supports this as the word is actually doubled (**seven seven**). Whether that be for emphasis or multiplication is an interesting debate. In verse 3, the fowls of the air are added to the "**sevens**" count (**seven seven** again). This is "*to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth*" which is preservation, not re-creation.

Verse 4 adds 7 days of final warning. The word “rain” is only used by Moses in the Hebrew Testament, and he does so 5 times (grace). The verse also mentions **40** twice, a generation or judgment, which in this case is both (compare to verse 1). The word “destroy” means “to blot out” (same as Genesis 6:7) in the Hebrew and RSV. It is translated in several places to emphasize personal accountability (e.g., Exodus 32:32-33 and Psalm 51:9). Verse 5 repeats the **all** declaration of Genesis 6:22, almost like a bookend from building to gathering. Verse 6 we referred to already as the years of Noah’s life mentioned in **6** hundreds—the number of man and the flesh. Verses 7-9 recount the entry into the ark. All three of the children noted are married, yet none are with a child yet (at least in the record, or this gets even more tragic). Lots of shadows here. The birds and beasts are used to describe Israel and the Gentiles in Hosea 2. Reading Isaiah 34-35 with no break is also a worthy exercise, as we see nations coming to the ark door for salvation as the only access to the Father. And, of course, verse 10 completes the 7 days of final warning, which now puts us 1656 years after creation (math from Genesis 5) as we transition to verse 11, waters above (thunder showers), waters below (overflowing of rivers, lakes, seas, perhaps geysers, earthquakes, and tsunamis). Factoring the waters all around, we have a type for baptism. One more thought is to note that the ark landed in Ararat. Therefore, the

ark floated north (or opposite of the natural flow pattern) because God is in control.

The next couple of verses show the judgment of the generation, with safety provided inside the ark and misery abundant outside. Isaiah 26:21: “*For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.*” Jesus himself gets very close to home, considering this important lesson with these words in context.

*He that loveth father or mother
more than me is not worthy of me:
and he that loveth son or daughter
more than me is not worthy of me.
(Matthew 10:37).*

This concept is not easy. Imagine the cries and pleas from those you know and even love as God’s judgment is delivered. We must know that Noah and his family intimately understand our pain when our loved ones walk away from the Father.

Let’s drop down to verse 16. Here, God closed the door. This action alone is a tremendous example of faith. Noah and his sons are not told to design a pulley system or creative contraption to close the door. Simply, the instruction was to build the giant box and leave the side open, trusting that God would take it from there. There is also a measure of mercy in this act. God did not require them to shut the door on others (including family) but rather took that on himself as the righteous Judge. Verse 17 repeats the **40-day** comment

again to emphasize the judgment of this generation. In context, Habakkuk 2:14 helps shed some light on the overall purpose. *“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”* Water used for cleansing is a common theme in Scripture. The ark being lifted up is a direct tie to the work of Jesus, referencing the water, the wood and provided redeemer to the obedient. Numbers 21 notes this idea as well, and John 3:14 puts them together.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.

The way to overcome the flesh and its lusts is to flood it with the Word of God. Knowing that all of this is preserved for our learning and pointed out by Jesus as a specific object lesson, it would behoove us all to look at ourselves individually and ecclesially. Our community once had a reputation for being readers and students of God’s Word. The question is, does it still? One of the most dangerous phrases that can be uttered in a Bible class or discussion is “I think.” We must continue to immerse our thinking in the Word of God, or we will replace it with the thinking of flesh. The current trend is toward Humanism and letting

Every relationship worth having requires a two-way dialog. We speak to our God in prayer, and He speaks back to us through His written word. Without Bible reading, we are jeopardizing the relationship by talking without ever listening.

To discuss this further is a separate topic, but we may use the imagery. The serpent represents flesh in Eden, as does the metal brass. The only way they could escape the death of the flesh and its sinful condemnation was to look on the man who was pierced and lifted up, draining water and blood in the end.

Genesis 7:18-19 emphasizes that *“the waters prevailed.”* Water (the Word of God) versus earth and sin: water wins!

whatever is “right in our own eyes” be “our truth.” What a sad condemnation of society at large and even the state of the ecclesia in general. Nothing wrong with having a thought to share. Just do not elevate the thoughts of man to the level of Scripture. Every relationship worth having requires a two-way dialog. We speak to our God in prayer, and He speaks back to us through His written Word. Without Bible reading,

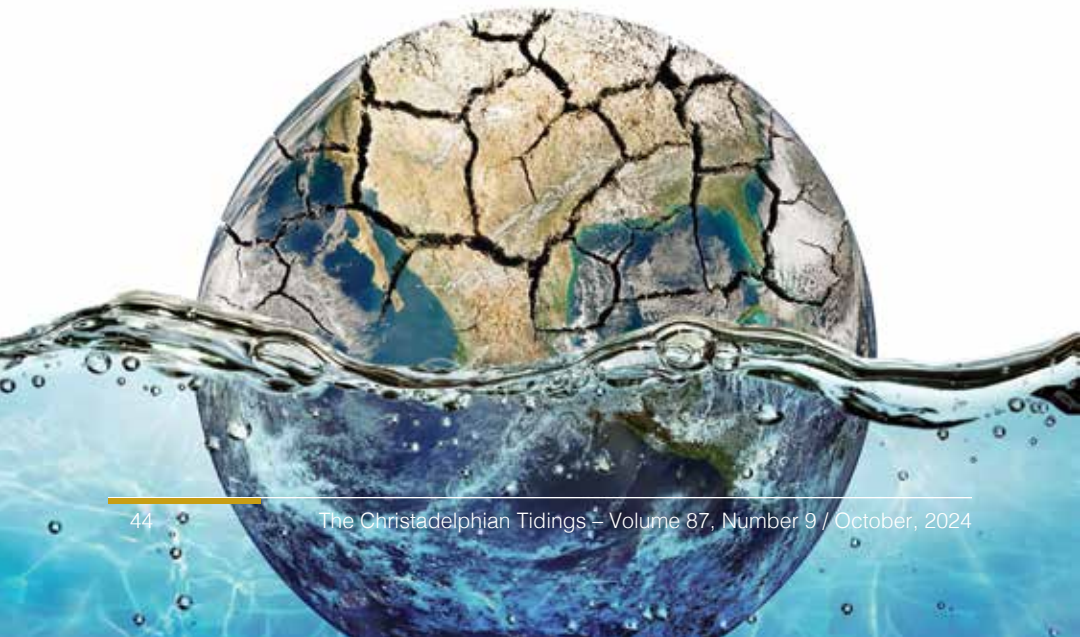
we jeopardize the relationship by talking without even listening.

Water was not the problem. Water was the salvation. The flesh that was corrupting the way of God was the real problem. If we are not consciously fighting flesh daily, we are losing. Their time was up, and God's patience was gone. This is a model for us in our day to be prepared!

Genesis 7:20 tells us that the water was fifteen cubits, or twenty-two feet, over the highest visible mountain. This section includes the commonly used verses to suggest a worldwide flood. We must be careful not to put our God into a corner He did not choose. Our opinion does not matter. You can believe the Flood was regional or worldwide, as evidence supports both theories. However, we should be careful not to feel so strongly about it one way or the other as to think those who disagree with us are wrong. When we dig our heels in, we miss the key

point. For God's Word to be correct, all humans had to die. The animals are amoral and only have to die due to their proximity to humankind. As long as we agree that everywhere that humans were, water was, then we are Biblically accurate.

This principle of letting God speak for Himself is a very valuable tool in our study arsenal. The same rules apply to the age of the earth and the creation account in Genesis 1. The Bible does not tell us how long ago the earth was created beyond "*In the beginning.*" It does tell us that this dispensation of time has lasted approximately 6,000 years. Science suggests that the planet is between 4-5 billion years old. Why would we argue something that may very well be true and, even if it is wrong, gains us nothing? Perhaps this planet was used for other purposes. (Were some of the angels of our dispensation part of a prior creation on this planet? Could that explain where dinosaurs



and other similar fossil evidence came from?). Let us not limit the Father to things we understand. The Hebrew language in Genesis 1 favors these theories. Using evidence like the word “create” being different on day 4 (the “made” of verse 16 differs from the “create” of verse 1) and the word “set” in verse 17 is better rendered as “appoint.” The Hebrew leaves room for the sun to exist before day 4. In fact, having an evening and a morning from day 1 illustrates one revolution of the earth on its axis in orbit around the sun. In addition, the word “replenish” in verse 28 is the same as that used in Genesis 9:1 after the Flood, which certainly intended repopulation. The point is that true science will always match true Bible study. When they don’t, one of them is flawed. Believing that the Bible says the earth is 6,000 years old is an example of flawed Bible study. Believing in macroevolution is an example of flawed science (not following the scientific method and changing the theory when the hypothesis fails the test).

Let’s take a moment to highlight a fundamental principle regarding our efforts as Bible students. We all produce thoughts and ideas as to what we “think” something in Scripture means. We must be careful not to get so locked in on our own thinking that we ignore the Scriptures refuting our theory. Letting God lead us inevitably means that some of our thoughts are wrong. When we refuse to modify our thinking

to match the Scriptural teaching, we, in effect, have become our own God. When we look to the Scriptures to validate our thinking, we sacrifice context and latch on to anything that might appear to support the thought. What a dangerous dilemma this presents! Another perilous and blasphemous “thought” that can ruin the efforts of a Bible student is writing off the Scriptures that do not match your desired theory (or modern sensibility) as if they “do not apply to our day.” This implies our God changes his righteousness to match ours! The Word of our God has been preserved for all our edification, and disregarding any of it means discrediting all of it. Let us not be so arrogant as to set YHWH on the sideline to make room for our pet theories or ideas. Let’s prayerfully ask God to guide us through his Word and search the Scriptures to reveal his glorious plan and not create our own.

From verses 21-23, we have repetition for emphasis, and then we get some new information in verse 24. 150 days equals 5 lunar months, which ends the chapter with a reminder of the grace behind the preservation of the faithful remnant.

It seems fitting to close this article with a quote from Proverbs 3:5. “*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*”

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EDENIC LAW AND THE BOOK OF ROMANS

By Richard Morgan

IT is a straightforward task to figure out the main doctrinal issue during New Testament times. For fifteen hundred years, the Jewish people had been living under the Old Covenant, and the Law of Moses directed their lives. The gospel taught that the New was replacing the Old Covenant and that one could not be saved by keeping the Law. The gospel accounts, the epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, firmly attest to this controversy. Many other parts of the New Testament touch on this topic, including First and Second Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and First Timothy.

As twenty-first-century Christians, it might be difficult for us to appreciate the impact of the New Covenant replacing the Old and the Law of Moses's failure to save. We were never under the Old Covenant or Law of Moses, so many of the powerful messages of the New Testament can lose their impact.

However, what happens when we boil down all the arguments of the gospel records and books like Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews? We produce a Bible passage that not only succinctly summarizes the New Testament controversy but universalizes it, making it applicable to all Christians of all ages, whether they were originally under the Old Covenant or not. That Bible passage is the story of Eden.

In this series of articles, I will look at the first principle teaching that law cannot save through the lens of how Paul, in the Book of Romans, uses the story of what happened in Eden to develop his argument. We will see that

while we were never under the Law of Moses, we all struggle to embrace the doctrine that justification comes by faith instead of law.

Eden

First, let's summarize the events of Eden. God set up an idyllic scenario that can be described as a perfect laboratory condition in which to test the first human pair. Everything was "very good" (Genesis 1:31) in a world devoid of sin and its consequences. God provided Adam and Eve with everything they needed and gave them the task of tending the garden. He also gave them one simple, unambiguous commandment to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Failure to obey that commandment would result in death. The serpent entered the scenario and conversed with the woman. The record states "*the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'''*" (Genesis 3:2-3).¹

By reiterating the commandment, the woman informs the reader that she and the man understood the commandment. In fact, adding "*neither shall you touch it*" infers they took the commandment seriously. Those words are not recorded with the initial commandment, and perhaps God said that too. Alternatively, it could be that the man and woman discussed the commandment and decided to put a safeguard in place not to even touch the tree. Either way, the record tells us they knew the commandment and were not blasé about it.

However, despite that, when confronted with the serpent's words that contradicted God, Eve chose to partake of the forbidden fruit. The serpent represents carnal thinking, the animal-logic way of assessing a situation. His words appealed to the woman's fleshly instincts, and despite the abundant clarity of the commandment she disobeyed, her husband followed suit.

One of the doctrines this teaches is the law's incapability to save. There weren't ten commandments, or the 613 commandments the Jews attest are in the Law of Moses—just one clear, precise, and basic commandment. They had all the other garden trees they could freely eat from (Genesis 2:16) but chose the forbidden one. Thus began the story of human nature and rebellion. Adam and Eve represent humanity; you and I **are** Adam and Eve.

The consequences of their sin begin with the words, *"Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths."* (Genesis 3:7). Their eyes were opened, which is our experience when we sin. This sensation was not a physical opening of the eyes, as if they were walking blindly through the garden beforehand. It was a spiritual awakening akin to a baby's first taste of something sweet after growing up on its mother's milk and plain cereal. The first time you put some chocolate into a baby's mouth, you see their eyes widen with the new experience, and there is no going back. Similarly, when we sin for the first time, we experience the sensual and pleasurable capabilities of the flesh, and there is no turning back; our eyes are opened.



It is evident that they were ashamed because of their sin and later hid from God (v. 10), contrasting with their lack of shame beforehand (Genesis 2:25). To solve their dilemma, they tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. We all do that when we sin—attempt to atone for our sins with a self-made covering. We justify, turn a blind eye, make excuses, or develop a fig-leaf religion whereby we mask our sinful lives by turning up at religious events, wearing the proper clothing, and doing the right things. In effect, we fail to learn the lesson that salvation does not come by law.

God taught them the fundamental lesson by giving them garments made of skins (Genesis 3:21). True atonement can only be provided by God; we are saved by grace.

Romans

Having summarized what happened in the Garden of Eden, let's turn our attention to how Paul develops the principles in his epistle to the Romans. For this study's sake, we will concentrate on the first eight chapters. Romans is divided into three sections. The first eight chapters are highly doctrinal. Chapters 9-11 focus on the example of the Jews and Gentiles as an object lesson illustrating that doctrine, and the final five chapters bring out the practical lessons based on it.

In Chapter 1, Paul reminds his readers of the sinfulness of the world, a world that started with Adam and Eve and followed their rebellion. A Jewish reader of chapter 1 would nod his head in agreement at the awful pagan world

around him, but then in Chapter 2, Paul turns his attention to the Jews and says they are just as sinful as the world in general despite having the Law of Moses. Paul sums it all up in Chapter 3 by saying that all have sinned, both Jew and Gentile alike.

How, then, can one be saved? That question is asked halfway through Chapter 3 and answered as we enter Chapter 4—justification comes by faith, not by law. Paul uses the examples of David and Abraham to prove his point, but then, in Chapter 5, he moves back to the universal nature of the problem by reminding us that it all started with Adam, whom he contrasts with Christ and the fact that we are saved by grace, not law. Chapters 6-8 begin to bring out the practical nature of the doctrine. In Chapter 6, Paul talks about the new way of life in Christ and contrasts it with the old way of life in Chapter 7, in which he illustrates the problem of the old life of the flesh by tying it to the Law. Finally, in Chapter 8, Paul tells us it comes down to a different kind of thinking or mindset. God is not looking for people who can follow a law but people who think differently, have a different attitude, and develop a character that fully depends on Him.

Paul's Thesis Statement

After a lengthy introduction to the epistle, Paul lays out his thesis statement in the first chapter, in verses 16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of

God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The rest of the epistle springs from these statements. The gospel is powerful enough to achieve salvation, which the Law of Moses could never do. It is not about law but faith—which is the key idea in both verses and is true whether you are Jew or Gentile.

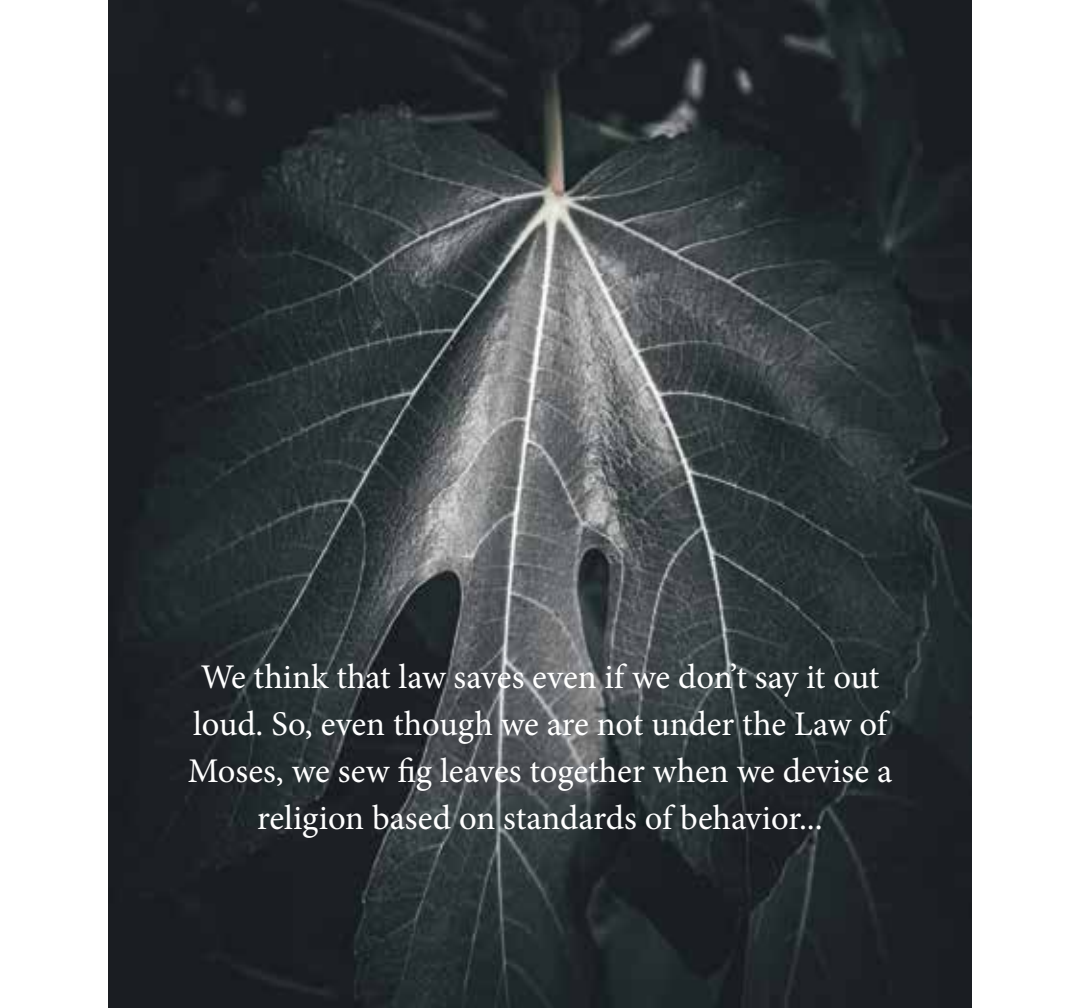
Why does Paul say he is "*not ashamed*" of the gospel? Perhaps he alludes to the persecutions and ridicule that the preaching of the cross brought to its adherents. Despite this, Paul found extreme value in it that overrode the ridicule. Or perhaps Paul is alluding to the other time when people were "*not ashamed*"—the man and the woman in the garden who "*were both naked and were not ashamed.*" (Genesis 2:25). Is Paul saying that the gospel can deal with the outcomes of sin when the man and woman realized they were naked and hid themselves?

Another echo from the Old Testament can help settle the argument. The Prophet Isaiah records, "*But the LORD God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*" (Isaiah 50:7). In the previous verse, the prophet speaks of one who suffers "*disgrace and spitting*" all of which points forward to the Lord Jesus Christ who did experience persecution and ridicule because he preached the gospel. But he was not "*put to shame*" despite the maltreatment. He knows "*the LORD God helps me,*" a sentiment repeated in the next couple of verses where the prophet writes, "*He who vindicates me*

is near." (v. 8.) The word "*vindicates*" is related to the Old Testament word for "*righteousness.*" In Romans, Paul talks about how the "*righteousness of God is revealed*" (Romans 1:17) in the vindication or justification of those who have faith.

Continuing in Isaiah 50:8, the prophet asks, "*Who will contend with me?*" and "*Who is my adversary?*" It is as if the one the prophet speaks about is in a court of law, a motif Paul uses in Romans 3 in the lead-up to his explanation of justification by faith. Then, in verse 9, the prophet again declares, "*Behold, the LORD God helps me,*" followed by another question, "*Who will declare me guilty?*"

It makes sense if Paul alluded to this passage when stating that he was not ashamed of the gospel. At the end of the first section of Romans, in Chapter 8, Paul alludes to the passage again with a series of similar questions. First, he asks, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31) because, as the prophet says, "*the LORD God helps me.*" Then, in verse 33, he asks, "*Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?*" echoing the prophet's, "*Who will declare me guilty?*" Paul's answer is best read as a question—"God who justifies?" Similarly, in the next verse, Paul asks, "*Who is to condemn?*" followed by another question—"Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us?" Will God condemn us? No! Will Christ? No! Neither God nor Christ is going to hold Paul and his readers guilty. In Christ, we find vindication and justification.



We think that law saves even if we don't say it out loud. So, even though we are not under the Law of Moses, we sew fig leaves together when we devise a religion based on standards of behavior...

The Solution for Shame and Guilt

In other words, the gospel can deal with the problems of shame and guilt. If we're like Adam and Eve, we feel shame when we sin, and we try to cover our nakedness with fig leaves. But that does not work. No amount of trying to cover our sins through our own devices will take away from the fact that we are guilty, and we continue to feel shame and hide behind a mask. It means we are not genuine in how we present ourselves, and there is no atonement despite the veneer of righteousness.

The practical implications of the doctrine of justification by faith are immense. Our dilemma as human beings is that we tend towards a fig-leaf religion as the solution to our problems. We think the law saves even if we don't say it aloud. So, even though we are not under the Law of Moses, we sew fig leaves together when we devise a religion based on standards of behavior, particularly those about how things are to be done in religious gatherings or behaviors that are easily identifiable as wrong. We can also be like Adam and Eve when we don't just

say, “Don’t eat from the tree,” but “Don’t even touch it.” Paul wrote about that kind of religion in Colossians. He said the “*Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch*” (Colossians 2:21) philosophy while having “*an appearance of wisdom*” (v. 23) is “*of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*” (v. 23). Adam and Eve are a testimony to the “do not touch” religious fallacy. Despite that safeguard, which seemed to support the commandment, they still indulged in the flesh.

In an ecclesial setting, this kind of law-based religion might appear on the outside to be righteous. Everything is done decently and in order. People dress and act in a way that conforms with nominal standards. Rules are in place to enforce commandments, like not marrying outside of the community, not getting divorced or remarried, and other rules governing things like the kinds of entertainment tolerated by members of the ecclesia.

However, inside that community, it can be like walking on eggshells. Because it is based on perceived righteous standards of behavior, people are afraid to be vulnerable with one another and show their true selves. Instead, because “*neither shall you touch it*” does nothing to stop the indulgence of the flesh, everyone wears fig leaves around each other to avoid the shame of their nakedness and hide their true selves behind a mask. If someone does touch the forbidden fruit, the law is in place to deal strictly with the behavior, with judgment being a first resort and forbearance and forgiveness an afterthought.

Contrast that with an ecclesial environment where it is understood that neither God nor Christ is holding us guilty. We are justified by faith and vindicated by the God who helps us. That is God’s way of dealing with the human problem. When we buy into God’s way, we can remove the mask, do away with the fig leaves, embrace the garments of skins provided by God, and be open and genuine with one another. We understand that as children of Adam, we are all in the same boat; all “*have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” United in our shared sinfulness, we are together also in our shared vindication in Christ, and shame and guilt are done away with.

Our predicament is that we question the wisdom of a religion based on faith rather than law. It seems as if the law solves the problem of sin because it identifies good and bad behavior and prescribes righteous living. Faith, on the other hand, sounds like it ignores sin and lets us get off scot-free. And so, we continually wrestle to find a law that can give life (Galatians 3:21) while paying lip service to faith. In Romans, Paul understands the power law holds over us, and that’s why he spends so long going over the problem.

In next month’s article, Lord willing, we’ll continue to examine Paul’s thesis statement as he endeavors to outline God’s righteousness.

*Richard Morgan,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

1 All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I read your editorial in the June issue of *Tidings* (“The Power of Being Apolitical”—June 2024) with much profit. Although here in the UK we don’t have the issues relating to Christian nationalism to the same extent as in the USA, you will have heard that we now have a General Election coming up on 4 July (USA Independence Day, if memory serves correctly!). Some of the Biblical principles and thoughts you express are timeless and relevant worldwide.

*Ivor Southgate,
Bracknell Ecclesia, UK*

I just wanted to share how helpful and timely “The Devil and Demons in Jerusalem” (May 2024) was, as I had literally been thinking about this topic one week ago, wondering how superstitions like spirits and demons crept into Jewish beliefs. Bro Jason’s article is really interesting and very informative and definitely prepared me for my next encounter with a Devil-believer!

*Graham Edwards,
Singapore Ecclesia*



BOOK REVIEW

KINGDOM JOURNEY

A CALL TO RECOVER THE CENTRAL THEME OF SCRIPTURE

Written by Sean P. Finnegan

December 21, 2023

FOR many years, Christadelphians have felt quite alone in their understanding of the true teaching of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, we have become aware of a significant group of Bible students who are aligned with our rejection of the doctrine of

the Trinity. It is with joy, then, that we see additional content that is very similar to our understanding of the Promises and the coming Kingdom of God.

Mr. Finnegan provides a unique look at the historical factors that have affected Christianity's view of the coming Kingdom of God on earth. It was very



AVAILABLE THROUGH AMAZON

helpful to read his summary of the philosophers and clergy that diverted opinion away from a literal Kingdom on earth and rejected the critical role of Israel as a Kingdom of Priests in the Kingdom. He walks through the writings of the ancient church leaders

who exchanged “the church” as the Kingdom and the reward for believers being in Heaven. Often, we aren’t familiar with these ecclesiastical extra-Biblical discussions and their historical developments. I found it very useful to see where these pure and explicit teachings of the Bible became corrupted.

As Mr. Finnegan points out, there has always been a remnant who have believed that Jesus will return to set up a worldwide, everlasting Kingdom of righteousness. Often, that same remnant has been persecuted for its beliefs. Mr. Finnegan provides a compelling Scriptural case to look forward to the advent of Jesus Christ and the unspeakable beauties of his rule.

In the end, Mr. Finnegan reminds us of our great responsibility for correcting error. The vision of the coming Kingdom of God is the core of the Promises and the gospel message. We must proclaim it to all who hear. In November, Mr. Finnegan will also speak at a Unitarian Christian Alliance event sponsored by the Simi Hills, CA Ecclesia. See the back cover and the following article, "Unitarian Christian Alliance," in this issue for more details.

Dave Jennings

Book excerpt, provided by Amazon

The more I reflect upon creation, the more I appreciate how spectacular it truly is. For example, plants come from seeds. What is a seed? Is it alive or dead? On the one hand, seeds appear to be dead because they can sit for years in a package and never change a bit: on the other hand, they begin growing into massive trees as soon as they are activated.

How do we unlock the incredible life-generating power of a seed? Do we crush it to pieces and form a paste, hang it on an existing plant, or affix it to the skin of an animal? No: we unleash the mysterious life force of a seed by sticking it in the dirt. Dirt. We put a semi-dead husk in dirt and sprinkle some water on it—which makes mud—and that somehow transforms an inanimate pod into a growing baby plant. The plant feeds on dirt, water, sunlight, and carbon dioxide, four of the most plentiful and non-endangered resources on the planet. It grows taller, produces leaves, emits oxygen, and brings forth many more seeds. This utterly common process is actually spectacular.

What's more, God's ingenious seed idea is incredibly resilient. Plants spring up everywhere, from the spaces between sidewalk slabs to the tiny cracks in asphalt parking lots. If someone doesn't patch and repair the road regularly, weeds will quietly and steadily spread the asphalt apart, bit by bit, until they take over completely. This is just one aspect of God's creation, but it teaches us something about the inherent goodness of God's handiwork. When God says, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed" the result is a diverse panoply of robust and stunning organisms that continue their life cycle eon after eon (Genesis 1:11). From massive redwoods to little clovers to colorful roses, creation is replete with grandeur.



By Dave Jennings

YOU may have heard of the Unitarian Christian Alliance (UCA) over the past few years. This unique group, formed in 2019, is worth being aware of.

Here's how the UCA describes its charter:

The UCA is a network of individuals, churches, parachurch ministries, and Christian denominations, each committed to the truth of the One God. While holding to various beliefs in other areas, UCA members all agree that the God of the Bible is the Father alone and that Jesus is his human Messiah. The mission of the UCA and its growing membership is two-fold: to promote unitarian theology and to connect like-minded believers across the globe.

Our modern Christian world, lost in a sea of confusing and post-biblical traditions about God, desperately needs to hear about the Father and his Son. It also needs communities of faith and fellowship centered around that truth. Though we all come from different backgrounds and may individually belong to different groups, we believe we can accomplish much more for the body of Christ and the cause of truth when we work together. If you can agree with that basic vision and with this simple, biblical statement about God and Jesus (what we call the "UCA Affirmation"), then you belong with us.¹

We believe and proclaim in accordance with the Scriptures that:

- Only the Father of Jesus is the one true God.
- The unique man, Jesus, is his Messiah/Christ.
- God the Father sent Jesus, gave him his message, empowered him, and endorsed him “with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him.”
- Jesus obeyed God, laying down his life so that we can have the hope of resurrection to eternal life.
- God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to his right hand, making Jesus the one Lord under the one God.

Short version

The one God is the Father alone, and Jesus is his human Messiah, who is now exalted as Lord and Savior.

The UCA represents an expanding global group of believers who attest to this Biblical statement. The UCA has introduced regional meetings, some of which are occurring in the United States, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. Some Christadelphians are UCA members (as am I) and have participated in and even presented at these conferences.

There was a time when it seemed we were quite alone with our understanding of God and Jesus Christ. We have been criticized because of this, sometimes persecuted by being summarily dismissed from camps due

to our rejection of the Trinity doctrine. It felt especially quite lonely. I am sure you will join me in finding great joy in the fact that many others have come to the same or similar conclusion on this issue. It is, in my view, a great blessing to know we are not alone on this critical topic.

It is important to state that the UCA does not represent a comprehensive set of beliefs outside of the Trinity issue. The group’s charter steps aside from other doctrines where we would find significant differences in our understanding. The function of the UCA is to encourage believers and provide connectivity to those who have often suffered by making difficult decisions to reject the Trinity doctrine.

To this end, the UCA and its members have created wonderful written and video content of the true teachings about God and Jesus. There is also a list of really great books that have been written by UCA members, which are good resources for Christadelphians.

So, What Does The UCA Mean To Christadelphians?

First, let’s identify what it does not mean. Many UCA members still hold doctrinal beliefs that we would not find compatible with our fellowship. Some UCA members are isolated and do not have a group to associate with. However, most UCA members are not seeking to join another denomination. Many would prefer to “collaborate” on the critical areas on which we do agree.

In my view, the UCA offers an important opportunity to expand the message of the true Bible teaching about God and

Jesus Christ. Already, Christadelphian materials and a few speakers are being widely referenced by UCA members. In a way, the Christadelphian worldwide body is the “big fish” in this small pond of believers.

Let me provide an example. Over the past year, three people have come to our ecclesia in Simi Hills, CA, through the UCA. One, a young man had come to a correct understanding of God and Jesus after completing Bible college. His newfound belief was anathema to his church, and he found himself unwelcome because of his belief. He discovered the Simi Valley Christadelphians through the UCA. Since then, he has attended that time, he has been to the Idyllwild Bible School and attended countless ecclesial and home Bible classes. He is an outstanding student of the Word, and we are blessed to have an association with him.

Similarly, another couple (referred to us by the first young man) had to leave their church due to their new understanding of the Father and Son. They had attended a very well-known mega-church for well over fifty years but found themselves dissociated from the church because of their belief. They, too, have begun attending our Bible classes.

In both of the cases above, we do not know whether any of these three will become members of the Christadelphians. We would certainly welcome that. However, we are providing an important service to our Lord by being a group that warmly accepted them when they had nowhere to go. Topics where we have differences

will be discussed over time as we grow in our personal relationships with them. In the meantime, we have also learned a lot from them.

I find it unscriptural when we choose to isolate ourselves from those who have doctrinal differences. However, there is an essential important line between this Christian association and our global fellowship practices. We can be helpful, influential, and loving to those who have courageously rejected the Trinity doctrine that has generally branded them as cultish. We know how that feels! However, fellowship is based on alignment with all of the first principles and teachings.

In November, the Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA is pleased to host a global Zoom UCA event. The topic will be, “*How Does Our Knowledge of God and Jesus Affect Our Understanding of: The Promises, and the Kingdom of God?*” Bro. Richard Morgan of the Simi Hills Ecclesia will be speaking on the impact it has on understanding the Promises of God. Mr. Sean Finnegan, of Living Hope International Ministries in Latham, NY, (also author of Kingdom Journey, see prior article) will be discussing how it affects the way we view the coming Kingdom of God. Please see the back cover of this magazine for the Zoom link and details if you’d like to watch this live broadcast.

If you would like to explore the many free resources of the UCA, I recommend their website, unitarianchristianalliance.com.

Dave Jennings

¹ Unitarian Christian Alliance website, www.unitarianchristianalliance.com.

DOMESTIC PREACHING

BAPTISMS OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

By Mark Carr

By the the hand of the LORD, many Christadelphian families who have fled Africa as refugees have found themselves spread throughout North America. Some are blessed to be near existing ecclesias, but sadly, others are in isolation. Brothers and sisters, ecclesias, and Bible Schools have responded to the call to provide pastoral care to those who make a new life so far from the home they know.

Four students were baptized in June and have been in the same class over the last two years in classes done over Zoom. All the students attend regularly on Sunday afternoons every week. The classes are in English, Swahili, and French. We had tremendous support from Bro. Benoit Mukendi of Toronto West, Bro. Jack Bizo Tchumbula of Quebec and Bro. Abedi Ndjelekulu of Kilcoy, Guyana to translate.

Following a good confession of their faith, Sis. Azola Inga Nomake (daughter of Bro. Jack and Sis. Vuyo Tchumbula), and Bro. Jonathan Cyril Mulumba (son of Bro. Christophe and Sis. Elizabeth Mulumba) was baptized into the saving name of Jesus Christ

on June 16, 2024, in Montreal, at the Archibald's house. The meeting was conducted in Swahili, French, and English. Bro. Dale Andrews gave the word of exhortation. Two friends joined the wonderful occasion.

Additionally, following a good confession of their faith, Sis. Marcelina



Sis. Azole Inga Nomake

and Bro. Daudi (sister and brother in the flesh) were baptized into the saving name of Jesus Christ our Savior on June 23, 2024, in Quebec City. Marcelina and Daudi are the children of Sis. Halinw Mari Kalenga, and our late brother Kalenga Mulimbi Malungu. The baptism took place at a hotel, and the memorial meeting was at Sis. Halinw's home and was

conducted in Swahili and French. Bro. Jack Bizo Tchumbula gave the words of exhortation. A few friends of the family joined us on this moving occasion.

*Mark Carr,
CBMC Link for Refugee Support*



The Montreal Ecclesia



*Montmorency Falls,
Quebec City, QC,
Canada*

Thoughts on the Way

"Do this in remembrance of me"

THE scene was an upper room in a house in Jerusalem, where the disciples met with Jesus. He had planned for this evening, ensuring no one outside their circle would know their whereabouts. He had organized the provisions that they would need to celebrate the Passover.

This Passover would be different from all others. For one thing, there would be no ordinary Passover lamb because Jesus would be the lamb. And for another, this Passover would have long-lasting effects on all believers:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take and eat; this is [represents] my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:26-29).¹

The First Ecclesia

Looking at this simple ceremony, we realize that it was the first "seed" of an ecclesia to be planted—one that was destined to multiply exponentially as the years passed:

a) After Jesus' resurrection and before his ascension, his disciples asked him: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). He answered: "It is not for you to know the times or dates which the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:7-8).

b) After Christ's ascension, the eleven apostles gathered in the same upper room they had occupied before, and there they selected Matthias to replace Judas. The group assembled in that room numbered 120 believers (Acts 1:15-16). Obviously, the small group (twelve) that had followed Jesus from the beginning had, like a seed planted, grown tenfold—and then given the assignment: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20).

c) On Pentecost. Peter, accompanied by the 120 believers, preached in the Temple, where, by the Holy Spirit, all the listeners heard his message in their own languages. To this, they

responded: “Brethren what shall we do?” And Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts 2:37-38 KJV). And there were added to the original 120 believers “about three thousand.” (Acts 2:41). “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (v. 47).

- d) “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing” (Acts 6:1), partly because Jews who had come from distant lands to celebrate Pentecost had been baptized and then decided to remain in Jerusalem.
- e) “And a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” (v. 7). One reason for this great number of conversions was the extraordinary miracle of the veil in the temple being torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).
- f) “Every day they [the believers] continued to meet together in the temple courts.” (Acts 2:46) It is here where they preached the gospel to all who would listen. Then they would have left the temple to meet together in their homes, where they

broke bread, as Jesus commanded, “Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25)

- g) Finally, in those days, “A great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered through Judea and Samaria... those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:1, 4), thus growing the body of believers enormously.

As mentioned above, the earliest converts met in the precincts of Herod’s Temple not to offer sacrifices or pay tithes but only to preach to their Jewish brothers and sisters. Those they baptized would have joined their fellow believers in meetings from house to house and breaking bread together. These original “house churches” were common then and set a standard for believers to recognize they were all part of one family, with one Savior and one Father. (The earliest structure, set apart solely for a church, was built about A.D. 250.)

Those who first believed in Christ were not the least bit interested in building a temple or a church because they were already part of a spiritual

Those who first believed in Christ were not the least bit interested in building a temple or a church because they were already part of a spiritual “temple,” with their Lord Jesus as their cornerstone.

"temple," with their Lord Jesus as their cornerstone. Not only was Jesus their cornerstone, but he was also their altar, their high priest, and their sacrificial lamb. Consequently, they understood that each of them was a member of a unique family organized around their Savior, with God as their Father.

As we read the New Testament, we realize that Jesus Christ is not only the center of God's plan but also the embodiment of the Lord's glory and love, shown in the salvation He offers to all humankind. In fact, we may also say that Jesus Christ was greater than the Law of Moses and its sacrifices because he was the **perfect sacrifice** and the **only sacrifice** that could provide forgiveness and eternal life. Thus, he became, in the words of John the Baptist, "*the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" (John 1:29). In this remarkable man's own words, he had come, not to "*abolish the Law or the Prophets,*" but to "*fulfill*" them (Matthew 5:17).

As we read through the Bible, we also notice the many times when Jesus has referred to himself (or been referred to by others) as the **true and everlasting "temple" of God**—the "temple" to whom believers might approach, to praise and worship their heavenly Father, and to enter with confidence or boldness into His presence.

The unique temple, Jesus, has several characteristics that make his "temple" more accessible and thus more attractive than any great building. For one thing, single believers may find their way to any assembly of believers and know they are in God's temple (2 Corinthians 6:16). They also know they can pray to the Lord God in Christ's Name, and their prayers will be heard.

Secondly, a single believer who has no access to any meeting can think of himself as an individual "temple" of God (1 Corinthians 3:16) and know that, wherever he is, he may partake of the bread and wine on his own and pray to God, knowing that his prayer will also be heard.

Finally, when God oversaw the Roman invasion of Israel, with its destruction of Jerusalem and Herod's temple, in A.D. 70, He also took away the only place where devout Jews could offer sacrifices to Him. This destruction may have led thoughtful Jews to turn their attention toward the only available "temple" in the whole world—the temple of which Jesus is the "*cornerstone*" and the temple of which believers in Jesus are "*living stones.*" And so it has been ever since.

George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

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

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SPECIAL ZOOM EVENT

*Sponsored by the Simi Hills, CA Ecclesia and the
Unitarian Christian Alliance (UCA)*

Saturday, November 9
4:30 PM Pacific Time (7:30 Eastern)

How Does Our Knowledge of God and Jesus Affect Our Understanding of:

- The Promises/Covenants of God? - Richard Morgan
(Simi Hills Ecclesia)
- The Coming Kingdom of God? - Sean Finnegan
(Living Hope Community Church)

All are invited!

Zoom information

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81747337928>

Meeting ID: 817 4733 7928

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