

TIDINGS

Volume 88, Number 10, November, 2025

THE COURAGE TO CONFRONT

Ecclesial leaders today can confront spiritual abuse
without becoming abusive themselves.



Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

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E D I T O R I A L

STANDING GUARD

**We are all accountable to one another
in the Body of Christ.**

IN Matthew 23, Jesus boldly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees. These men, who were supposed to be shepherds and spiritual servants to the people, had forcibly shaped their religion into a legalistic, unloving, and self-serving farce. Jesus knew the hearts of these men, so he could aptly call them “blind,” “hypocrites,” and “fools.” He had the authority to call out those who fed themselves at the expense of the sheep. Jesus was the shepherd who searched the hills, gathering and feeding lost sheep. These evil men were so filled with envy that their calcified hearts could not accept his rebuke. As James later wrote, “*For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*” (James 3:16). Because they followed their own lusts, they committed the greatest crime in history by bringing about the crucifixion of our Lord.

Ezekiel prophesied against the shepherds of Israel more than six hundred years earlier. Those religious leaders had been ruling over the people with “*force and with cruelty.*” (Ezekiel 34:4). This abuse robbed the people of the needed spiritual food. Earlier, Hosea spoke of how when Israel was in adversity, they were like a “*silly dove*” (Hosea 7:11), flying back and forth from one potential savior to another, but not to God. They had no knowledge, no grounding, and no faith. They had lost their hearts and had no guides to lead them back to God. Cruel, self-indulgent leaders destroyed the flock. They were more concerned with their own status, their own perceived righteousness. It became a religion centered on their thirst for recognition and praise.

Jesus could rightly rebuke those leaders. But should we? What happens when we see persistent un-Christlike behavior from those who often have strong voices in our community? How should we react to those who denigrate and slander others? What must we do when we see the manifestation of bitter envy and strife? What steps should we take when some inject themselves into meaningful inter-ecclesial discussions, upending progress? Should we just shake our heads in disappointment? When are we called to rebuke those who put the flock in jeopardy?

No shepherd in Israel started their work to be abusive. There would likely be many years of faithful service. I suspect that even Samuel’s sons were not always taking bribes. It was something that likely developed over time. Eventually, they would begin to see themselves differently from those they served and lose sight of their role as servants. Instead of bringing people to the Word and inviting them to see righteous principles, they became directive. Their presumed personal authority dominated. They created their own commandments. They might cast out anyone who questioned them. Soon, the shepherds, whose very existence was for guidance and spiritual sustenance, became vicious and cruel.

False Prophets

Some of the wicked shepherds pretended to be prophets. In the middle of Judah’s spiritual wasteland, some men and women corrupted the commandments of God by insisting they had received special revelations. They often carried the messages the

people and the wayward king wanted to hear. This posture vaulted these false prophets into prominence in the kingdom. Some declared that the people should not listen to Jeremiah and that God didn't want them to surrender to Babylon. They argued that Jerusalem was the LORD's city, and He would defend it, the opposite of Jeremiah's counsel. But their evil counsel confused the people and did not bring about the repentance that the LORD demanded. It led to terrible destruction for the city and the people. Jeremiah spoke of these false prophets. They spoke words of vanity, *"visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD."* (Jeremiah 23:16 ESV). The LORD told Moses that there would be false prophets, and they would be exposed by whether what they prophesied came to pass. God's instruction was, *"Thou shalt not be afraid of him."* (Deuteronomy 18:22). False prophets continued in the time of the Apostle John. He wrote of false prophets, false teachers, and deceivers. Paul wrote not to despise prophesyings, but instead it was the role of ecclesial members to *"Prove all things,"* or as the ESV translates this, *"Test everything; hold fast what is good."* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It is the responsibility of believers and ecclesias not to be influenced by the speaker's reputation, but to try their words and behaviors by the standard of Scripture, whether these leaders were elected or self-appointed.

Ecclesias Today

We must stand guard over two crucial issues. The first is our need to be a community that discerns what righteousness is, solely by the words of Scripture. It matters not who says what.

Are we able to verify what is being said by a reading of the Word? Boldly test and verify. Accept and hold fast to what is correct. Have nothing to do with error.

The second issue is behavior. When we see un-Christlike behavior in our ecclesias, it requires rebuke and correction. It is not to be tolerated from anyone, especially our leaders. This measure is for both the individual's recovery and the protection of the ecclesia. We occasionally witness bullying, slander, gossiping, and derogatory labeling. Individuals who practice these affronts may try to present themselves as protectors of the Truth, but their behaviors have little reflection of it. God's counsel to Moses was, "Don't be afraid of them."

It is not my role, or yours, to assess the thoughts and intents of the heart. Our assumption must be that we cannot judge motives. But clearly, we are expected to judge behavior. Such judging is not to be done in a condemning or judicial way. If a brother or sister is insisting on a perspective they think we ought also to embrace, it must be coupled with *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."* (Galatians 5:22-23). When someone insists on their point of view and, in the process, demonstrates ungodly behavior, it must raise a gigantic red flag. This assertion doesn't necessarily mean their perspective is wrong, but we are alerted to consider a more fundamental issue. For this member, the need to be right has overcome the need to reflect the spirit of Christ, putting them at risk and requiring help. He or she is also a threat to the flock.



How to Rebuke

Often, those overcome by such madness are dear brothers and sisters. They have worked beside us, laboring for the Lord for decades. They are valuable to us and to our ecclesias. However, un-Christlike behavior is disallowed in the body of Christ. Rebuke is not a simple task. They need restoration, but it must be gentle, and in the “spirit of meekness.” (Galatians 6:1). The one rebuked must be lovingly instructed that the behaviors do not reflect our Lord’s character. These behaviors cannot continue in our ecclesia or across our community. In fact, the individual’s goal may be impeded by causing many to close their minds to behavior and words that are coupled with ripping and tearing.

In most cases, those sincere in their love of God will hear instruction’s warning voice. They will re-engage through self-reflection and examination. If so, the rebuke was an excellent service. However, if it is not accepted and behaviors continue, the ecclesia is responsible for dealing with

this individual. If ecclesias took such a responsibility, they would protect the community from great harm.

Paul’s instructions are rather clear about how to rebuke an erring elder.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and “The laborer deserves his wages.” Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. (1 Timothy 5:17-20 ESV).

A charge against an ecclesial elder is quite a serious matter. If a charge is made, there needs to be witnesses to it. One would assume that if they listened to the witnesses and repentance occurred, that would end the process. However, if not, if they “persist” in sin, then they are to be rebuked before all. Not just privately, but before the entire ecclesia.

In my experience, I have not witnessed this ever being done. It is generally dealt with privately and shielded from the ecclesia's view. However, Scripture's guidance is a message to all ecclesial members that particular behavior is not acceptable in our community. We will not consent to it.

Accountability

We are all accountable to one another in the Body of Christ. Only our Lord is above all, as our Head. In today's ecclesial environment, with technology, we can voice our opinion globally, with just a few keystrokes—no need to wait for letters to be received and formally reviewed. Caustic, even slanderous comments can be made, often without repercussions. This circumstance is far removed from the spirit of our Lord, and can be terribly damaging. When such messages are distributed and we know of them, rebuke is necessary.

We hear inflammatory comments about brothers and sisters, speaking of other groups in slanderous ways, such as accusing brothers and sisters with different perspectives as being "Humanists that are corrupting the Truth." Beware! This assertion is not how the Lord ever behaved. All things are to be done for edification and building up. Those who tear down and rule with cruelty are evil shepherds. Without repentance, the shepherds must publicly rebuke them.

Bible Knowledge Can Be Misleading

Some take leadership roles in our community by being keen Bible students. In many cases, their work greatly edifies us. But Bible exposition must be coupled with the demonstration

of the spirit of that word. Jeremiah spoke of the priests in Jerusalem as handling the law, but not knowing God (Jeremiah 2:8). Jesus rebuked many of the leaders of his day, because for all their Scriptural study, their behaviors showed that they failed to know God, or recognize the Lord Jesus Christ: "*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me.*" (John 5:39 ESV). "*You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.*" (John 8:19 ESV). For all the time and effort those religious leaders put into studying the Scriptures, they never came to know God's character, and failed to demonstrate it. That's a huge warning for us! As John said, "*Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*" (1 John 4:1 ESV).

Are We Up to This Challenge?

What will you do when you see incorrect behavior? Will you lovingly rebuke the perpetrator, showing how dishonest words are destructive? Or will you cower in fear, enabling these corrupt behaviors to continue? Will you safeguard the ecclesia and those with differing views from bearing the brunt of unrighteous actions? Good shepherding requires taking initiative to correct such conduct. We cannot permit wolves to feed upon the sheep. In ecclesial elections, your vote should demonstrate that behavior matters.

When brothers and sisters work in a committed and loving way to accomplish the Lord's will, they should not be required to look over their shoulders, wondering when the

critical and abusive letter will come. They should not hear their motives being critiqued, particularly by those with whom they have had no contact during the process. They should not worry about being labeled negatively or maligned. The fear of such attacks often derails good, positive work before it even starts. That is a shame.

Who Are We?

My father told me about his initial perceptions of the Christadelphian body. He learned the Truth soon after returning from the Korean War. He accepted the Truth with joy, feeling he had never heard the Bible spoken about so clearly. However, he noticed that our community fought frequently and was quite surprised to see this. That was in 1953. The situation continues today. In the quest for doctrinal purity, some disregard the requirement for the spirit of Christ to act in love. The Ephesians faced this problem. In Revelation 3, Jesus commended them for defending the Truth, but found fault with their neglecting love. It is quite acceptable to debate and test the Scriptures. It's reasonable to have differing opinions. But it is never permissible to demonstrate the works of the flesh and lose sight of the love of Christ.

We all truly desire a community of peace, a place where fear has no resting place. Fear inhibits love (1 John 4:18). So, where does peace and wisdom come from? Does it emerge from victories in knock-down, drag-out debates, or scorching assessments of others? Of course not. Let's let James tell us what is required first.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
(James 3:17-18 ESV).

James goes on to identify the root causes of the “wars and fighting” among them. The state of affairs was steeped in “lust.” Lust can manifest as a desire for power, a thirst for estimation above others. Let's not reward such behaviors. If we are looking for truth, let's open our Bibles. Look for those who sow peace, who reflect the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Have no fear of those who abuse the flock. Good shepherds give their lives for the sheep; they don't drive them away.

I recommend two articles in this issue that further develop this theme. The following article, *The Tragedy of Eli*, was written by Bro. David Fraser of Durban, South Africa. In this article, he traces Eli's failures and the corruption caused by not upholding God's standards of behavior. May we all be intolerant of behavior opposed to the spirit of our Lord and have the strength of character to accept loving rebuke when given. The next article is by Bro. Andrew Weller of the Cumberland Ecclesia in South Australia. His article continues an examination of Paul's letter to Titus, and this month, he deals with *Silencing the Dangerous: The Courage to Confront*. I hope you will find their words profitable.

Dave Jennings

THE TRAGEDY OF ELI

Leadership Lessons: The Accountability Standard

By David Brown

THE Biblical account of Eli and his sons presents one of Scripture's most sobering examinations of leadership failure. Here was a man described as having "good desires for the people of Israel" and "reverence for God," yet his tolerance of his sons' egregious behavior led to catastrophic consequences that rippled through an entire generation. What can we learn from Eli's tragic example about parenting, leadership, and the courage required to uphold God's standards?

A Family in Crisis

Eli served as both high priest and judge during one of Israel's darkest periods – when "everyone did what was right in their own eyes." His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, held positions of priests but had become what Scripture bluntly calls corrupt men. As the Word declares:

Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD. (1 Samuel 2:12).¹

The corruption wasn't hidden or subtle. These men systematically violated their sacred office, stealing from God by taking the best portions of sacrifices before the fat burned, literally taking what belonged to the Almighty Himself. But their corruption went far beyond theft. They intimidated worshippers who came seeking God, used their positions to exploit vulnerable women serving at the tabernacle, and created such a toxic environment that people began to abhor the worship of the LORD. Scripture records the devastating consequence:

Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD. (1 Samuel 2:17).

Think about that devastating phrase—their behavior was so egregious that it drove people away from God Himself. This deed wasn't just personal sin. It was institutional abuse of power that poisoned an entire generation's relationship with the divine.

The Failure: Understanding Eli's Tragic Choice

So why did Eli tolerate the intolerable? Modern psychology would identify his approach as classic "permissive leadership." High responsiveness, but low demands. He was emotionally supportive, even loving, but utterly failed to set or enforce meaningful boundaries. When he finally did confront his sons, his rebuke was **technically** accurate but **practically** useless. Scripture records his words:

So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them. (1 Samuel 2:23-25).

He offered mere words without decisive action, a conversation without consequences. The real issue, however, was deeper than poor management style. God's devastating assessment cut to the heart, recorded in His own words:

Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place,

and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people? (1 Samuel 2:29).

This statement reveals the core failure—disordered love. Eli’s desire for family harmony, his sons’ approval, and his own comfort outweighed his duty to uphold God’s holiness. We see this pattern repeated throughout the history of Israel: leaders who sacrifice integrity for personal relationships.

Even more troubling, the text reveals that Eli grew fat on his sons’ excessive and unlawful demands on the people. While verbally opposing their behavior, he continued benefiting from their corruption. This insincerity transformed him from a passive observer to an active enabler. He was complicit in the system he claimed to disapprove of, a position that undermined any moral authority he might have claimed.

At 98 years old, nearly blind, and having tolerated this behavior for decades, Eli also lacked both the physical energy and emotional resolve for sustained confrontation. But this raises an uncomfortable question. Had his pattern of avoidance created the very situation that now seemed impossible to address? Sometimes our failures to act early create crises that become overwhelming later.

Modern Parallels: Eli’s Error Today

Eli’s story provides uncomfortable parallels. Like leaders who maintain impressive public personas while failing to address issues behind closed doors, Eli appeared to be doing his job while enabling the behaviors destroying people’s faith.

But the Eli syndrome extends far beyond religious contexts. We see it today in corporate environments where leaders tolerate unethical behavior from profitable subordinates, in family businesses where nepotism overrides competence and ethics, and in modern parenting where the desire to be liked replaces the necessity of discipline. The fundamental dynamic is the same: those in authority positions who lack the courage to enforce standards, especially when enforcement would cost them personally.

Lessons for Parents: The Discipline Imperative

For parents, Eli’s story offers both warning and wisdom. Solomon’s ancient counsel remains startlingly relevant:

Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction. (Proverbs 19:18).

The phrase “while there is hope” suggests there’s a time when it’s too late for discipline to be effective. When these events occurred, Eli’s sons were mature men, possibly in their forties or fifties. Their corruption wasn’t teenage rebellion. It was an adult choice, hardened by years of consequence-free behavior.

The pattern starts early. Effective parenting requires establishing boundaries and expectations when children are young enough to learn them. Children must understand that defying God’s standards and family values will bring consequences, not endless negotiations. This concept doesn’t mean harsh or unloving treatment, but it does mean consistent follow-through on established



"Ecclesial leaders must be willing to act when someone violates established standards, regardless of personal relationships or potential backlash, but always in the love and gentleness that our Lord taught us."

expectations, as tiring as this often is. Perhaps most importantly, Eli's failure teaches us that one must exercise authority to be taken seriously. Love without boundaries isn't love. It's enabling, which ultimately destroys both the enabled and the enabler. True love sometimes requires the difficult path of discipline, the uncomfortable conversation, and an imposed consequence that feels harsh in the moment but protects character in the long term.

Leadership Lessons: The Accountability Standard

Eli's failure offers equally essential insights for those in ecclesial leadership positions. He possessed both parental and spiritual authority over his sons, but failed to exercise either effectively.

This situation reminds us that **having** authority and **using** authority are entirely different things. Ecclesial leaders must be willing to act when someone violates established standards, regardless of personal relationships or potential backlash, but always in the love and gentleness that our Lord taught us.

The story also underlines the impossible tension of maintaining a public persona while tolerating private error. How could Eli claim to represent God among the Israelites while repeatedly ignoring his sons' blasphemy? The contradiction eventually becomes visible to everyone, undermining the leader and the entire ecclesial environment they represent.

Effective ecclesial leaders develop early warning systems and sensitivity to recognize gradual drift before it becomes an entrenched pattern. They

understand that small compromises, left unaddressed, become significant failures that require dramatic interventions. They also acknowledge that their primary responsibility is to the unity and stability of their ecclesia as a whole, and not merely to the whims and approval of an individual, however uncomfortable this may be.

The Devastating Cost of Tolerance

The consequences of Eli's tolerance were swift and catastrophic. Both sons died in battle on the same day. Eli himself died upon hearing the news. Enemies captured the Ark of the Covenant. Thirty thousand Israelite soldiers lost their lives.

God removed the priesthood from Eli's lineage permanently, resulting in Israel's compromised spiritual leadership for generations. It was plainly God's visible hand of disapproval at work!

But beyond these immediate disasters, consider the ripple effects. How many people lost faith because of the sons' behavior? How many families were affected by the military defeat their corruption precipitated? How many future generations grew up without proper spiritual guidance because of the corrupted priesthood? Leadership failures never affect just the leader; they cascade through entire communities and generations like stones thrown into still water.

The Samuel Contrast: A Glimmer of Hope

The narratives' genius lies in the contrast between Eli's failed sons and Samuel, whom Eli successfully mentored. This paradox suggests something profound about the difference between professional and

personal relationships. Samuel thrived under Eli's guidance, while Hophni and Phinehas failed under his tolerance. The same man who couldn't discipline his own children effectively trained one of Israel's most outstanding leaders.

This contrast teaches us that biological parenthood doesn't guarantee successful child-rearing, that spiritual mentorship can succeed where natural parenting fails, and that character formation depends more on consistent discipline than blood relationships. It also suggests that we can learn from our failures in one relationship to succeed in others if we're willing to apply different standards and approaches.

Divine Justice and Mercy

Despite the tragic outcome, God's character shines through the entire account. Multiple prophetic warnings came before judgment fell. God waited years for repentance and change. Alternative leadership was already forming through Samuel. Even in his righteous anger toward the corruption, God demonstrated patience, provided clear communication about expectations, and made provision for continued ministry.

This chain of events reminds us that God's discipline, unlike Eli's tolerance, comes from love rather than convenience. Divine correction aims at restoration, not destruction. It sets clear boundaries precisely because relationships matter, character is important, and the community must be protected from those who exploit or corrupt it.

Applications for Today

In our contemporary context, Eli's story challenges us to establish clear

accountability in our ecclesias, families, and communities. We need zero-tolerance policies for certain behaviors, regardless of who commits them. We need regular review processes where commitments are honored and actions have consequences. We must call for ecclesial leadership that prioritizes character over convenience, competence over connection.

Their moral disqualification thwarted the expectation that leadership would automatically pass to Eli's sons. This principle teaches us to separate leadership positions from familial or fraternal loyalty. The best person for the role should get the role, not the most connected, loudest, or convenient person. Perhaps most importantly, we need the courage to have difficult conversations early before minor problems become serious crises.

The Ultimate Lesson

Love without boundaries is not love at all. Instead, it is abetment that ultimately destroys both the enabled and the enabler. True love, whether parental or ecclesial, must be willing to enforce standards that protect both individual character and communal integrity, even when that enforcement comes at significant personal cost.

Eli's tragic example reminds us that good intentions, ecclesial position, and personal piety cannot substitute for the courage to exercise proper authority when those under our care violate fundamental standards. In our contemporary context of moral relativism and conflict avoidance, this

message feels uncomfortable as well as urgent.

Final Challenge

Will we have the courage to uphold God's standards when tolerance would be easier? The pressure on the ecclesial resolve will only increase on this side of the Kingdom.

The account of Eli stands as both a warning and a source of wisdom for ecclesial leaders, parents, and communities. When tolerance becomes the enabling of evil, the cost of tolerance is always greater than the cost of timely, appropriate discipline. In the days before our Lord's return, may we find the courage to honor God above all human relationships, knowing that true love sometimes requires us to choose the difficult path of accountability and discipline. The story of Eli teaches us that God's standards are non-negotiable, and some behaviors demand immediate, decisive response for the love of the household.

In a world that often confuses tolerance with love and accountability with judgment, this ancient account provides warning and wisdom for anyone entrusted with leadership, whether in families, ecclesias, or communities. May we have the wisdom and the courage, by God's grace, to do what is right.

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

BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION

By Emil Mukambilwa and Nathan Badger



CORRUPTION is the misuse of entrusted power or resources for personal gain. It has plagued human history from ancient times to the present day. Often associated with developing countries, this illness is instead a universal challenge, and thrives even in modern Western countries.

World headlines frequently highlight corruption cases involving governments, politicians, business leaders, and entrusted powers such as police and church leaders. In 2001, the Pandora Papers leaked twelve million documents, which exposed secret offshore bank accounts and corrupt financial and political dealings of hundreds of leaders, celebrities, and wealthy individuals.¹

God's Word, our spiritual and moral guide, offers deep insights into the nature of corruption, its harmful effects, and God's call for justice, integrity, and righteousness. In this article, we will explore how the Bible addresses several forms of corruption and provides wisdom that transcends time, geography, and culture.

Biblical Corruption

Genesis identifies corruption as a primary reason for the Flood: "*God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.*" (Genesis 6:12).² What was the earth doing that was so corrupt? The Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible for "*corrupt*" describe a process of decay or ruin. In the Old Testament, words like *shachath* denote something spoiled, ruined, or perverted. Similarly, in the New Testament, *phtheiro* implies decay

or destruction, frequently applied to moral degradation.

The context of these words shows that corruption figuratively refers to the decay of morals, spirituality, integrity, justice, truth, and righteousness. This condition is evident when Moses contrasts Israel, who "*have corrupted themselves,*" with "*the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.*" (Deuteronomy 32:4-5).

Therefore, the earth was full of distortions of God's good and just purposes at the expense of fairness, justice, and righteousness. The root of this corruption is our fallen human hearts: "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*" (Jeremiah 17:9). However, corruption is not limited to an individual's actions. Genesis implies that dishonesty, greed, and misuse of power crisscrossed into earthly institutional systems, such as governments, economies, and legal structures.

Out of Egypt

Exodus records a period when the nation of Israel lived under the oppressive rule of Egypt. The people were subjected to corrupt practices such as forced enslavement, harsh treatment, vast commercialism, building projects, and wealth (at the expense of the ordinary people). The ruthless, authoritarian rule of Pharaoh and a perverted, polytheistic religious system governed them (Exodus 1:11-22; 12:12). Amid this corruption, Israel was bitter, and they cried out in anguish for help (Exodus 2:23). Corruption was killing them.

Sadly, most nations still operate within this identical corrupt model of ancient Egypt and Genesis. We see political or religious extortion, slavery, bribery, embezzlement, nepotism (jobs for close associates), kickbacks, money laundering, fraud, lobbying, and misappropriation of aid during natural disasters, to name a few. But God wanted His people to be different. Upon rescuing Israel, He took Israel into the Wilderness and taught Israel how to leave the practices of Egypt and to live “non-corruptly,” both individually and as a nation.

The Books of Moses contain God’s amazing “counterculture” to Egypt. He trained Israel to mirror the righteous character of God (Exodus 34:6-7). He taught them the value of His principles, laws and lifestyles which contrasted those of Egypt’s: respect for human life (Exodus 20:13), love of your neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), fairness (Leviticus 19:15), honesty (Exodus 20:16, 23:1), justice (Deuteronomy 16:20), righteousness (Deuteronomy 6:25), humility (Numbers 12:3), proper treatment of servants and strangers (Exodus 21, Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 25) and integrity (Exodus 23:7).

The behavior of Egypt and the bitter experiences of Israel should cause us to actively reflect on our own practices. Corruption is often culturally so intertwined with our lives that we normalize it—we do not even see it! Take a step back. Are we living in a corrupt system? Do we participate in, or actively contribute to, this culture at work, or in our daily activities? Do these behaviors subtly spill over into our families, ecclesias, or our worldwide community of believers?

Do we seek out and apply God’s counterculture principles to call out and radically turn corrupt practices upside-down? Proverbs reminds us of a general principle to fortify all our activities: *“Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight.”* (Proverbs 11:1).

Bribery

One form of corruption that God explicitly condemned after leaving Egypt was bribery. A bribe is money, a gift, or favor offered or required to influence someone’s decision or behavior, usually for personal gain. In Biblical times, it was often used to corrupt the judgment of rulers, judges, or leaders.

Transparency International is a global coalition that works to illuminate and end the injustice of corruption.³ Their website offers shocking insights and statistics on world corruption, and provides sad evidence that most nations run on bribes. A recent survey showed that, over twelve months, one in four people worldwide had to pay a bribe to a public servant to obtain a service (e.g., education, health care, identity cards, police services). Thirty-six percent think that the police and elected officials are highly corrupt.⁴ Developing countries alone are estimated to lose at least \$1.26 trillion annually due to corruption—enough to lift billions of people out of poverty!⁵

Many of our brothers and sisters around the world live in countries ravaged by corruption and experience daily encounters with bribery. Bro. Nathan Badger can recall several incidents while visiting ecclesias in Kenya when police randomly stopped

their vehicle and demanded a bribe to be released. In a Pakistan airport, while attempting to board a flight to Dubai, the airline attendant would not issue him a boarding pass due to a missing, unnecessary visa, until a brother “who knew the game” discreetly placed money on the counter. Then the agent hastily pocketed the funds and replaced them with a boarding pass, no visa required!

In Exodus, God commands the Israelites: *“Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent.”* (Exodus 23:8 NIV). Later, Moses instructs Israel, *“Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to kill an innocent person.”* (Deuteronomy 27:25). Moses even contrasts bribery with the character of God who he exalts as the *“God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.”* (Deuteronomy 10:17).

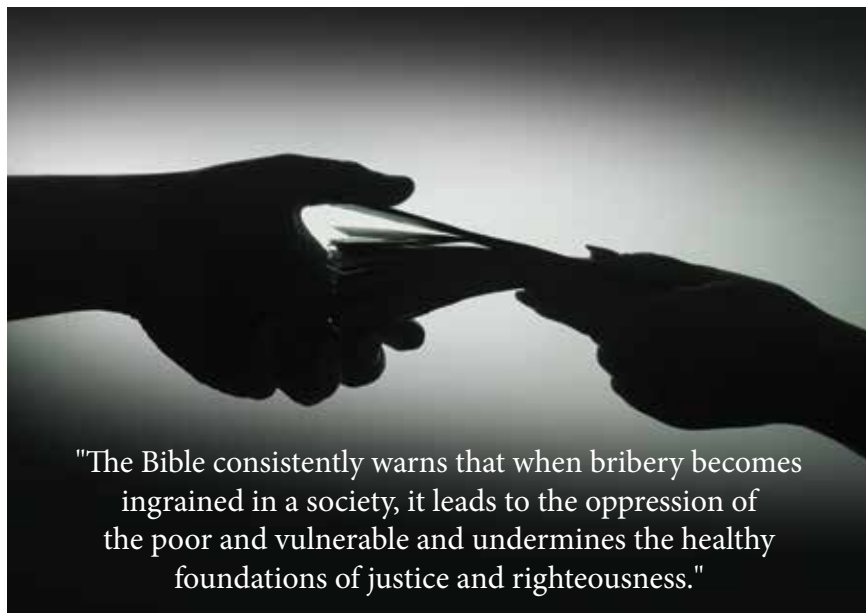
God’s instruction emphasizes explicitly the importance of not **accepting** or **requiring** a bribe. If no bribe is demanded or taken, a bribe ceases to exist. Corruption is stymied!

Bribery, such as taking tangible money, gifts, or rewards to manipulate decisions or receive personal gain, seldom exists in our ecclesial world.

However, intangible bribes and more subtle corruption can also exist in powerful ways. These aren’t bribes in the traditional sense, but they still have the potential to affect behavior and decision-making in an ecclesia. For example, being part of the “inner circle,” or close to leaders and influential ecclesial members, can provide benefits such as opportunities for leadership roles, invitations to special events, or even social status. Members or leaders might use guilt, shame, or subtle pressure as an emotional bribe, such as suggesting that members who are not contributing or following their prescribed rules, specific beliefs or practices are letting the ecclesia down, or are not spiritually mature. This stance may lead to exclusion or social shunning.

Other forms of corruption can include a lack of transparency in decision-making, dishonesty, false witnessing, misuse of ecclesial funds, making pacts between ecclesias to influence the community, showing partiality to members who may be friends or “favored” individuals, and manipulation of decisions in meetings, ecclesial teams, arranging committees, or worse, behind people’s backs. Some of these behaviors are hard to detect

Corruption can include a lack of transparency in decision-making, dishonesty, false witnessing, misuse of ecclesial funds, making pacts between ecclesias to influence the community, showing partiality to members who may be friends or ‘favored’ individuals, and manipulation of decisions in meetings.



and therefore are hard to “call out” or deal with. Where they are identified, ecclesial elders should bring them to the attention of the individual at fault, or even the ecclesia. Covering up bribery and corruption, or silencing “whistleblowers” is itself a form of corruption. The key to combatting such issues lies in transparency and accountability within our ecclesial structure. It also helps if we ensure that leadership roles are simply “serving roles,” not “lording” roles (1 Peter 5:3). At the very least, we should take personal inventory and ensure that our personal example follows God’s principles of integrity, and does not include any form of bribery or corruption whether tangible or intangible.

If we follow God’s commands, we should not require, accept, or voluntarily offer a bribe, in any form, especially for our own personal gain. It perverts justice and disadvantages

the poor and powerless. Many in our world face harsh penalties, loss of freedoms and daily necessities, or even death if they do not pay the bribes demanded of them. Sometimes, there is no choice but to pay a required bribe involuntarily to sustain one’s daily life. In these circumstances, God wants us, if possible, to avoid handing over bribes involuntarily and participating in these schemes. However, accepting, or demanding bribes in any form, especially within our ecclesias, is explicitly against his laws. Job’s rhetorical question to his accusers is a good example for our personal behavior and integrity: “*Did I ever say, ‘Bring something to me’? Or, ‘Offer a bribe for me from your wealth?’*” (Job 6:22).

Bribes and Oppression

Another critical theme in the Bible is that corruption and bribery lead to the exploitation of the poor and

needy. When judges or rulers accept bribes, they often make decisions that favor the wealthy or powerful, while the poor are denied justice and made poorer.

Amos condemns the wealthy and powerful for their exploitation of the poor when he observes:

They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.” (Amos 2:6-7 NIV).

The reference to selling the “*innocent [NKJV-righteous] for silver*” is a metaphor for bribery and corruption, where justice is sacrificed for financial gain.

Similarly, Proverbs warns against those who “*accept bribes to pervert justice*,” emphasizing the social harm such practices cause: “*A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the ways of justice.*” (Proverbs 17:23). This system perpetuates inequality, deepens the divide between the rich and the poor, and creates a society marked by injustice. Research shows that people and families who pay bribes to access public services have a lower standard of living and have difficulty living healthy lives and accessing education. Studies also show that poorer people are frequently penalized by bribery and are twice as likely to have to pay bribes.⁶

The Bible consistently warns that when bribery becomes ingrained in a society, it leads to the oppression of the poor and vulnerable and undermines

the healthy foundations of justice and righteousness. What are we doing to avoid bribes and other forms of corruption? Are we demonstrating God’s counterculture laws, which bring health to individuals and institutions and build a just and righteous ecclesia or society? What are we doing to stand up for the poor and marginalized as God has instructed?

Bribes and Leadership

God also teaches Israel to have non-corrupt leaders, not influenced by bribes. God wanted them to lead and judge differently than the nations around them, such as Egypt. Moses shares God’s explicit instructions to Israel’s judges and officials:

You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates...they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20).

God holds leaders and judges to a high standard of integrity. Unbiased and fair judgment is fundamental to the health of any institution or nation. The entire Bible reinforces this foundational teaching. God’s message condemns the prevalent corruption and bribery among political and religious leaders. It reminds God’s followers of a fundamental principle: “*By justice a king gives a country stability, but those*

who are greedy for bribes tear it down.” (Proverbs 29:4 NIV).

Isaiah condemns bribery among Israel's leaders as a fundamental source of national corruption and calls for a return to righteousness: *“Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; Everyone loves bribes and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them.”* (Isaiah 1:23). Bribes cloud the judgment of those who are supposed to uphold the law and provide healthy communities. Later, Isaiah contrasts the corrupt leaders with core ingredients of godly leaders:

He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil. He will dwell on high.” (Isaiah 33:15-16).

In a similar vein, Micah warns leaders who are more concerned with personal gain than with the welfare of their people: *“Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right.”* (Micah 3:9 NIV). He goes on to illuminate the nature of their corruption when he accuses Jerusalem, *“Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money.”* (Micah 3:11 NIV).

Both prophets issue a clear message: leaders who engage in corruption of any form or accept bribes fail to uphold God's justice and righteousness. What type of leadership do we offer if we are in leadership positions, whether

in the world around us or especially within God's community of believers? Just and righteous rulership, or one tainted with corruption and mired in partiality, dishonesty, manipulation, bribes, pride, or power? If bribes lie at the heart of a community, it will rot from the head down.

John and Jesus Suffered From Bribery

John the Baptist and Jesus were well acquainted with corruption. Roman society mirrored ancient Egypt. Both men died at the hands of a thick culture of corruption, bribery, and harsh subjugation wrapped in hypocrisy. John lost his life due to a corrupt “reward” to Herodias' daughter. Religious leaders offered Judas a bribe of silver to betray God's son (Matthew 26:14-16). Jesus then endured a crooked trial by religious leaders, and afterwards, the chief priests bribed the Roman guards to spread the false story that Jesus' disciples stole his body while they slept (Matthew 28:12-15).

John and Jesus confronted this system by challenging people to behave differently from the culture around them. John's solutions drew on counterculture principles that God taught Israel in the Wilderness: *“Collect no more [taxes] than what is appointed for you,”* and *“Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.”* (Luke 3:13-14). Jesus countered corruption in a single statement: *“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?’ But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”* (Mark 11:17). Rome, and especially the Jewish religious leaders were robbing the people financially,

but because of this corrupt behavior they had also robbed them spiritually by stealing the opportunity for them to come to know God genuinely.

The example of Jesus and John is to radically counter a culture of corruption by changing our behavior. We cannot likely remove the systems or individuals around us. Still, we can witness to God's character and principles by exposing corruption and purposefully living in a radically different way. Are we following Jesus' example and clearing God's house of exploitation to make way for prayer, healing, and nourishment in a broken world?

Summary

Corruption, though pervasive, is not insurmountable. God's Word provides clear teachings and inspiring examples to guide us to live with integrity and combat injustice.

As we navigate our corrupt surroundings, Micah inspires us to be agents of change in a world yearning for justice and equity: *"And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8 NIV). Peter, a disciple of our Lord,

encourages us by saying *"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."* By this knowledge and imitation of Jesus and the Father, Peter assures us we can *"participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."* (2 Peter 1:2-4 NIV).

The Bible also offers hope. If we struggle in an environment of corruption, God knows our situation; He will help us and hold these individuals and systems accountable. The gospel message is one of redemption. God has a sure plan to restore the corrupt human heart and bring about lasting transformation. If we separate ourselves from these practices, Isaiah reassures us that we can look forward to a future Kingdom, led by a ruler who will heal the world of this plague: *"Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice."* (Isaiah 32:1).

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COMPARISON IS THE THIEF OF JOY

By Joseph Pommer



WE live in a world where comparison is nearly unavoidable. Whether we realize it or not, it often shapes how we see ourselves and perceive others. Some of us are students, others have graduated and are in the workforce, and some have even retired. Some live in apartments, others live in houses. But regardless of where we are, we often look around and measure our lives by someone else's standard. God never intended for us to evaluate our worth by what others are doing or achieving. Yet we live in a society fueled by competition and comparison, always striving for the next best thing, setting records, chasing innovation, and crafting the perfect image. This obsession with "comparison" has become a spiritual threat, one that creeps into every corner of life—family, friendships, relationships, even within the ecclesia.

At its root, comparison is often born out of envy. Coveting is not a modern issue; it is one of humanity's oldest problems. In fact, the moment Eve looked at what she did not have, rather than what God had already given her, humanity fell. And from that point on, envy, coveting, and insecurity became constant thorns in our sides. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel, He included this one: "*You shall not covet your neighbor's house...or anything that is your neighbor's.*" (Exodus 20:17).¹

When the disciples followed Christ, they brought this issue to life, arguing among themselves who was the greatest of them all. God knows how easily we desire what we don't have and how quickly our hearts turn toward what looks better on someone else. And when we begin to covet, comparison

is often the next step. We start noticing what we lack rather than what we've been given.

But comparison isn't limited to material things. It extends into more personal areas—like relationships, experiences, emotions, and even our spiritual understanding. A single person might look longingly at a married couple. Someone renting an apartment might envy their friend's new home. A person dealing with anxiety or depression may feel even more burdened after seeing someone else's joy or peace. Parents compare their children. Speakers compare their talks. Workers compare their success and achievements. We may even compare our spiritual walk to someone else's and wonder why we're not "as faithful," "as wise," or "as useful." But what do we really gain by all this comparison? When our focus is on man, the answer is: **nothing**.

This point is why the Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 1:10 are so powerful. He asks, "*Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man?*" and then he answers, "*If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.*" Paul urges the Galatians to recognize that there is no comparison between the gospel he preached and the false gospels others promoted. Now he was seemingly at a disadvantage in this case, as the gospel he was preaching was not designed to please **people** but to please **GOD**. But his teachings weren't born from tradition or imitation—Christ revealed them directly. So, who is he trying to please? The people he's speaking to, or the ones he's speaking about? Ultimately, Paul reaffirmed that his identity and mission rested in Christ alone—not in how

he compared to others or how others perceived him. That's the focus God calls us to use as well: to look upward, not sideways.

What's particularly interesting about this topic is that it presents two equally dangerous perspectives. There's the viewpoint of the one who feels lesser in comparison—those who feel like they're behind, not good enough, not as successful, or spiritual or joyful. But there's also the danger of being the greater, the one who begins to feel superior, proud, and self-satisfied. When we think we are "greater" than someone else, it can become easy to start making assumptions about their faith, work ethic, or worth. But Jesus warns us clearly in Matthew 7:1-5 not to fall into this trap. *"Judge not, that you be not judged... Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"* The danger here is that comparison doesn't just steal our joy but distorts our view. It causes us to minimize our own weaknesses while magnifying someone else's. Jesus calls us to examine ourselves first—to remove the log from our own eye—so that we can see clearly, not with criticism, but with compassion. This is humility in action. It reframes our focus away from how we stack up to others, and back to where we truly stand before God.

But if anyone ever had the right to consider themselves greater, it was our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, he didn't elevate himself. Instead, he exemplified humility, contentment, and peace—virtues our world rarely celebrates today. As Paul says in Philippians 2:3, *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others*

more significant than yourselves." Our Lord Jesus Christ didn't just teach this—he lived it. He counted each of us as more significant than himself when he gave his life for us. He saw us in our weakness and chose not to compare, but to redeem.

What can we take away from this topic practically? How do we resist the urge to compare ourselves to others, whether we feel above or below them? The first and most crucial point is that we need to be aware of who we are supposed to be comparing ourselves to—and that's Christ. No man, woman, or child should ever take his place as the standard for our lives. We should measure our thoughts, words, and actions against his example. Only then do we begin to see clearly.

It's also important to acknowledge that what we often compare ourselves to is only a "highlight reel." On social media or in everyday conversation, we usually only hear the good—new homes, promotions, vacations, and smiling families. But those snapshots rarely include moments of weakness, doubt, or failure, things nobody is dying to share with the world. And when we compare our full reality to someone else's carefully crafted and curated image, we end up discouraged and discontented with our own lives. Don't let someone's mountaintop moment steal your joy in the valley God is walking through with you.

In truth, comparison has become more intense than ever, thanks to social media. It's no longer limited to our neighbors or peers—we now compare ourselves to people worldwide. We see their best moments but forget that we aren't seeing their full stories. In some

cases, the story isn't even true in the first place. In doing this and viewing this highlight reel, we rob ourselves of the joy God intends for each of us to have. Because the truth is this: God has given every one of us a unique race to run. We have our own calling, our own challenges, our own purpose in the body of Christ. When we stop comparing and start focusing on our assignment, joy returns. We are free to embrace the journey God has placed before us, trusting He has equipped us with the gifts and opportunities we need to serve Him well. Now, all of this may sound like I'm saying, "Only focus on yourself!" However, this is not the case. There is no problem with being aware of others' success; in fact, we should celebrate it often. But we need to be cautious and not diminish ourselves in our celebration of others. Rejoicing in someone else's blessing doesn't lessen your own.

Paul gives us one final encouragement in 2 Timothy 2:15: "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*" That's our goal—not to be better than our brother or sister or be the best among all humanity, but to be faithful before God. We are each part of one body, with distinct functions. "*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*" (1 Corinthians 12:27). One may be the eye, another the hand, another the foot. But we're all vital to the health of the whole. The eye should not compare itself to the hand. The foot

should not envy the head. So instead of asking where we fall on the ladder of comparison, let's ask: Where do I excel in my service to God? Where has He placed me? What has He equipped me for? When we can answer that, we can stop comparing our calling to someone else's and start maximizing ours for the fast-approaching Kingdom.

And now, we turn to the table of the Lord—a table that levels all comparisons. Here, there are no richer or poorer, no more critical or less needed, not ahead or behind. This table is not one of competition but of remembrance. As we take the bread and the wine, we fix our eyes on the one life that deserves all our attention—the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12:2 says, "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross.*" He didn't look around at others. He didn't weigh whether you were worthy of his sacrifice. He maximized his calling. He completed the work. He ran his race with joy, knowing what it would mean for us.

So, as we partake this morning, let us not come to the table with thoughts of comparison, shame, or pride. Let us come in humility, in gratitude, and in unity. Let's look up, not sideways. Let's run our race. Let us keep our eyes on Christ. Because **comparison** is the thief of joy—but **Christ** is the source of it.

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

LIVING IN THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

By Ted Sleeper

In their days...

THE days of the prophet Haggai were difficult times for God's people. We must be careful not to be too quick to condemn them for failing to see the obvious. Would they have needed a Haggai if the circumstances were so obvious? They were dealing with circumstances that brought discouragement from every direction! There had been discouragement from the moment they set foot back in their land:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off. (Ezra 3:10-13).¹

Solomon's temple had been built with the finest materials available and by some of the most skilled men in the world. How could this handful of unremarkable people hope to construct anything near the glory of the former House of God?

When they began this work sixteen years earlier, they had encountered an almost steady stream of opposition from their neighbors. In the true spirit of multiculturalism, their neighbors pressed them to be part of their grand plans to build a temple to their God. You can imagine how, once admitted into this project, they would soon be clamoring for changes here and changes there to make this temple more welcoming to those whose view of God was a little different, a little broader, than these Jews!

It wasn't this that was so discouraging, nor when these Gentile neighbors turned hostile. No, what discouraged them most was that God had allowed these neighbors to succeed! They finally concluded they must have had the dates all wrong, that the seventy-year desolation didn't start in 606 BC, but it must have started in 586 BC. If so, then this meant that they had four more years before God would bless their work:

Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: This people say, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built." (Haggai 1:2).

Even in those days, they had prophetic dates nourishing their faith that came and went without the fulfillment they sought.

Finally, there was the discouragement that came from everyday life: They found it very difficult to make ends meet. When they thought they would have a good harvest, insects or diseases seemed to take the “good” out of it. What they had left was never enough to provide for the year; they were always running short.

Is it any wonder that some, because of overwhelming discouragement, began to question the work, maybe question the prophecies, maybe even question God’s care for them, or worse, His existence?

For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth. (Zechariah 4:10).

In Our Days

How close are we to the same despair? Aren’t the same discouragements there as we attempt to rebuild the House of God in our day? The same hostility from the world around us only seems to grow and prosper. We may experience the same struggles with daily living. Perhaps the same reproof given to that generation centuries ago fits our needs? I don’t believe any of us have gone so far, as Peter says, to question the “promise of his coming,” though the lengthened wait for our Lord’s return must ultimately bring that test to us, too. For these reasons, I wish to share some reflections by way of encouragement, to hold fast to the Faith we have professed as the Body of Christ.

In 1967, many of us in the Christadelphian community were galvanized by the Six-Day War in Israel. The re-taking of Jerusalem was a prophetic landmark, only equaled by the birth of Israel as a state twenty years earlier. In another twenty years, a generation for those who saw 1948, surely all our prophetic expectations would be realized!

That was a long time ago. 1988 came and went, as did all our other pre-2001 prophecy expectations. In 2006, though, something did emerge that provided another remarkable step towards fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel 2.

Days Of Change

For years, I have pondered Daniel’s image:

Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the Kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the Kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. (Daniel 2:41-43).

The iron fragments were clearly the remnants of the Roman world and culture. As far as I could readily discern, these spoke of the powers in the Mediterranean and European areas. Indeed, it has always been a marvel to me that for almost 2,000 years, Greco-Roman ideas have guided the political,

cultural, and intellectual shape of the Western world!

But who was the clay? Bro. Harry Whittaker argued it to be the Arabs. If this were true, how would Arabs and Europeans ever combine to form a united entity from which would emerge ten kings?

In 2006, an answer began to emerge: **For the first time, the Arabs had succeeded in invading Europe.** In 2020, the Muslim Arab population was 6% of Europe. Very much per Daniel's prophecy, they do not mix with Roman iron!

So, what holds them together? Consider this lengthy quote from one political commentator in 2002:

After the Yom Kippur War and the Arab oil blackmail in 1973, the then-European Community [EC] created a structure of Cooperation and Dialogue with the Arab League. The Euro-Arab Dialogue [EAD] began as a French initiative composed of representatives from the EC and Arab League countries. From the outset, the EAD was considered as a vast transaction: The EC agreed to support the Arab anti-Israeli policy in exchange for wide commercial agreements. The EAD had a supplementary function: the shifting of Europe into the Arab-Islamic sphere of influence, thus breaking the traditional trans-Atlantic solidarity. The EAD operated at the highest political level, with foreign ministers on both sides, and the presidents of

the EC—later the European Union (EU)—with the secretary general of the Arab League. The central body of the Dialogue, the General Commission, was responsible for planning its objectives in the political, cultural, social, economic, and technological domains; it met in private, without summary records, a common practice for European meetings.

Over the years, Euro-Arab collaboration developed at all levels: political, economic, religious and in the transfer of technologies to education, universities, radio, television, press, publishers, and writers' unions. This structure became the channel for Arab immigration into Europe, of anti-Americanism, and of Judeophobia, which, linked with a general hatred of the West and its denigration, constituted a pseudo-culture imported from Arab countries. The interpenetration of European and Arab policies determined Europe's relentless anti-Israel policy and its anti-Americanism. This politico-economic edifice, with minute details, is rooted in a multiform European symbiosis with the Arab world. (Bat Yeor, October 2022, "EU and the Arabs")

There is the glue, rightly styled a "**symbiosis**" with the Arab world of the old Roman iron. Arab and Western Europeans are united on one thing: Hatred of all things Jewish. The iron and clay are gradually now becoming

one element. All that remains is for Ten powers to emerge from this “symbiosis”!

2006 also marked the year when we began to see the beginning fulfillment of Ezekiel’s powerful Last Day’s prophecy:

Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity came to an end, ... Because you have said, “These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them,” although the LORD was there. (Ezekiel 35:5, 10).

Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains, the hills, the rivers, the valleys, the desolate wastes, and the cities that have been forsaken, which became plunder and mockery to the rest of the nations all around—therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country.” (Ezekiel 36:4-5).

It was on August 15, 2006, that Israel began its fateful withdrawal from Gaza, and as Ezekiel prophesied, this has become both a “plunder” and a “mockery” to the nations around about. How long before “the rest of the nations” and these descendants of Esau give God’s land to themselves as

a possession, with whole-hearted joy and spiteful minds, to plunder its open country?

Days Of Darkness

We are living in a post-Christian world. Pockets in the US hold out against the forces that would bury Christian morality under the godless philosophies of evolution and tolerance. Accepting these philosophies in our culture, the enshrinement in our laws, and the inclusion in our educational curriculum guarantees a day of darkness unparalleled on this earth. Men and women will no longer know good from evil, right from wrong. I never could quite conceive how, in the free United States, as a believer in Christ, I could actually be harassed, persecuted, or even jailed for giving voice to my Biblical beliefs. **Now I do.**

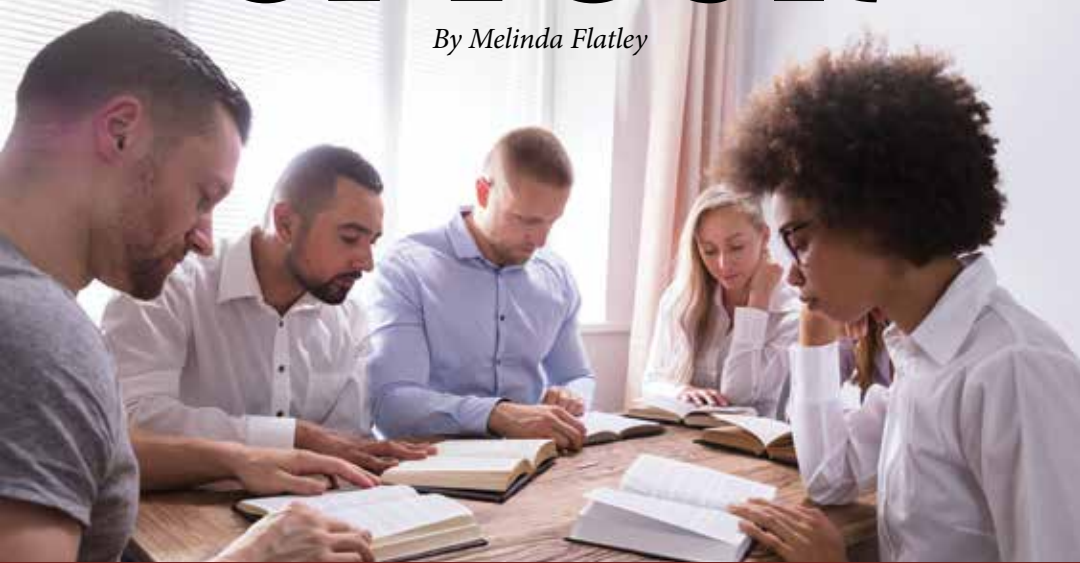
Time does not permit a fuller treatment of this critical reflection, but I urge you to stay alert to the forces of darkness that use “tolerance” as an excuse to shut down anyone whose moral values come from God’s Word. We have now passed the threshold into the darkness of night, but it cannot be the dread of darkness that holds our attention, but the light of dawn that shines beyond. When that Light returns, the Kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our LORD and of his Christ. This hope is what anchors us when our world turns upside down.

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

THE FORCE OF FOUR

By Melinda Flatley



Do you think it's possible to quantify the benefits of regular Bible reading? Almost everyone would agree that reading the Bible is a good thing and positively influences people's life choices. But can we analyze this mathematically? Here are some stats about Bible reading. The average family owns four Bibles. However, a 2001 Gallup poll indicates that approximately 50% of American adults read the Bible twice a year, or not at all. Those who read Scripture most days are only at

about 16%. Hopefully, we can include ourselves in this percentage and see why it is so important.

Jesus himself was among the Bible readers. He employed Scripture to direct his actions and, by the power of God's Word, could lead a sinless life. Jesus said,

It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4 CSB).

God is alive and talking to us. Many Bible passages emphasize the potency of His Word on our lives. Here are a few:

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12-13 NLT).

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105).

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8 NIV).

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. (Isaiah 40:8 NIV).

The Magic Number

Unfortunately, without the Bible as a source, we tend to trust our own abilities to determine solutions to life's problems—usually not in an optimal manner. However, returning to those regular readers, can we put a number on how often they need to read to benefit their moral lives? **Yes!**

A recent Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) study¹ discusses the benefits and consequences of regular Bible reading or the lack thereof. The research uncovered some startling conclusions. A group of 40,000 people aged 8-80 were asked how often they read the Bible in a week. The administrators correlated these numbers with questions about lifestyle issues.

There was a statistic they were surprised to see: the numbers for unhealthy lifestyle choices remained stagnant until readers engaged with their Bibles at least four or more times a week. One to three times had no more benefit to these individuals than choices made by non-readers. The group of four-timers demonstrated significantly lower involvement in unhealthy behaviors. The only gender discrepancy was in the category for pornography, in which the male gender skewed the stats. See the reduction percentages below.

- Drinking to excess—62% less
- Viewing pornography—59%
- Having sex outside marriage—59%
- Gambling—45%
- Lashing out in anger—31%
- Gossiping—28%
- Lying—28%
- Neglecting family—26%
- Overeating or mishandling food—20%
- Overspending or mishandling money—20%
- Feeling bitter—40%
- Thinking destructively about self or others—32%
- Feeling like they have to hide what they do or feel—32%
- Having difficulty forgiving others—31%
- Feeling discouraged—31%
- Experiencing loneliness—30%
- Difficulty forgiving oneself—26%
- Thinking unkindly about others—18%
- Experiencing fear or anxiety—14%

Wait, There's More!

These behavior numbers are for the total population. But an even greater surprise emerged among young people. The age group of 13-17 was even more successful in avoiding destructive choices, showing far lower involvement rates than among older participants. Given these results, wouldn't it be fabulous if we could find a way to encourage our young people to read their Bibles at least four times a week? It sure might help them avoid negative life-changing behaviors at a time when the world is constantly brandishing poor options before them. What about getting young people together as a reading group to do this together? Well, we found one, an active reading group of young adults! *Tidings* interviewed Bro. Nate Craver of the Paris Avenue, OH Ecclesia, to get insight into setting up and maintaining a Bible reading group.

How did the group start? Did you give it a name?

We began at Shippensburg Bible School on July 6, 2024, at 3:37 PM. One of the speakers, Bro. Peter Owen, suggested we keep together after Bible School and continue our active reading group. We named our group after the other speaker, Bro. Stephen Whitehouse!

How many are in your group, and what is the age range? Have you had trouble retaining participants?

Currently, there are 6-7 consistent members, ranging from 16 to 21. If you count pets, the youngest is two. We lost many of those who started with us. But

we've since added a few new members. Those of us who remain are regular attenders.

What time of day do you meet, and how long do you spend?

We meet at 8 PM EST for two or more hours. We attempt to get together every day, except Wednesday, because most of us have a mid-week Bible class that night.

What format of chat application do you use?

We started on Google Chat, then switched to Zoom for a special person in Texas.

Do you have discussion questions?

We typically ask, "So what did you think of this question?" Since it's daily, it would get pretty complex and repetitive. We do use Bro. Jacob Alexander's Drive Home the Points document, and we've made notes in it since he joined the group.

Do the participants use various Bible Versions?

We primarily use the King James Version, though we also look at ESV, NLT, BBE, ASV, YLT, NASB, and others.

Final Point

It's good to see this group having fun and making friends as they connect around the Word of God. May God grant them continued success with their reading group. We hope their efforts will inspire others to imitate them.

*Melinda Flatley,
Pittsburgh Ecclesia, PA*

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

THE CALL TO BE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

By Juan Diego Vargas



Love, Mercy, and Trust in the Kingdom

TODAY we would like to examine the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, a central theme in the Gospel of Luke 6. This chapter presents us with a manifesto of the ethics of the Kingdom, a set of principles that call us to live in a way that contrasts strongly with the world's values. By meditating on these words, let's try to understand how to apply these lessons in our daily lives as brothers and sisters.

1. The Beatitudes of the Kingdom (Luke 6:20-26).

Jesus begins his speech with a series of beatitudes that reverse the world's notions of prosperity and suffering.

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (Luke 6:20-23).

Jesus does not glorify poverty or suffering, but he reveals that true happiness and rewards are in the Kingdom of God, not in possessions or earthly status. For us, this means that regardless of our material situation or trials, our true wealth lies in our relationship with God and the hope

of the Kingdom. The world may not understand or even hate us for our faith, but our award is safe in the heavens.

2. The Call to Love and Mercy (Luke 6:27-38).

Jesus raises the standard of human behavior to a divine level, calling us to love even our enemies.

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. (Luke 6:27-29).

From a purely human perspective, this commandment seems impossible to fulfill. It is an ethics of the Kingdom that challenges the nature of man, which seeks revenge and retributive justice. Jesus urges us to go beyond the "justice" of an eye for an eye, instead calling us to a sacrificial and proactive love.

It is not about being passive or allowing abuse, but about refusing to respond with the same evil. Instead, we are called to show the character of God: to do good, bless, and pray for those who wish us evil. This action can only be born from a heart transformed by the power of God, since true love is not a passing feeling, but a conscious decision.

This teaching is the pinnacle of mercy and forgiveness in its purest form. It invites us to break the cycle of hatred and aggression, showing that we are disciples of a Master who loved his enemies to the extreme of dying for

them. As Christians, our response to aggression should not be revenge, but the love and compassion that reflect our Savior.

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:35-36).

We are called to reflect the character of our heavenly Father, who is kind even to those who do not thank him. Mercy is a central quality that we must cultivate, forgiving others as God has forgiven us.

3. The Importance of Coherence and Self-Evaluation (Luke 6:39-49).

Jesus uses a series of parables to emphasize the need for self-assessment and coherence in our lives.

And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. (Luke 6:39-42).

This is a powerful lesson about humility

and self-criticism. Before pointing out the flaws of others, we must examine our own hearts. Holiness begins with honest introspection and the effort to correct our own mistakes, without hypocrisy. The call of Jesus is not to be blind to the faults of others, but to an order of priorities. By concentrating on our own lives, we demonstrate that we understand the gravity of sin and our own need for redemption. Only with a clear spiritual vision, which comes from having purified ourselves first, can we genuinely help our brothers correct their own "flaws." It is a call to coherence between our faith and our actions, recognizing that true holiness is not an external adornment, but an internal work that makes us genuine and reliable to guide and help others on the path of truth.

Conclusion

The teachings of Jesus in Luke 6 are the essence of our lives as disciples. They call us to be merciful like our Father, to love our enemies, and to judge with humility. We must fully trust in the word of God, knowing that he will give us the strength to obey these commandments, no matter how difficult they may seem. Let us seek that our lives are holy, so that his glory may dwell in us. May the grace and peace of God be with you.

*Juan Diego Vargas,
Santa Barbara Ecclesia, Costa Rica*

BLESSED

are those who

HUNGER AND THIRST

for

RIGHTEOUSNESS

for they will be

FILLED

SHEPHERDING OUR CHILDREN IN CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES

Within our community, some are raising children in a home without both parents being “believers.”

By Linda Beckerson



WITHIN our community, some are raising children in a home without both parents being “believers.” Some have a spouse who may have walked away from God, and some have one who has never committed to Him or perhaps goes to meeting but is not an active member and does not necessarily encourage Bible readings in the home. These scenarios lead to challenges for the parent trying to follow the advice in Proverbs 22:6 to *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

In these situations, we must have honest and loving conversations with our partner about our focus on teaching and leading our children in God’s ways and truth. We wish to help them understand and support our role in teaching and bringing up our children in this manner. It may not be an easy thing to do, depending on the feelings of our partner. They may have been “turned off” from the Truth for many reasons or have never had an interest in religion. The focus of this article is not to address the reasons for this. It is to provide help and guidance for the parent so they can find ways to lead, teach, and guide our children, as well as their partner.

We all strive for a God-centered home, whether within or outside these circumstances. It is not built on perfect behavior, but like any house, it needs to have a strong foundation,

built on the rock of the Word and not the sand of the world. Our faith must be woven or knit into our children’s daily lives by our example and love for God.

How can this be achieved? Well, in the everyday raising of children, we know that routine greatly impacts their learning. Routines provide stability, independence, and a feeling of safety. It also builds self-confidence and supports healthy relationships. When we add “faith routines” to their lives, we

also add these same feelings about God to their minds. We need to incorporate our faith into the family’s daily routines. Making prayer a regular and shared experience is one way, not just as a bedtime ritual. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul tells us to, *“Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the*

will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” So, we teach them about prayer even when they are very young children.

Close your eyes. Tell them that we are going to pray and thank God for this day, for our food, that we do well at school, and that we have fun with our friends, maybe that God will help with a struggle or anxiety they are facing. At some point, we may see them standing with closed eyes, praying quietly by themselves. They need to see us model this behavior.

Our faith must be woven or knit into our children’s daily lives by our example and love for God.

We can talk about our faith during the day with them as well. When we are driving, we can ask them questions like, “Did you see God work in your life today?” At the dinner table, ask the same question in a round table discussion. Listen to them. Accept their feelings. Help them build confidence in their emotions and the need to share. Each child will have a different answer; one is not more important than another. This experience will also help them to hear and accept what others are feeling.

There is a saying, “A feeling is neither good nor bad. It is just a feeling.” It also helps to teach children to listen to others and understand this statement. We don’t all feel the same way in the same circumstances. But our feelings are not wrong. Just different. What makes me happy, sad, or anxious might not be perceived the same by you.

We can guide them to the many examples we have recorded about feelings in the Bible. How did Joseph feel when his brothers threw him into the pit? How did David feel when he was running from Saul? How about

If a child has been unkind to them or they are being bullied, we can teach them about Biblical love and forgiveness. The “What Did Jesus Do?” question is worth discussing with them. We may have to take it further if the bullying is at school or (unfortunately) the ecclesial level, but we can also show them the Christlike example in this. We can teach them Christ’s example in Matthew 18 about working out our issues with others. Or as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:32 (NLT), “*Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*”

With older children who may be affected by current events in the world, we can teach them the Bible’s view of these things. We can discuss with them how the world is changing and that we need to trust God is in control and will bring His Son back to earth soon. There are so many books and chapters about the end times, and we can discuss these events. It may well build their faith and trust that the Bible is true and God has shown us what will come.

Read the Bible together with them as often as you can. Pick the best way for the family to learn the lessons and words of God. Maybe it is the daily Bible readings or perhaps choosing a book and working through it with them. Regardless, read it with them!

Daniel when he faced the lion’s den? What compassion did Jesus feel when he healed someone? How anxious was Esther when she stood before the king to help save her people from Haman? There are so many examples for us to draw on and implant in their minds, and to teach them about with open discussion.

Read the Bible together with them as often as you can. Pick the best way for the family to learn the lessons and words of God. Maybe it is the daily Bible readings or perhaps choosing a book and working through it with them. Regardless, read it with them! Feel free to use a storybook Bible with pictures for the younger kids. My son-in-law has a great ending to every

Bible reading we do. He begins with the youngest and ends with the oldest person in the room, asking specific questions about the chapter. The very little ones get this type of question: “Who lives in heaven?” or “Where does God live?” Their smile is infectious when they answer.

Another critical point is to be consistent with these efforts. Even a few minutes every day will make an impact on them and on us! God willing, even our spouse. Perhaps we ask them what their favorite Bible verse is and then place it somewhere we can all see it, such as on the fridge, bathroom mirror, or the door to their bedroom. Maybe even in their lunch box?

Playing worship music in the home can also be helpful. We have several Christadelphian praise and worship websites, as well as WCF music or perhaps Christian music stations we can play. On the way to meeting, we can listen to that music to help prepare our minds for the service and Sunday School. Watching Bible-based shows or movies can be appropriate. There is a site called “Sight and Sound” with several Bible-based plays, music, and even real animals. Every age group will enjoy them.

Be an example to them in your daily life. There are several ways you can do this. You can be happy parenting them every day. Don’t countenance anger or upset about being the sole parent who insists on Divine standards for behavior. When you have to mete out the judgment for their misbehavior, you can relate it to God’s examples of

justice to His children in the Bible. Show your children that He does this out of His love for us, and His desire that we choose Him above all, so that we can be with Him in the Kingdom for eternity. Luke 12:32 reassures us, *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”*

When you make a mistake with them, confess and ask for forgiveness from them, and vice versa. When they err, as they will, teach them to confess and ask for forgiveness. Encourage them not to hide their misbehavior from you. Let them know that you love them and will forgive them, although there may still be a consequence.

Teach them trust as well. You will feel humility and grace when you do this. It can deepen their understanding of God’s love for us as our heavenly parent, who wants us to follow His example to be honest, loving and forgiving. Jesus encouraged us in Matthew 6:14 (NIV), *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”*

Be the example in the home so that when your children see you putting God first in your life daily, they will learn that faith is a daily walk. It is not meant to be something we only do on Sunday or in the weekly Bible class. It is an everyday way of life, not an occasional one.

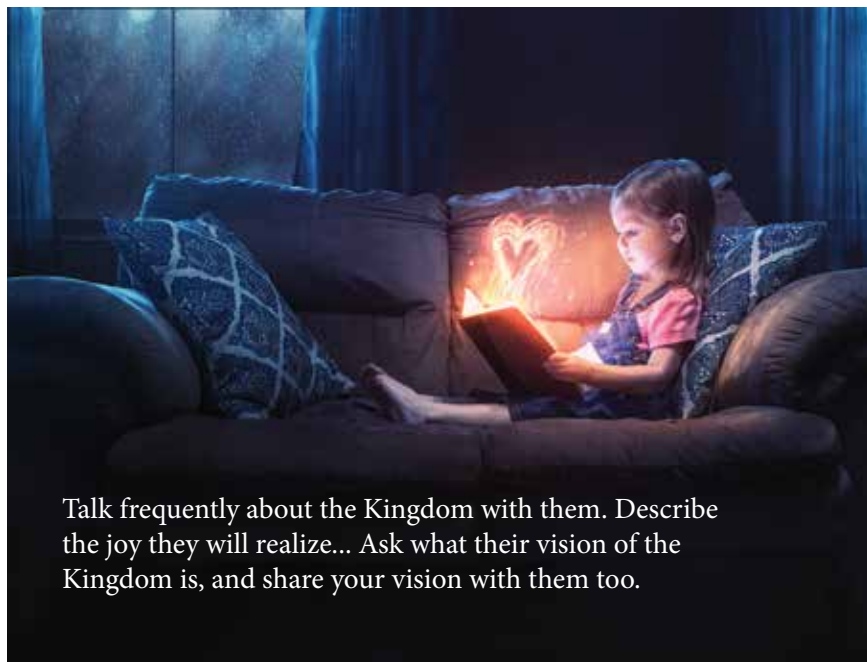
You need to be intentional about their interactions with the world as well. Who do they spend their time with? Are their friends from the world or the meeting? Implementing this policy can be a tough one, especially if you do not

live close to their ecclesial friends. But you can help them choose their world friends on a more Scriptural level. Do those friends want to do the readings with the family? Might they want to come to meeting or Sunday School with them, or if older, would they come to CYC? Make a concerted effort to attend the ecclesial events every week. Get to the Bible study weekends and Bible schools. If you can afford a vacation every year, you should also do at least one Bible School a year.

What devices do you allow them to use, and how much time do they get to spend on them? Are you regulating the sites they may visit? How about TV and the shows or movies they may watch? We need to limit their exposure to the worldly influences contradicting God's values. Very little in the world is Christ-like in manner or influence. We need to be so careful

in this regard, and at the same time, talk to them and show them the Bible teachings as the reason we don't walk in the way of the world. Many verses in Scripture reinforce this, such as Psalm 119:1, *"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD."*

Let's go back to the beginning and revisit the idea of routine. These examples of leading your children daily with these routines will likely build in them a need to carry on as they grow up, perhaps finding a partner in the Truth. They may then lead their own family based on your Bible-based example of guiding children to the Kingdom. The results of this plan aren't perfect. Some will still walk away on a path you don't want them to be on. But they will all likely walk away if we don't provide an example. The world is a dangerous place, and we have so many examples of



Talk frequently about the Kingdom with them. Describe the joy they will realize... Ask what their vision of the Kingdom is, and share your vision with them too.

that in our Bibles. God knew it. He said to have little to no interaction with the world because it would take us away. Hebrews 2:1 ESV says, *“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”* As we read stories about His people turning to the world and its idols, we can reinforce why we are trying so hard to follow God’s ways.

Talk frequently about the Kingdom with them. Describe the joy they will realize. Talk about Christ reigning on David’s throne. Ask what their vision of the Kingdom is, and share your vision with them too. Share the Bible verses that point to that time. The little ones will love to hear about being able to play with lions. The older ones will develop a vision of a time of peace and be motivated by the work they may be able to do for Jesus with their friends.

I recently had a discussion with a few young people about the Kingdom. One was baptized, and the other three were not. We spoke about the differences of being brought to the Kingdom at Christ’s return. We discussed how the baptized teen and I would be taken immediately to the Judgment. But for many who have yet to come to a knowledge of the Truth, they may live to a very ripe age, bringing up a family in ideal conditions. Then, for them to see in the end, the final judgment and

resurrection. Their faces light up when this is discussed, and they shared their questions and thoughts about how beautiful this would be.

It is so vital for those without a spousal agreement on the necessity of God in our lives to find the best ways to be the example and the leader in our homes. Set up the routines, and be the role model for them. We have so

It is so vital for those without a spousal agreement on the necessity of God in our lives to find the best ways to be the example and the leader in our homes.

many stories about this in the Bible. Timothy is a great example, being raised by his mother and grandmother in the Truth, with a father who was not. We don’t know exactly how long Naomi taught Ruth and her sister-in-law, but Ruth heard and turned to God because of her. Mordecai helped Esther. We ourselves need to turn to it and read about those men and women, take their methods as role models, and incorporate

them into our daily lives. It won’t always be easy. There will definitely be a need for open communication with our partner about having God and His Word in our homes and lives. But the key here is that nothing is more important than our children and guiding them to the Kingdom in every way we can.

*Linda Beckerson,
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THE CHRISTIANS

By Jason Hensley

So far, we've seen the development of Judaism throughout the centuries. We've watched the Roman armies surround Jerusalem, we've seen Rabbinic Judaism grow out of the remnants of Pharisaic Judaism, and we've looked at a final Jewish revolt against the Romans in AD 132–135. From that point on, for the next few centuries, while there were still Jews living in Palestine (the name Hadrian officially gave to Judea), there were no longer Jews in Jerusalem.

Yet, throughout all that time, what were the Christians doing? Throughout New Testament times, many Christians were Jews, and so how did all of this history affect them? In this article, we'll see that in many respects, the early Christians, even if they were Gentiles, saw themselves as Jews and as those who had been

grafted into Judaism. But, in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction, much of that changed.

Jewish Christians

Being Gentiles, we sometimes forget all of the links between Jesus' early followers and Judaism. Sometimes, as we read through the record, we disassociate early Christianity with Judaism, even to the point of thinking that the apostles saw themselves as fighting Judaism. Even some translators have made this mistake—translating a unique word coined by Paul as “Judaism” and making it sound as though Paul believed he had left Judaism and thus opposed it.¹ Yet, this is a misunderstanding.

Early Christianity began as part of Judaism. When the apostles first started their preaching, they were celebrating Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

Though the Greek name may cause us to miss this link, Pentecost's Hebrew name is *Shavuot*, or the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-22)—which is why its Greek name connects to the number 50, because the Feast of Weeks happened 50 days after Passover. In the next chapter, Peter and John went to the Temple *"at the hour of prayer."* (Acts 3:1).² Not only were they preaching in the Jewish Temple, but they were going at a very specific time—yet, what made this hour the *"hour of prayer"*? In the law, God had commanded the people to make an offering every morning and evening (Numbers 28:4); the people eventually connected the times of these offerings to prayer. Thus, while the sacrifice was being made, the people prayed and remembered their relationship with God. Hence, David specifically connected *"the evening sacrifice"* with his prayer (Psalm 141:2). Similarly, Gabriel appeared to Daniel while Daniel was praying *"at the time of the evening sacrifice."* (Daniel 9:21). In other words, the hour of prayer was a specific time connected to the sacrifices. Some of Christianity's first preaching efforts were thus connected specifically to Jewish worship—they began at a Jewish holiday, and in the next chapter, in the Temple, at the specific time of the evening sacrifice.

As time went on, these Jewish connections continued. When God gave Peter the vision of the sheet, Peter exclaimed, *"By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."* (Acts 10:14). He couldn't believe what he heard—

because he had always kept kosher. Yet was God thus telling Peter that Judaism was wrong or that what the Old Testament taught was no longer useful? Certainly not. Instead, the point of Acts 10 was to help Peter realize that the Gentiles, whom he had often seen as *"common"* or *"unclean,"* had been granted *"repentance that leads to life."* (Acts 11:18). These Gentiles were thus grafted in to the promises that God had offered to Abraham. This grafting is why the elders called together the Jerusalem Conference: because these Gentiles had entered into Judaism. Therefore, the early believers wondered how much of Judaism was necessary for these Gentiles to keep. Did they need to keep the whole Torah? Did they simply need to be circumcised? The conclusion may be somewhat surprising: *"For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well."* (Acts 15:28-29). Do you see what the council decided about the law? While they didn't require the Gentiles to be circumcised, they insisted that the Gentiles still keep pieces of the law. In doing so, they recognized that keeping the law doesn't necessarily bring life, but also acknowledged that Christianity wasn't something new. It was a sect of Judaism, and these Gentile believers, though they didn't keep the whole law, still kept certain facets of it.

For decades, Christianity thus functioned as part of Judaism. The believers held to the “*hope of Israel*” (Acts 28:20), having joined “*the commonwealth of Israel*.” (Ephesians 2:12). Even history seems to support this: Suetonius, an early Roman historian, noted that Emperor Claudius “expelled the Jews from Rome, since they were always making disturbances because of the instigator Chrestus.”³ This isn’t a reference to Jews fighting against Christians and thereby creating a disturbance—this is a reference to the Christians themselves. Suetonius saw them as Jews.

How, then, can we explain the animosity we see in the New Testament between Jews and Christians? Certain Jewish groups would indeed target Christians and attempt to prevent the preaching of the gospel (Acts 13:50; 14:2), but we can understand much of this in the context of an intra-Jewish debate. Throughout time, many of the Jewish sects struggled to get along with one another, and thus the history of Acts and Jewish movements against Christians matches what we know of the history of Jewish sects.

Separation

Separation from Judaism came from an unexpected source. Rather than originating within, separation from Judaism began with the Romans. After Rome burned in AD 64, Nero sought a scapegoat. The Roman historian Tacitus records:

To put down the rumor [that he ordered the fire], Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated

for their shameful acts, whom the crowd called “Chrestians.” The founder of this name, Christ, has been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for a time, the deadly superstition erupted again.⁴

Persecution created the separation. Suddenly, this group was no longer seen as a sect within Judaism. Instead, it was its own new religion. Christianity thus became illegal. Writing at that time, the Apostle Peter prepared the believers for what was coming:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:12–13).

This wasn’t just descriptive language. Peter used the term “*fiery trial*” in a reference back to Daniel when the government at the time tried to burn three believers to death. Such was what Nero sought and perpetrated against many Christians. Many historians believe both Paul and Peter perished under Nero.

Nevertheless, even though persecution can create a separation between two groups, if one group continues to see itself as part of the other, the link between them can sometimes still be maintained. So, therefore, when did Christianity begin to see itself differently?

Everything changed in AD 70. As we already discussed, the various Jewish

groups at the time had to reevaluate themselves. How could they function without a Temple? What did it mean that the Torah was no longer possible to follow? The Sadducees and the Essenes couldn't do it—they disappeared. The Pharisees redirected their movement and became the rabbis. But what would the Christians do?

Decades prior to AD 70, the Christians had concluded that the Temple, while important, wasn't necessary (consider the thrust of Stephen's speech in Acts 7—for centuries, people had worshipped without a Temple!). Nor was the law. Though it was good, it could not bring life (Romans 7:11–12). When God destroyed the Temple, Christians recognized God was ending that form of Judaism—He made it impossible to live by the Torah. Though the Pharisees adapted, they could never, until there was another Temple, keep the law fully.

This was the final break between Christianity and Judaism. Pharisaic Judaism sought to sustain a ritual-based religion, while Christianity interpreted the destruction of the Temple as God's judgment on ritual and tradition.

Conclusion

Christianity began as a Jewish sect. The early Christians worshiped in the Temple, celebrated Jewish holidays, and even followed Jewish rituals. Though they eventually recognized that these rituals were not necessary for salvation, many continued to keep them culturally. This was not required by any means, but was just part of early Christianity as a Jewish group. Eventually, things changed, and the two groups separated.

Unfortunately, as the years passed and the separation solidified, Christians forgot their Jewish roots and Jewish connections. The gospel and its presentation as the hope of Israel, was lost. Yet doctrines affect actions. Thus, tragically, as we'll examine in the next article, with that forgetting and that loss, Christianity would come to turn against the very religion from which it had come.

*Jason Hensley,
Associate Editor*

¹ See how the ESV and NKJV translate Galatians 1:13–14. The word translated “Judaism” there is probably better translated as “Judaizing,” or forcing others to adhere to a certain form of ritualistic religion. While many scholars recognize this important distinction, Novenson very articulately explains the nuances. Matthew Novenson, “Paul’s Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*,” in *Galatians and Christian Theology*, eds. Mark Elliott, Scott Hafemann, N.T. Wright, and John Frederick (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 33.

² All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version.

³ Suetonius, quoted in Robert Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 30. Note also the historical link with the record in Acts 18:2.

⁴ Tacitus, quoted in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus*, edited by Craig Evans (New York: Routledge, 2014).

P A R T 6

HIDDEN TREASURES IN THE TITLES OF THE PSALMS

By Leen Ritmeyer

PSALMS FOR OVERCOMERS



How Did Jesus Overcome?

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.
(Revelation 3:21).

WE have looked at how we can use the Psalms to overcome. I would now like to look at how Jesus overcame. When we think of what Jesus had to overcome, we may envision him avoiding being tripped up by the Pharisees and Scribes. We may reflect on him being tempted in all things, like we are, or on his overcoming death on the cross. But surely there must have been more than that. All his life, Jesus suffered mentally and physically, and we need to understand that, for by his life we are saved.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus healing people from all sorts of diseases. In Matthew 8, for example, he first heals a leper (vv. 2-4), then the centurion's servant (vv. 5-13), followed by Peter's mother-in-law (vv. 14-15) and many others (v. 16). It paints an optimistic and upbeat picture of Jesus doing good for many people. These healings were to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: *"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses."* (Matthew 8:17).

A superficial reading of this verse may not paint the full picture. Let's go to Isaiah 53:3-5:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried

our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded [pierced] for our transgressions, he was bruised [crushed] for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. [In his stripes there is healing for us].

The Hebrew text is much stronger. In verse 3, instead of *"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,"* the Hebrew text reads *"a man of pains and knowing sickness."* There is a difference between being *"acquainted with"* as in *"being familiar with,"* and *"knowing,"* as in *"experiencing"* in your own body. This is the true sense of fellowship, which we sometimes confuse with membership. To know Jesus in this way is true fellowship, as described by Paul: *"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."* (Philippians 3:10).

The phrase in Isaiah 53:4, *"He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows"* reads in the Hebrew: *"He hath borne our sicknesses and carried our pains."* The verb *"borne"* (Hebrew *nasa*) indicates to *"bear"* or *"carry away"* our sicknesses. *"He carried our pains"* (Hebrew *sabal*) means *"to carry a load."* So, Jesus did not just make these diseases disappear with a magic wand, but he took them away from these people and carried them himself instead. In doing so, he became ill himself.

The word *"stricken"* in verse 4, *"and we did esteem him stricken,"* (Hebrew *nagua*) means *"plagued."* It occurs sixty times in Leviticus 13-14, and there it plainly speaks of the plague of leprosy.

The Gospels don't say much about the effect other people's healings had on Jesus. However, two incidents recorded may tell us something of this nature.

And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all. (Luke 6:17-19).

The phrase “*virtue went out of him*” also occurs in the parallel accounts of Mark 5:24-34 and Luke 8:46, where Jesus healed the woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years. In verse 34, it says, “*And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace,*” The Greek *mastigoō* means a whip or a scourge. It was indeed a scourge for this woman to have been bleeding for twelve years. Only women can fully understand what devastating effect that must have had on her body. On top of this plague, which she hadn't caused (it just happened to her), she was condemned by the Law as unclean. In this context, we do not want to dwell

on the happy outcome of this healing process, but on the phrase that “*virtue went out of him.*” It may be misleading to think that was a good thing, as in, Jesus was being virtuous in healing this woman. But the Greek text says something else. The word translated as “*virtue*” is *dunamis*, which means “*power*” or “*strength.*” He must have felt that some strength had left him. Jesus became weaker when he healed this woman, for he took upon himself

The word translated as “*virtue*” is *dunamis*, which means “*power*” or “*strength.*” He must have felt that some strength had left him. Jesus became weaker when he healed this woman, for he took upon himself the devastating results of this disease

the devastating results of this disease, which was slowly killing this woman. As we will see below, only the Psalms give us an insight into his feelings.

Jesus, more than anybody else, would have known where all diseases came from. Jesus must have thought back to the events in the Garden of Eden, when, as a

result of Eve's disobedience to God's commandment, God said to her: “*I will greatly multiply thy sorrow [Heb. etsbon = pain] and thy conception; in sorrow [Heb. etsev] thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*” (Genesis 3:16).

This consequence was the immediate result of sin, which eventually led to Eve's death. Jesus must have seen all this portrayed in this woman who had touched the hem of his garment. By touching that hem, that woman

expressed her faith in remembering the Scriptures:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of Yahweh, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: that ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am Yahweh your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am Yahweh your God. (Numbers 15:38-41).

Unlike Eve, this woman desperately wanted to be holy and do all God's commandments, but her condition prevented her from doing so.

We often read that Jesus was filled with compassion when he saw human suffering, which he knew was the result of sin. Jesus had sympathy, which means entering into and sharing someone's misfortune. Jesus did this to such an extent that by taking away their

diseases, he became ill himself. We don't read about this in the Gospels, but the Psalms reveal the mind of the suffering Christ, especially Psalm 38.

This Psalm is undoubtedly a Messianic Psalm, although I believe that all the Psalms as Messianic, as Jesus explained to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, when he said to them: "*All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*" (Luke 24:44).

Psalm 38 is a Psalm of remembrance, just like Psalm 70. In this Psalm, we see Jesus asking to be delivered from his enemies and those who reproached him all day long. It speaks of the mental suffering of Christ. Psalm 38 speaks of the physical suffering of Christ. It is a Psalm that belongs to Christ, as verse 11 shows: "*My*

lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off."

We remember Peter, who had denied Jesus following him afar off: "*But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.*" (Matthew 26:58, Luke 22:54). When Jesus hung on the cross, we read in Luke 23:49 (Matthew 27:55) "*And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*"

The title of Psalm 38 reads: *A Psalm*

Jesus had sympathy, which means entering into and sharing someone's misfortune. Jesus did this to such an extent that by taking away their diseases, he became ill himself.

of David, to bring to remembrance. The contents of the Psalm appear to indicate that Jesus wanted God to remember the frailty of the flesh, which he experienced. "LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." (Psalm 39:4).

By taking on the diseases of the people, Jesus wanted God to remember the result of sin and how he (Jesus) tried to overcome sin in the flesh. In this light then, let us examine this Psalm.

O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. (Psalm 38:1).

The word "chasten" also occurs in God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:14: "I will chasten him with the rod of men." But more about this connection when we come to verse 6 of this Psalm. "Thine arrows stick fast in me." (Psalm 38:2).

Arrows can be bitter words, as expressed in Psalm 64.

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. (Psalm 64:1-4).

Job experienced the force of arrows in his suffering:

Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it

would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. (Job 6:2-4).

Thy hand presseth me sore. (Psalm 38:2).

Although the words of Job's so-called friends hurt him very much, he knew that "*The hand of God has touched me.*" (Job 19:21). God's hand was heavy on Job, and also on Jesus. In Psalm 17:13-14 we read: "*Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world.*"

No soundness in my flesh. (Psalm 38:3).

This physical and mental suffering made him look old beyond his years, as John 8:57 indicates: "*Thou art not yet fifty years old.*"

Unlike David, the author of the Psalm, Jesus never committed iniquity. Nevertheless, like other great men of the Scriptures, such as Moses, Daniel, and Nehemiah, he took upon himself the sins of the people.

In verse 5, his wounds were stinking and rotting, as the Hebrew says, "*I am troubled* [Hebrew *na'aveyti*, from *ava*]." (Psalm 38:6).

This expression, (margin "wried"), actually means "made crooked," as we see in Ecclesiastes 1:15 and 7:13.

Most interestingly, this same word appears in 2 Samuel 7:14. In this beautiful chapter, God promises a son to David who will sit on his throne forever.

I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. (2 Samuel 7:14-15).

Jesus, of course, never committed iniquity, as David's son Solomon did. How then can this prophecy relate to him? The Hebrew for "commit iniquity" (*ha'avoto*) doesn't literally mean that. It is directly related to the word "troubled"

if he had our nature. According to the words of Psalm 38, he bore the full brunt of it. He was "bowed down greatly" and went "mourning all the day long."

Similar expressions are found in:

I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why

Jesus had such empathy that he, as a man, could feel her disease in his own body, as if his own loins were filled with the disease that the woman suffered for twelve years. The taking away of her disease made Jesus weak, as he said that strength went out of him.

in Psalm 38.6, which in this derivation means "being crooked," or "being in his iniquity." Because Jesus bore our iniquitous nature, he also had to be chastened with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men.

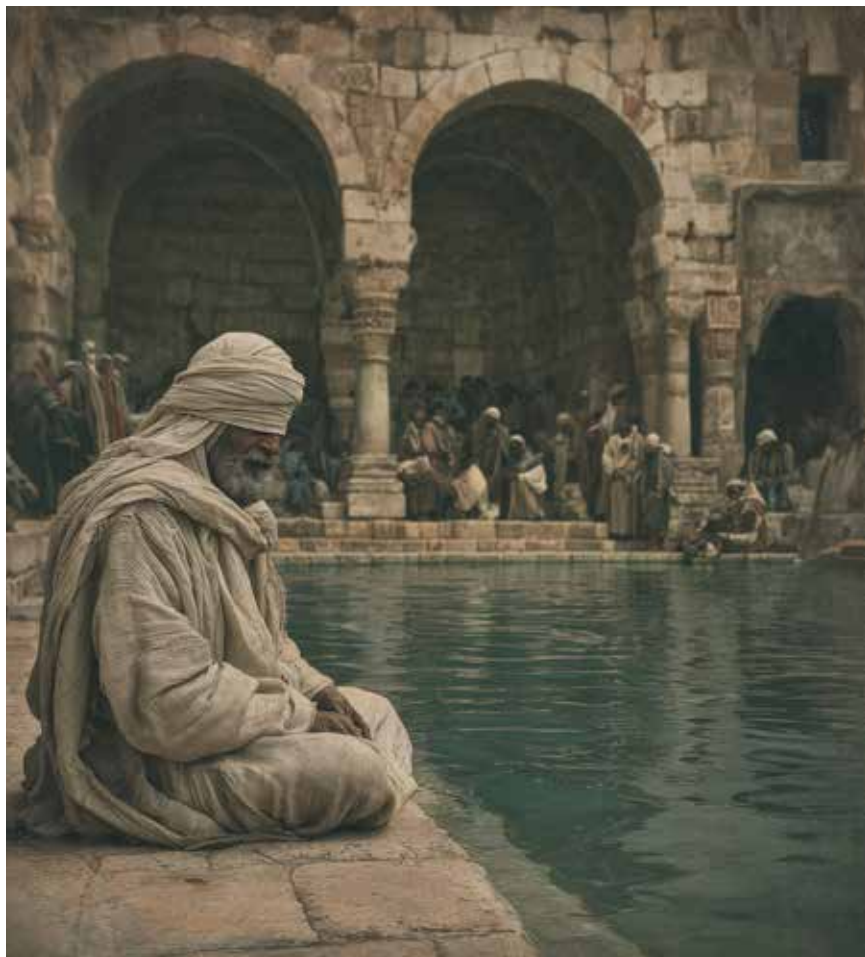
Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. (Hebrews 5:7-8).

He could only learn obedience and become an example for us to imitate

art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. (Psalm 42:9-11).

My loins are filled with a loathsome disease. (Psalm 38:7).

Did he feel that after having healed that woman with the issue of blood? It is difficult for a man to fully understand how that disease must have affected that woman and how she must have felt it inside her body. But Jesus had such empathy that he, as a man, could feel her disease in his own body, as if his own loins were filled with the disease that the woman suffered for twelve



years? The taking away of her disease made Jesus weak, as he said that strength went out of him.

I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. LORD, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. (Psalm 38:8-9).

In his agony, Jesus prayed to God. Indeed, he spent all night in prayer to God. What better way to pray with the Psalms, which had been prepared for him to be used in such circumstances.

Psalm 22:1 also speaks of the “*words of my roaring.*” His only desire was to be with God through the words of this powerful prayer. When we are in difficulties, it would be good to focus our desire on God, as David did:

One thing have I desired of Yahweh, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Yahweh, and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4).

I have set Yahweh always before

*me: because he is at my right hand,
I shall not be moved.* (Psalm 16:8).

In the following verses, we have a list of all the diseases Jesus took upon himself. *“My strength faileth me.”* Strength went out of him when he healed that woman. *“The light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me.”* (Psalm 38:10).

In John 9, we read of Jesus healing the blind man by sending him to the Pool of Siloam. Jesus also healed many other blind people. He so much entered into these suffering people's souls that he felt he had lost his own sight. *“My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.”* (Psalm 38:11). We already spoke of Peter and those of his acquaintance who stood afar off from the cross.

“They also that seek after my life lay snares for me.” (Psalm 38:12).

We can imagine Jesus pouring out his soul to God after the many times the Pharisees and other Jews tried to lay snares for him and trap him for the things he said. His final test came when he stood before the chief priests:

And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. And the high priest stood up

in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. (Mark 14:55-61).

But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. (Psalm 38:13).

We may, of course, understand this when Jesus didn't reply to the High Priest and to Pilate.

And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain [straight]. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. (Mark 7:31-37).

In whose mouth are no reproofs. (Psalm 38:14).

In Matthew 12, we read that after healing the man with the withered hand:

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; And charged them that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. (Matthew 12:14-20).

This quietness does not mean Jesus will never open his mouth in judgment. He will do so when the time comes, as he said to the Pharisees after the healing of the blind man:

And Jesus said, for judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, "Are we blind also?" Jesus said unto them, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth." (John 9:39-41).

Their sin will remain until they stand

before the Judgment Seat of Christ and will have to give an account of their treacherous deeds. "*For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.*" (Psalm 38:15).

Again, Jesus pours out his soul to God, saying he will continue to hope in Him and believe God will answer him at the right time. "*When my foot slippeth,*" and: "*For I am ready to halt.*" (Psalm 38:16-17). Similar words are in Psalm 35, where "*adversity*" in verse 15 is actually the same word for "*halting*."

False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother. But in mine adversity [halting] they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not: With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. (Psalm 35:11-16).

Jesus knew what the disability of "*halting*" meant, for he had healed people who were lame. During the capture of Jibus, David spoke of "*the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul.*" I'm sure David did not hate people who were blind and lame. But Jesus had compassion on the blind and lame, which is why he healed them.

We can learn from Jesus, not just to be sympathetic with brethren and sisters when they suffer, but to enter selflessly into their plight, for then we can better help them and appreciate God's salvation.

*For I will declare mine iniquity;
I will be sorry for my sin.* (Psalm 38:18).

Again, Jesus never committed iniquity, but had our iniquitous nature. He never sinned, but God *"had made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him."* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation. (Psalm 38:21-22).

So, at the end of praying this Psalm, as he often must have done in the nights, he asked God not to forsake him, for his Father was also his salvation.

So, what does exploration of a very personal Psalm of Jesus mean for us believers? We can learn from Jesus, not just to be sympathetic with brethren and sisters when they suffer, but to enter selflessly into their plight, for then we can better help them and appreciate God's salvation. It teaches the meaning of the extraordinary features of the High Priest's garments. The breastplate, as Jesus reads in Psalm 89:50 (without italics): *"I do bear in my bosom all the mighty people."* Jesus, as the true high

priest, held people close to his heart and bore the sins of the people to the cross.

It gives us an appreciation of the compassion Paul had for his fellow believers in 2 Corinthians 11:29:

*Who is weak, and I am not weak?
Who is offended, and I burn not?*

It explains to us why, after Jacob had wrestled with the angel in Peniel, *"He halted upon his thigh"* (Genesis 32:31), and why it is written in 2 Corinthians 4:16: *"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."*

We don't have the same capacity for compassion Jesus had, but it is an inspiring example to *"follow his steps."* *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13).

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P A R T 4

TITUS: TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

*Silencing the Dangerous:
The Courage to Confront*

By Andrew Weller



SOME people imagine that love means never confronting anyone. To be kind is to stay quiet. To be spiritual is always keeping the peace, even when truth is at stake. But Paul gives Titus a different picture. He tells him, clearly and forcefully, that false teachers must be silenced. “*For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced.*” (Titus 1:10–11).¹

This charge is strong language. Paul is not warning about outsiders or fringe influencers. He talks about people inside the ecclesia, those with influence and persuasion but without spiritual integrity. The instruction is not to tolerate them, ignore them, or try to appease them. It is to silence them.

This article will explore why Paul uses such urgent language, what kind of people he is warning about, and how ecclesial leaders today can confront spiritual abuse without becoming abusive themselves. The goal is not to win arguments but to protect the vulnerable and uphold the truth.

When Words Do Damage

Paul describes these dangerous voices with a cluster of traits: *insubordinate*, *empty talkers*, and *deceivers*. Let’s unpack each one.

Insubordinate—These are people who resist accountability. They will not submit to sound teaching or healthy spiritual leadership. Instead, they stir unrest. They want influence without responsibility. They want to be above correction but central to conversation.

Empty talkers—These people use many words to say very little. Their speech may sound sophisticated, even

spiritual, but it lacks depth. They use rhetoric instead of revelation. They chase shadows and miss the substance, generating fog rather than light. Their teachings do not nourish; they inflate, confuse, and distract.

Deceivers—These individuals are the most damaging. They aim to lead others astray. They may not always be aware of the harm they cause, but their teaching twists the gospel and undermines confidence in Christ. Whether by subtle additions to the gospel or by manipulative tones of authority, their influence weakens faith and divides ecclesias.

Paul singles out those “*of the circumcision party.*” These were likely legalistic teachers who insisted Gentiles conform to Jewish ceremonial law to be accepted. But their message added burdens Christ never gave. Their gospel was no gospel at all.

Paul’s verdict? They must be silenced. That’s not a call for censorship born of intolerance, but a pastoral directive born of love. Because what they were doing was dangerous. Legalism is dangerous.

Wrecking Households

They are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. (Titus 1:11).

False teachers don’t just distort ideas; they damage lives. Paul says entire households were being overturned. Perhaps these were literal families. Perhaps they were “house churches.” Either way, the impact was deeply personal.

And the motive? Shameful gain.

Whether it was money, influence, control, or admiration, their teaching served themselves, not Christ. What ought to have been a ministry of edification had become a mechanism of exploitation.

This pattern repeats across history. Wherever spiritual authority is used for personal advantage, the gospel is obscured. Whenever teachers seek a platform more than the well-being of others, harm follows. When ecclesias do not take responsibility for their leadership, the vulnerable suffer. Paul says this cannot be tolerated. The gospel is too precious, and the people of God too valuable.

The Courage to Rebuke

Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. (Titus 1:13).

Silencing false teachers is not just about exclusion. It's about correction. Paul tells Titus to rebuke them sharply. That word means clearly, decisively, with firm conviction. Still, the goal is not humiliation. It's healing. Paul added, "*that they may be sound in the faith.*" Paul still hopes for restoration. Even false teachers can be redeemed, but they won't change without being challenged.

To rebuke with clarity is to love truth and people enough to say what must be said. It's not easy, but it's essential. Ecclesias need leaders who will guard doctrine without being doctrinaire, who will call out harm without becoming harsh, and who will protect the flock without posturing as saviors.

The courage to rebuke includes the grace to forgive. The grace to forgive

includes the humility to confront, not to prove we're right, but to restore what's been harmed.

Cretans Are Always Liars? Discernment Without Cruelty

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. (Titus 1:12–13).

Paul quotes Epimenides, a Cretan philosopher, to describe the cultural backdrop Titus was working in. Crete was known for dishonesty, greed, and indulgence. Even Cretans admitted it. But Paul affirms this cultural diagnosis not to insult, but to prepare Titus for reality. He's not stereotyping individuals; he's naming the climate. In that context, the gospel must shine even more clearly. The ecclesia must not adopt the culture's vices. It must display a new way of being human, life shaped by truth, self-control, and hope. Discernment means recognizing the dangers without descending into disdain. We name sin but never dehumanize sinners. We acknowledge cultural brokenness but never assume people are beyond redemption. The grace that reached us in our sin can reach them in theirs.

Titus had a challenging task. He needed both realism and resolve. And Paul was giving him both.

Conclusion: Protecting the Flock with Courage and Grace

Paul ends this section of his letter with a serious charge: false teachers are defiled, unfit for any good work, and deny God by their deeds. That's not hyperbole. It's the sober truth of what happens when words and lives are no longer anchored



in Christ. These leaders had slipped so far into deception that their very lives contradicted their confession. For Paul, this wasn't just a doctrinal error; it was spiritual betrayal.

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. (Titus 1:16).

This verse captures the gravity of spiritual leadership gone wrong. These men said the right things but lived a lie. Their leadership had the appearance of godliness but denied its power. Paul does not hesitate to name the outcome as being detestable in God's sight, disobedient to His Word, and disqualified from any fruitful work.

This warning isn't about minor disagreements. It's not about the nuances of Scriptural interpretation or ecclesial style. It's about the heart of

the gospel being undermined. When leaders live contrary to the truth they preach, they bring dishonor to the name of Christ and danger to the people they are supposed to serve. And so, Paul calls Titus, and through him, all of us, to two essential and difficult tasks:

1. Have the Courage to Confront: Confrontation is uncomfortable. Many of us would rather avoid it. But Paul leaves no room for passivity. If a teaching is harming the body, it must be addressed. If a leader is leading people away from Christ, they must be challenged. Courage in this context is not the absence of fear, but the presence of conviction. It's the willingness to speak the truth, not because it's easy, but because it's necessary. Silence in the face of deception is not neutrality; it's negligence.

Confrontation must be rooted in

love—love for the flock, love for the Truth, and even love for the one in error. That’s what makes it so hard. It’s not about vengeance or triumph. It’s about clarity, healing, and the hope of repentance. Still, it must be done. Leaders who refuse to protect the vulnerable are not qualified to lead.

2. Have the Grace to Restore: Paul never loses sight of grace. Even here, in a section full of strong language and sober warnings, the hope is restoration. The rebuke is not meant to end the story—it’s intended to create space for a new chapter. A chapter where false teachers become sound in the faith. Where wolves turn back into sheep. Where corrupted voices are silenced so that truth can once again be heard.

Restoration is never guaranteed. Some will harden. Some will resist. But the offer must remain open. Because grace is not just how we begin the Christian life—it’s how we lead, how we correct and how we hope. Ecclesias shaped by grace will be places where truth and love walk hand in hand—here the vulnerable are protected and the wayward are called back—not with shame, but with truth and tenderness.

This leadership is the kind the ecclesia desperately needs. Leadership that’s vigilant without being violent. That’s bold without being brash. That protects the weak and stands firm for truth—but always with an open hand, ready to restore, ready to forgive, ready to begin again.

Titus had a formidable assignment. So do many leaders today. But Paul did not send him into that role without tools. He gave him clarity. He gave him a strategy. God gave him grace. The same grace that saves us is the grace that strengthens us to serve, to speak, and to stand.

So, let’s be clear where the gospel must be clear. Let’s confront what threatens the flock, not with arrogance, but with resolve. Let’s rebuke with truth, not to tear down, but to build up. Above all, let’s never lose sight of the grace of God, which trains us, saves us, and transforms even the hardest hearts. That grace is our hope, and it is enough.

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





THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH AND THE ANTICHRIST

By Richard Morgan

WE cannot overemphasize the importance of knowing the Truth. Jesus himself said, *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”* (John 8:32). He also said, *“This is life eternal, to know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* (John 17:3). Knowledge of the Truth sets us free and gives us the opportunity for eternal life. What we must understand, however, is

that this knowledge is more than just academic head knowledge. It’s more than just acknowledging the validity of a list of truisms. When Jesus spoke those words to the Jews, he spoke to people who knew Scripture very well. They had a lot of head knowledge but hadn’t grasped the true principle behind it. And they didn’t truly know God, and certainly did not know His Son. The kind of knowledge we need

is one in which we are in tune with God. We know what He is about, and while it springs from academic head knowledge, unless it turns into something meaningful and practical as we endeavour to glorify God, it is not truth.

In his three letters, the Apostle John writes extensively about knowledge and truth. He also uses the term “*antichrist*,” and using that term as an example, we can see the difference between truth and error while acknowledging the truism of the existence of antichrist. The main error behind the term is found in Christendom’s use of it, particularly in the evangelical community, with their teaching of the future antichrist theory. However, we know that John (the only author who uses the term) did not speak of an antichrist in the futurist sense. He said, “*Ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists.*” (1 John 2:18). The common understanding not only distorts the period of when antichrist should come, but misses the whole point behind its meaning. Evangelicals will tell you that the Antichrist is a future militant figure, either Satan in human form or one of Satan’s minions. He will do all the things we Christadelphians believe Christ will do, such as making a covenant with the Jews and destroying the Russian armies that come against the land of Israel. So nominal Christianity will mistake Christ for Antichrist when he returns and fight against him, or at least that’s how it appears things will turn out, according to the false idea of Antichrist.

On the other hand, the topic of antichrist is far more fundamental than an eschatological figure. Instead, it centers around the importance of knowledge of the Truth. In 1 John 2:18, the Apostle says, “*Whereby we know that it is the last time.*” The problem with the futurist view is that it totally misses the point about the “*last time*” in the context of John’s epistle. He is not talking about the last days when Christ returns, but about the end of the Jewish world. Jesus, when he said, “*The truth shall make you free,*” was talking to a generation that would see the end of their religious system being replaced by a truth that understood the principles behind the Law they misunderstood. Only when we understand concepts like Antichrist in that context can we appreciate the importance of the knowledge of the Truth.

Paul also spoke of the last times when he said:

The spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Like John, the apostle is not discussing some future time just before Christ returns. He’s talking about the first century when apostasy would begin to set in to the early ecclesia. We see the seeds of some Roman Catholic

teachings in the phrase “*forbidding to marry*” and “*commanding to abstain from meats*.” Interestingly, the Roman Catholic Church is built on the same mindset as the Jewish religion of the time of Christ, emphasizing legalistic adherence to ritual and tradition. In that sense, they have missed the entire point of the gospel and corrupted the Truth so badly that it is almost unrecognizable. That’s what happens when true doctrine fails to find its central focus. The result was centuries of persecution by the Church against true believers who refused to conform to their man-made religion, just as the Jews persecuted Christ and the apostles. Error is not just being wrong about something; it causes behavior completely out of tune with God and His Son.

Notice that Paul says, “*Some shall depart from the faith*,” and talks about false doctrines in that context. “*The faith*” is not just about trusting in God (although of course that is central to it, as believing that God is right), but it’s also about adhering to core teachings. There are true doctrines and there are erroneous ones. It matters what we believe.

Jude reminded his readers of the Apostles’ words that “*There should be mockers in the last time*.” (Jude 17-18) and so exhorts his readers to “*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*.” (v. 3). The only sense in which faith can be “*delivered*” is in a set of teachings and this is again the way in which we need to understand “*the faith*.” It’s not just faith itself, but core doctrinal understanding. Things had become so bad by the time Jude wrote his

epistle that he said false teachers were “*denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ*.” (v. 4). It is difficult to imagine these false teachers getting up and saying, “God and Jesus don’t exist, we don’t believe in them,” and in fact that probably wouldn’t have motivated Jude to write his epistle because it’s so obviously wrong in context of the first century ecclesia. False doctrine is more subtle than that, and their error probably led them to lose their knowledge of God and Christ. In the sense of John 17, they were out of tune. These were people who pretended to be true believers but followed in the way of Cain, Balaam, and Korah (v. 11). While being great orators they were teaching doctrines that were simply wrong (v. 16). In contrast to that, Jude tells us we must be “*building up yourselves on your most holy faith*.” (v. 20). Again, we need to understand that truth is important, and it has a practical outworking in our lives.

Returning to the Apostle Paul’s warnings, perhaps his most famous prediction of false teaching concerns the man of sin. It seems the Thessalonians were troubled by some teachings that the day of Christ (in the sense of his return) was nigh at hand (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). And Paul puts them straight by talking about the rise of an apostate system: “*Except there comes a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed*.” (2:3). Like what John says about antichrist, Paul told the Thessalonians, “*The mystery of iniquity does already work*.” (2:7). It was no future phenomenon but happening right there and then, at least the seeds were being sown. However, he also says the spirit of the man of sin would

continue until the return of Christ (2:8)—meaning we need to be adept Bible students to identify the nature of the apostasy. And again, it is full of false doctrine, “*with all deceivableness of unrighteousness...because they received not the love of the truth, that they should believe a lie.*” (v. 9-11). Just like Jude, Paul finishes by again emphasizing the importance of truth: “*God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth.*” (v. 13). If truth were not necessary, Paul would not have written this. We need to believe **the Truth**, not just believe!

Many expositors have seen a prophecy in these words about the Roman Catholic apostasy, and there is no reason to differ from them. However, we must understand that Christendom is a giant visual aid, an object lesson on the importance of truth. When error comes in and replaces that truth, the practical outcome can be very frightening indeed.

So, truth matters. Coming back to John’s epistles, this is precisely what he says. Speaking of the antichrists that were already there in his days, he says:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us...I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. (1 John 2:19, 21).

There are truths, and there are lies. We need to understand the difference. As John says, “*no lie is of the truth,*” and those who spoke lies eventually left “the Truth” (as we call it).

John uses two words for knowledge in his epistles—*ginosko* and *oido*, which are key words throughout. One (*ginosko*) tends to imply more of an intimate kind of knowledge, the kind of knowledge where we understand and are in tune with God and have experienced His mercy. Both words tell us about the importance of accepting truth and rejecting error. Knowledge is important. Being a true Christian is not just about being a “nice” person. It’s about acknowledging the importance of true knowledge, rejecting error, grasping the fundamental principles behind knowledge rather than the surface ritualism and tradition, and applying the knowledge in practical ways to glorify God.

The importance of knowledge and truth tells us several things:

- We need to avoid undue emphasis on man-made traditions.
- Other so-called holy books have no relevance for the true believer.
- We should not tolerate false ideas.
- It is not good enough just to have a vague belief in God.

John, in writing about the spirit of antichrist, covers a great deal of first-principle doctrine. Consider the second occurrence in his epistles where he says, “*Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denies the father and the son. Whosoever denies the son, the same*

has not the father.” (1 John 2:22-23). The knowledge that Jesus is the Christ was, of course, denied by the Jews and still is today. However, Christendom went on to inherit that rejection even while calling their version of Jesus the “Christ.” That word carries with it several important ideas: the promises to the fathers and David concerning the land and seed, the Kingdom of God on earth, and the Resurrection and Judgment. Those things are fundamentally spoken against by those who teach heaven-going at death, and that the Kingdom is merely spiritual. The teachings of Christendom are fundamentally anti-Christ because they contradict everything about him. We cannot have anything to do with a doctrine that denies that Jesus is the Christ because it takes away our vision of the Kingdom and the correct motivation a true believer should have in their life.

In 1 John 2:23, it also says it is antichrist to deny the Father and the Son—something that would take away from eternal life (John 17:3). We need to know who the Father and Son are, their relationship to each other, their character, and their purpose. We need to experience the work of God and His Son in our lives, and that’s where true knowledge comes from. It does not come from, for example, ideas that contradict the statements about God and Jesus in Scripture. John is very concerned about these things and goes on to say, *“And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life. These things I have written unto you concerning them that seduce you.”* (1 John 2:25-26). Those who would say our concept of who God and Jesus are,

and the fact that Jesus is the Christ, are not important, and replace that principle with doctrines that are easy to the ear and tolerant of erroneous ideas, are seducing true believers away from what matters, which is the knowledge of the Truth.

Interestingly, John uses the example of Cain in 1 John 3:

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. (1 John 3:11-12).

Why bring up Cain in this context? Not just to demonstrate the antithesis of true Christian love. If we look at the story of Cain, we see a man who **appeared** to be the promised seed of the woman (Genesis 4:1), and he was not an irreligious person. He’s even the one who seems to be following God’s instructions, for God had cast man out of the garden to till the ground (Genesis 3:22-23). Cain was a tiller of the ground (Genesis 4:2). However, we know God rejected his offering, and subsequently, he showed his true colors. Cain was the prototype false teacher and believer, pointing forward to such people as the chief priests and the Roman Catholic Church. They, too, had a religion based on rote following of ritual, which appeared religious but did not follow truth. Each subsequently persecuted and killed those who should have been their brethren. God, of course, could have told Cain, “It doesn’t matter. At least you offered something. I don’t care.” It would have avoided what followed. But God values truth and the

actions that follow truth. Cain's offering was wrong, and God sought to instruct him about the truth. Unfortunately, some will react against the concept of truth, and their actions will be antagonistic towards those who value it. John continues to speak on the topic of antichrist doctrine:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know you the spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God, and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already it is in the world. (1 John 4:1-3).

The beginning of many false doctrines connected with the nature of Christ began in the time of John, and he tells us it is vitally important to know the truth of who Christ is. The Bible teaches us that Christ did come in the flesh and that he died as our representative. It also teaches us that the doctrine of the atonement is not a philosophical idea to be debated, and everyone's ideas are equally valid. It matters what we believe! The priesthood of Christ hinges on his being of the same nature as his brethren, and so does his example for us. Deny these things and you cannot live the life God wants you to lead, and that's why we thoroughly reject doctrines like the Trinity, penal substitution, and original sin, which are firmly antichrist in nature. Doctrine connected with the

Trinity, for example, effectively denies Jesus was truly human, truly tempted, truly died, and truly rose from the dead. In effect, it is a doctrine that destroys the gospel message.

This adherence to true doctrine is something so important that John repeats the warning in his second epistle (2 John 7) where he goes on to say, "*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.*" (v. 9). Doctrine matters! Truth matters! The seeds of the apostasy were sown in the first century and led to errors that completely dismantled the true message of the Bible, and the warning is just as relevant for us today as it was in the first century. Doctrine affects behavior and our ability to worship and serve God in sincerity and truth. As John says:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:1-5 ESV).

*Richard Morgan,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

CARIBBEAN PREACHING CONFERENCE

By Ben Drepaoul



So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:7 NKJV)

THIS summer marked a milestone for the Guyana Christadelphians and the Caribbean Youth Camp Committee, as we embarked on our first-ever combined youth conference and preaching campaign on the Essequibo coast. Nearly fifty participants, from infants to seniors, travelled from Georgetown to Anna Regina, a bustling town set against rice fields and quiet country roads, to share the gospel and enjoy a week of fellowship.

Planning and Preparation

The seeds for this effort were planted at GuyExpo 2024, when visitors from Essequibo urged us to bring Christadelphian outreach to their region. Though we had no local brethren in Essequibo and little

knowledge of the area, a dedicated committee of twelve brethren worked tirelessly, securing permits, accommodations, and transport. God opened every door, and the Essequibo Technical Institute became our home base, offering dorms, an auditorium, and space for worship and activities.

A Week of Camp and Fellowship

Days began early with prayer, exercise, and Bible classes led by Bro. Nigel Small of New Jersey on the theme “As a man thinketh in his heart.” Youth discussions, mini VBS sessions for children, and training on how to share the gospel filled the schedule. Brethren from Trinidad, New York, and elsewhere joined in, adding to the richness of teaching and fellowship.



The evenings were just as vibrant. Some campers gathered for games and laughter, while others enjoyed quiet conversations. The elderly sisters provided a steady spiritual anchor, rising daily at 4:30 am for readings and prayer.

The Preaching Campaign

Each afternoon, the group took to the streets—armed with leaflets, smiles, and T-shirts boldly asking, “Have you heard the Good News? Ask me!” Youths who started timid soon grew confident, encouraged by warm encounters with local residents.

Not every day went as planned. A sudden storm once forced us to abandon preaching for the evening, reminding us of the Lord’s guiding hand. Adjustments followed, moving

outreach to earlier hours and upgrading our sound system. By week’s end, the team had reached multiple villages, held countless conversations, and witnessed genuine interest. Several residents requested prayers, attended Bible classes, and even began First Principles lessons.

Building Momentum

The Essequibo mission sparked wider outreach. Shortly after, brethren organized a medical campaign in Georgetown, offering free blood pressure checks and reading glasses, while youth reconvened to map out solutions to challenges facing our CYC groups.

Looking Ahead

The Essequibo effort highlighted what God can accomplish when His people

work together in faith. Everyone, from the youngest camper to the oldest sister, made this mission possible. As seeds grow in Essequibo and beyond, we pray for God's increase and thank the CBMC and all supporters who made this work a reality.

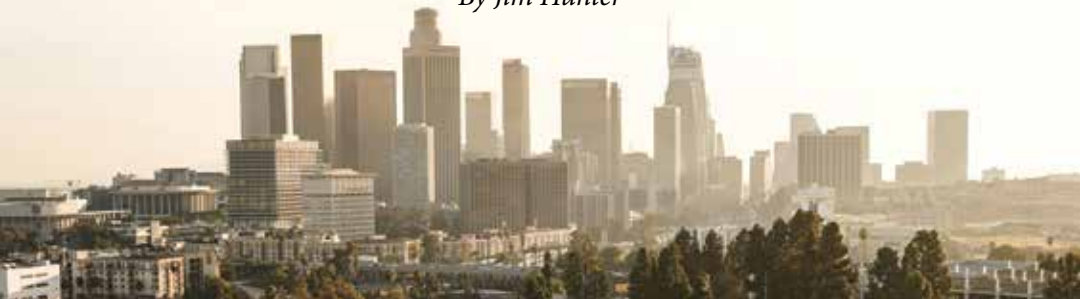
You may access a full report on the CBMC website, cbma.net.

*Ben Drepaul,
CBMC Caribbean Working Group*



BAPTISMS IN LOS ANGELES

By Jim Hunter



WITH great joy we witnessed the baptisms on August 3, 2025, of Lennart Blanco and Daniel and Lucrecia Astacio.

Our new brother Lennart was a postal student since 2009, always answering, but because of living out in the Inland Empire (a long way from Los Angeles), and having no transportation, he wasn't able to attend the meetings. With the advent of ZOOM, he immediately began attending all our meetings as well as the public lectures in San Salvador. He was able to attend in person a number of times as well. It gives us great pleasure to have him as part of the family. He already is supporting the various ecclesial classes with readings and prayers.

Bro. Daniel and Sis. Lucrecia were formerly Adventists. Daniel was a

pastor for twenty-one years. But they began to notice that the teachings weren't really what the Bible said. They started their own study, but thought that no church in the world taught what they had discovered. Then they found "labiblia.com" and were overjoyed to see there was a group that understood Bible teaching. They live in Houston, Texas, and have attended the ecclesia a few times, but they found that not speaking English made fellowship difficult. They attend the LA Hispanic ZOOM meeting, and Daniel is already doing readings and prayers. They were delighted that their daughter, who lives in San Bernardino, could attend their baptisms.

*Jim Hunter,
LA Hispanic Ecclesia, CA*

ECUADOR BIBLE SCHOOL

By Andrea Tovar

FROM the moment we arrived at the airport, the excitement was palpable. After many days of anticipation, we were finally in Quito, Ecuador, ready for the Bible School gathering. The journey had taken six hours, with a stopover in Colombia, but the joy of what awaited us made it all worthwhile. We had begun preparing a week earlier by reviewing the discussion topics, and when we landed, our brothers were there at the airport to welcome us warmly.

The following day, we met with the rest of the attendees already in Quito. Among the group were eighteen foreign visitors: four from the United States, one from Australia, nine from El Salvador, one from Guatemala, one from Honduras, and two from Panama. Together with our brethren in Ecuador, we totaled seventy-two participants, all united in the single purpose of studying God's word.



The Bible School officially began on August 7, with a full program of classes for adults, young people, and children. Two in-depth Bible studies were presented: *“The People of Israel Before the Establishment of the Kingdom”* (covering Numbers 11–14 and Judges), taught by Bro. Kevin Hunter from the San Diego Ecclesia in California, and *“A Perfect Creation for Humanity,”* presented by Bro. Jaime Mate from El Salvador.

Youth classes were led by Bre. Alejandro Alfaro and Herberth Carrillo Ayala of El Salvador. The young people expressed how much they enjoyed the sessions, saying they learned a great deal and hoped for more opportunities like this in the future. The younger children also had meaningful lessons, accompanied by Sunday School hymns and activities. Their topics included the manna and quail, and the twelve spies of Jericho, all guided by our dedicated sisters.



Beyond the formal studies, the Bible School was filled with opportunities for connection and joy with group activities, daily Bible readings, games, a visit to the zoo, swimming, and even a walk through the town of Guayabamba. Everything took place in a spirit of brotherhood and companionship, creating an atmosphere of harmony where both young and old felt blessed. The Bible School concluded on August 10 with the Breaking of Bread and Wine, followed by a final study on the Judges.

After the Bible School, we spent additional days in Quito with the young people, strengthening bonds of friendship within our shared hope.

Activities included visits to Quito's historic center, Pululahua, the Middle of the World monument, the cable car, and a hike on Mount Pichincha. We also shared meals at various restaurants, and wrapped up our time with an evening of bowling.

Though the week passed quickly, we all were left deeply strengthened in spirit. God blessed us with a joyful time, rich in learning, fellowship, and good works. God willing, we plan to pull together a group for follow-up activities to try to build on the momentum.

*Andrea Tovar,
San Salvador Ecclesia, El Salvador*



Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

(Thoughts from 1 Corinthians 1:11-13; 2:1, 2)

THERE is a distinct difference here in how Paul preached to the believers in Corinth. When Paul came to them, he preached, as he said, in “*weakness, fear, and trembling*.” (1 Corinthians 2:3)¹ Not with “eloquence,” or an attitude of superiority.

Paul did not seek to convert people with his great learning, his clever use of words, or his dynamic personality. Instead, he preached with a very different emphasis. Even as he spoke, he was weak and fearful, to the point of trembling.

Paul was not an actor playing a character on a stage. If that were the case, he would have been guilty of a different kind of “cleverness.” In other words, he would have led his listeners to believe he was a weak, trembling man. Then, like many of the Pharisees, Paul would have been just another one of their group, whom Jesus called “*hypocrites*” (Matthew 23:13) because

of their long prayers designed to impress their listeners. (Matthew 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47).

Now, what did Paul mean when he also said he would only preach “*Jesus Christ and him crucified*”? Setting Paul’s words here alongside his other letters may shed some light on the issue. To be “*crucified*,” as Jesus had been, would mean a terribly long, drawn-out torture. First of all, in its anticipation, the idea led to a horrible fear, which swallowed all reason. In its execution, the pain would cause intense trembling, as the victim struggled to breathe moment by moment until finally, after many hours of torture, he succumbed to a dark and desperate weakness, at last collapsing entirely and dying by suffocation. In such a condition of prolonged suffering, I cannot imagine the suffering person would ever pause to think: “How can I impress this crowd with my eloquence while I’m dying?”

The Apostle Paul may have witnessed Jesus Christ's crucifixion and his dying moments. If this is so, he would have carried those memories with him all his life.

Furthermore, Paul may have been afflicted with some serious illness. This ailment may be what Paul meant when, at another time, he told the Corinthians that "*I was given a thorn in my flesh.*" (2 Corinthians 12:7). This "*thorn*" could have been some tropical fever. Various diseases like malaria and dengue fever exist among people who live in warm and humid climates, and they can leave the victim weak and trembling. I have witnessed just such a case in Jamaica.

Such an illness would lead Paul to understand the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord [Jesus Christ] to take it [this "thorn"] away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

Then Paul added, for his own part:

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Before this, Saul the Pharisee had hunted down many followers of Jesus, sent some to prison, and oversaw the execution of others. As stated before, he may even have witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, the leader of this

movement. However, while he was on one more mission, this time on the way to Damascus, to find more "heretics," he was blinded by a great light, and he fell to the ground, where he heard a voice: "*Saul, why do you persecute me?*" And then the voice identified himself: "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*" (Acts 9:4-5).

At this point, the life of the old "Saul" came to an end. Now he was no longer "Saul," but a new man soon known as "*Paul the Apostle.*" His mission was to bring the good news of Jesus and his Kingdom to the world. In other words, he would preach about "*Jesus Christ,*" the Son of God who had been "*crucified*" on behalf of all believers, and was then raised from the dead, to sit on the right hand of his Father in heaven, and oversee his disciples, especially Paul, as they witnessed to Jesus as the true Messiah.

Now we may ask again, "What does Paul mean when he refers to his preaching about '*Christ and him crucified*'?"

Is he remembering the many times during his travels and his activities when he almost died?

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger

from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

So, as Paul remembered his illnesses and many dangers, and the numerous times he had almost died, he may have considered how he might reach the believers in Corinth, especially their “leaders.” He wanted to help them see that there was more to the gospel than making a reputation for yourself, sitting in the highest seat, making decisions, and giving orders.

Paul’s thoughts went to the gospel’s centerpiece, that is, *“Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”* He may have thought of an approach like this to this problem in Corinth:

Brothers and sisters, I see that your community has been divided into antagonistic camps led by strong personalities, and I am sad that this is the case. The men who are dividing the One Body are more interested in building a reputation and developing a following than in teaching and instructing others. They spend their time trying to find fault with others and arguing over words. They spend more time gossiping and criticizing one another than helping one another. They spend even more time tearing down what others have labored to build.

So, after observing and hearing these men, I have decided to teach them, and the rest of you, the simplest facts of our faith. I will teach you about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and how he prayed with tears falling to the ground, and how he cried and struggled, and how he laid down his life for us. A wondrous story about his love.

I have seen Christ’s sufferings, and following my Lord and King, I have experienced more suffering than you can ever imagine. I have walked in my Lord’s footsteps, felt his terrible pains, and understood some measure of his love, for all of us. Yes, I can tell you all about Christ and his torture when he was nailed to a tree. He came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. So, I must tell you that I may not impress any of you with my appearance or my voice. But I will show you, as best I can, the glory and beauty and peace to be found in our Savior and his Kingdom.

While you all are trying to gain a following among the naive and gullible members, I will try to show you Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I will try to show you how to follow him, putting away your pride and serving your brothers and sisters with love and kindness. It may be all that I can do, but I pray that it will be enough.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:3).

*George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX*

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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

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