

“Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps, set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest” (Jer. 31:21)

The Living Way

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**Upholding the Original Christadelphian Faith concerning:
“The Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12)**

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“I saw, and behold, a white horse; and he that sat up on him had a bow: and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2)

“Thou Art the Christ” – Sound Doctrine Revealed by the Father

“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16.) This was not just a moment of clarity — it was sound doctrine, revealed directly by the Father. And it is upon this revealed truth, that the Lord Jesus Christ builds His ecclesia. Let us walk through these verses and understand their weight.

1. The Context – False Teaching

In verse 11, Jesus warns his disciples to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” In verse 12, the disciples realise He is referring to doctrine — false teaching. This is the context in which Jesus leads them into a conversation about who He truly is. He begins with a warning: that the teachings of religious leaders can corrupt and blind. As Paul later says in Galatians chapter 5, verse 9: “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” So, it would seem ... Jesus is showing us: doctrine matters.

2. The Great Question

In verse 13, Jesus asks: “*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*” (Matt 16:15) It would appear the answers reflect confusion — some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, some Jeremiah. Then He asks the question directly to His disciples: “But whom say **ye** that I am?” It’s not enough to repeat what others say. This question demanded a personal answer - and it still does today.

3. The Great Confession & Other Accounts of the Same

Peter answers in verse 16: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Let’s break that down:

- “Thou art the Christ” — the anointed one, the promised Messiah. The one spoken of in Psalm 2 and Isaiah 61.
- “The Son of the living God” - not a co-equal part of a Trinity, but the one whom God begat, empowered, and sent. [See John 14:28 “my Father is greater than I”](#)

Peter’s confession is confirmed throughout the Scriptures. Let’s look at some of them:

- Gabriel to Mary: “That holy thing... shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).
- At His baptism: “This is my beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17).
- At the Transfiguration: “This is my beloved Son: hear ye him” (Luke 9:35).
- Nathanael: “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God” (John 1:49).
- Martha: “I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God” (John 11:27).
- The disciples in the storm: “Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33).
- John 6:69: “Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”
- Acts 8:37: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

Let's look at some Old Testament accounts:

- 2 Samuel 7:14 – “I will be his father, and he shall be my son.”
- Psalm 2:7 – “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” [see also Acts 13:33](#).
- Psalm 89:26–27 – “He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God... Also I will make him my firstborn.” – [see also Colossians 1:18](#).
- Isaiah 7:14 – “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”
- Isaiah 9:6 – “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.”

Even the unclean spirits recognised him:

- Legion cried out in Mark 5:7: “Jesus, thou Son of the most high God.”
- Others confessed him in similar words (Matthew 8:29; Luke 4:41).
- Mark 3:11 records: “Unclean spirits... fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.”

Yet, like a child, the demoniacs simply say what they see and see what they say. As it is written, “The devils also believe, and tremble.” (James 2:19).

In the case of Legion, the man who had been tormented was now healed.

“Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on the” (Mark 5:19)

The man longed to remain with The Lord, yet Jesus sent him home to bear witness.

He was found “sitting, clothed, and in his right mind” (verse 15), meaning that before, he had been in the wrong mind - just as all men and women are before the revelation of Jesus Christ opens their hearts. This isn't to say all were mentally unwell before, but we were all certainly in darkness and children of disobedience. See (Philippians. 2:5) & (Ephesians 2:2).

And likewise Mary Magdalene, from whom the Lord cast out seven devils — both her healing and that of Legion were among the many mighty works of our master, that shone forth as living testimonies of the compassion and glory of God.

4. Other Sons of God – But One Only Begotten

Scripture does indeed call others “sons of God”:

- Adam was the son of God (Luk. 3:38)
- Angels (Job 1:6), as ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14).
- Israel as a nation (Exodus 4:22) [also \(Hosea 11:1\)](#)
- Jewish judges and prophets (Psalm 82:6).
- True Believers by adoption (Romans 8:14)

But Hebrews 1:5 makes the difference plain:

“For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?”

Angels are sons as ministering spirits, Israel is a son by covenant, and we are sons by adoption into the New Covenant. But Christ alone is the only begotten Son, declared by the Father Himself. This is a principle of sound doctrine, and it points us directly to Christ, the true cornerstone.

Although Peter's confession is not unique, it is consistent, powerful, and doctrinal. And it formed a key principle in which the foundation of the Ecclesia was laid, this truth binding us together then, as it does today.

5. Doctrine Is Revealed, Not Invented

Jesus responds in verse 17:

“Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

Peter didn't come up with this — it was revealed to him. Even though he may not have understood certain things, he was able to receive this truth and confess it.

This truth didn't come from rabbis, or tradition — it came from heaven:

- Matthew 11:27 – “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:10–14 – spiritual things are only understood through the Spirit. – also Romans 10:11 “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”
- Even our calling in Christ is by God's initiative: John 6:65 – “No man can come to me, except it were given unto him of my Father.”

So as we see in the case of Peter. Nothing is given unless God gives it, likewise he taketh away. Nothing exists without Him. All is of Him, through Him, and for his will and good pleasure. He upholds ALL the Law of Nature by his Free Spirit. By grace he gives Eternal life, ONLY through Jesus Christ - the Son of the living God, Abbas Arm of Salvation, and his Good Doctrine - The things Concerning Jesus Christ and the kingdom of GOD.

6. The Rock and the Ecclesia

Matthew 16:18:

“Upon this rock I will build my church.”

The rock is not Peter the man literally - The true Rock - The cornerstone is Christ. So, could it be this sound doctrine that Peter confessed: “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God” Christ builds his church - his spiritual house? By this Peter being a living Stone? See (1 Peter 2:4–5).

As Solomon's stones were prepared quietly to fit the Temple, so are True believers shaped now, to fit Christ the Cornerstone, being developed to bear the image of him (1 Kings 6:7)

We see Christ as the cornerstone in Isaiah 28:16 & Ephesians 2:20–21. Also 1 Corinthians 3:11 – “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

We know Peter would be one of the pillars of the disciples when Jesus restored him. To be a pillar we must have sound doctrine - The Good Doctrine revealed by GOD.

- If we are to be oracles of God. When we speak. We should ONLY utter GOD's revealed word to us through scripture, Not the Philosophical imaginations of men. (1 Peter 4:11, [Ezekiel 3:26](#), [1 Peter 4:11](#))
- We cannot be oracles of God if the truth is not in us. Which is the case in the religious and political systems Of the Harlot - The blind leading the blind.
- In Matthew chapter 7, verse 24, Jesus taught that the wise man builds his house upon the rock, while the foolish man builds upon the sand. To build on sand is easier, but the foundation will not stand. To build upon rock requires effort and steadfastness — yet it is the only foundation that leads to life everlasting. Any other ground is shifting sand.

So too, the Ecclesia must be built upon Christ and his Doctrine, the true and living foundation.

So... What is that house that will stand?

Jesus prayed in John 17:3:

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

7. The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail

Verse 18 continues: “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

- “Hell” here = Hades, the grave.
- Gates = authority, confinement.

Could Jesus be saying here, the power of the grave will not overcome His Ecclesia, founded on the truth concerning him, first identifying who he is and the one whom sent him?

8. Sound Doctrine vs. Man-made Fables

- Peter confessed: “Son of the living God.”
- He did not say: “God the Son.” GOD the son is not found anywhere in scripture.

Let's hear what John said by the Spirit:

- 1 John 4:15 – “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him.”
- 1 John 5:5 – “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”
- (2 John 1:9) “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”

So let's look at the Spirit that abideth NOT in the doctrine of Christ:

The phrase “God the Son” arose from human tradition and Apostasy - “the wisdom of the prince of the power of the air.” - The Wisdom of this world, the vanity of men's minds. That same spirit denies our Creator and those who claim to be shepherds, feeding off the fat of the lambs - pervert his Law and testimony - his very purpose from creation to salvation and reformation. Instead of declaring “For it's written saith the Lord, they declare “For it's written saith man” We certainly hear this among much of secular denominations today, and throughout the ages, let alone the Atheist. As Robert Roberts terms the former: “Christendom Astray”!

Would it be accurate for me to say, the phrase “God the Son” echoes the first lie in Eden, “Ye shall not surely die,” and therefore belongs to the same spirit of error that opposes the truth?

Let's look at the serpent seed & it's Rebellion against GOD.

- Genesis 3:1–5 – Serpent's lie: “Ye shall not surely die.”
- Genesis 4:3–8; 1 John 3:12 – Cain offers up unacceptable sacrifice and murders Abel.
- Numbers 16:1–35 – Korah, Dathan, Abiram rebel against Moses.

- Leviticus 10:1–3 – Nadab and Abihu offer strange fire.
- 1 Samuel 15:22–23 – Saul rejects God’s word; rebellion likened to witchcraft.
- 1 Kings 21:25; 2 Kings 9:22 – Ahab and Jezebel spread idolatry and deceit.
- Isaiah 8:20 – Those who speak not according to God’s Word have no light.
- Jeremiah 23:16–32 – False prophets speak visions of their own hearts.
- Matthew 15:3–9 – Pharisees set aside God’s command by tradition, blaspheming The Holy Spirit denying the power thereof, by denying Christ’s works witnessed by themselves and many.
- Matthew 23:33 – “Serpents, generation of vipers.”
- Romans 1:25 – They changed the truth of God into a lie.
- 2 Corinthians 11:3 – As the serpent beguiled Eve through subtlety, so their minds were corrupted and drawn away from the purity and simplicity that is in Christ.
- 1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7–9 – Denying Christ come in the flesh = spirit of antichrist.
- 2 Peter 2:1–3; Jude verses 10–19 – False teachers and ungodly men follow their own lusts.
- Ephesians 2:1–2 – Spirit of disobedience; prince of the power of the air.
- James 3:15 – Earthly, sensual, devilish wisdom.

- Revelation 12:9 – That old serpent, the deceiver of the world.
- Romans 16:20 – God will bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

The conclusion of the matter is this: there is Truth, and there is Apostasy — nothing in between. And that Truth is found only in God, revealed through His Son, Christ Jesus.

9. The Importance of Doctrine – A Scriptural Mandate

- 1 Timothy 4:16 – “Take heed unto the doctrine... for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”
- Titus 2:1 – “Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.”
- 2 Timothy 3:16 – “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine...”
- 2 Timothy 3:15 – Scripture makes us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ.
- Romans 6:17 – “Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine...”
- Proverbs 4:2 – “I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.”

So we conclude: Good doctrine is central to salvation!

10. Peter’s Journey – Weakness and Restoration

- Peter sank for having little faith (Matthew 14:30)
- He rebuked Christ (Matthew 16:22).
- He denied Him (Matthew 26:69–75).

But Jesus restored him - see John 21:15–19. And subsequently, Peter boldly testified, “God hath made that same Jesus... both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36). He may have failed in action at times as all of us do, but he never abandoned the Good doctrine he Declared in Matthew 16:16 and died in his Testimony, as many others did.

Conclusion:

The great question was: “But whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). And Peter’s answer was not just a moment of clarity — it was revelation. It was the truth that saves.

- The true foundation: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
- Peter fulfilled his commission exactly as Christ said - he used the keys of the Kingdom: first in Acts chapter 2, when he opened the gospel to the Jews, and again in Acts chapter 10, when he opened it to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. [By contrast the Jewish leaders, took away “the key of knowledge” \(Luke. 11:52\).](#)

The record shows his work clearly. He was never a bishop of Rome, nor the head of any hierarchy as later claimed. The authority he held was exercised through the preaching of the truth - not through the custodianship claimed by the apostate church.”

- The mystery of godliness revealed: Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh Yeshua HaMashiach — “I will be who I will be - Saviour Anointed.”

This is Abbas memorial Name - first revealed in Christ, and in the future to be revealed again in the multitudinous Christ — the saints in whom His glory will be manifested. Yawheh is not just a title, but it's a declaration of his divine purpose: see Exodus 3:14, 1 Timothy 3:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:10, Romans 8:19.

Let us hold fast to the Doctrine in Christ Jesus, continue to reject false creeds and men’s traditions, and walk in the hope of Israel. For our master said: “Salvation ***is of the Jews***” (John 4:22).

We are a privileged few to know these things, may Abba’s mercy always rest upon us. as we are gathered together in fellowship, Christ says:

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them

me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:27-29)

Closing Reflection:

All is of God — nothing is given unless He gives it.

He is the Almighty, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent - "The Ancient of Days" (Daniel 7:22). Through Him and by Him are all things, and to Him belongs all glory.

It was the Father who revealed His Son, raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand — far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.

Kieran Waite

"No Contradiction"

A voice from the past in 1874!

"You said in 1869 that there was no change in Adam's nature at the time he transgressed. Now you seem to say there was; I see in the same article (1869) you speak of condemnation 'running in the blood, 'which looks like the same position you take now. Does not the threat, 'dying thou shalt die, 'show that Adam was dying?'—(E.C.)

Answer:

Is there any difference in nature between a man in a state of health and a man dying of small pox? No. Both men have the same nature, but it is the same nature *in different states*. So Adam before and after transgression was the same nature, but in two different states—**the second state being expressed by the word mortal or subject to death, which is not affirmable of the first. The sentence of death became a physical law of his being; hence it has passed on us who are derived from him.** Its passing on us would be incomprehensible on any other principle. God's sentences are carried out differently from man's, who has no power beyond mechanical acts. When God decrees death, "we have the sentence of death *in ourselves*" (2 Cor. 1:9) as Paul expresses it. **It is a law "working in our members."** When man decrees death, he has to carry it out with rope or guillotine. This difference has to be kept in view. We bear "the image of the earthy" in its second or condemned

state, in which it became “heir” to “ills” unknown to the first. Hence the proverb. When the Dr. speaks of “nature unchanged taking its course,” he means nature unchanged into the spiritual body. He does not mean that the law of death, inoperative before, did not set in. He does not contradict himself. The glib assertion that he does only indicates the superficial thinking of the speaker. “Dying, thou shalt die” is a Hebraism not to be understood according to the English idiom. It occurs in the description of many other acts: *e.g.*, “living thou shalt live;” “running thou shalt run;” “hearing, thou shalt hear,” &c., &c. It expresses both the act and the result as future to the time of speaking. Hence, when it was said to Adam, “dying thou shalt die,” it amounted to an intimation that the “dying” would not commence until transgression. No one having understanding of the Hebrew idiom would suggest that it meant he *was* dying.

Robert Roberts 1874

David and Bathsheba

Ecclesiastes chapter 10 describes how: “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour” (Eccl. 10:1). We have an illustration of this in the life of David, a man who was renowned for being after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). His sin with Bathsheba sullies the record of his military prowess and adherence to the ways of Yahweh. Wherever his life is made known, so is his indiscretion, as a little folly in the apothecary’s ointment. Although he did it in private, it would be made known before all – yet he did repent and find forgiveness. Hence, Romans 4:6-7 provides David as an example of how God “justifieth the ungodly” through their repentance and faith.

The mischief began with David lying upon his bed. Yahweh had chosen him to be a warrior, to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, yet in 2 Samuel 11:2, we find him not on the frontline fighting earnestly (as on previous occasions), but lying in bed, enjoying home comforts. Thus we read:

“and it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof, he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon” (2 Sam. 11:2).

James describes the process of temptation in terms of a seducing woman:

“... every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:14-15).

In this, we see the example of David, enticed by the beauty of Bathsheba. He was seduced, and engaged with an adulterous union with her. Then, as a result of that sin, a child was produced – which child died in due course. David succumbed to the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes” (1 Jno. 2:16), and entangled himself with the cares of this life, rather than pleasing He who had chosen him to be a soldier (2 Tim. 2:4).

Proverbs 24 describes the folly of sleeping in a time when diligence is required:

“yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man” (Prov. 24:33-34).

Hence in Nathan’s parable, sin, as a travelling man, came knocking at the door, and David used the substance of another man to satisfy his needs. Rather than to make a covenant with his eyes (Job. 31:1), he yielded to Sin, and trespassed against Uriah, and also Yahweh Himself. He “arose from off his bed”, and looked upon Uriah’s wife, to lust after her (cp. Mat. 5:28), and committed adultery. Moreover, he also sought to cover up his sin, by inviting Uriah, who was fighting on the front line, to return home, and enjoy home comforts, including lying with his wife. Then, it would have appeared that the child would be his rather than David’s! But Uriah was a man of integrity. Although he was a Gentile, he fought in Israel’s battles under the leadership of Josiah, and was one of David’s trusted valiant men (1 Chron. 11:41). His heart was set in fighting the battle, and engaging in a warfare of faith. He refused home comforts, as the record informs us:

“and David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king’s house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house, with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house. And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? Why then didst thou not go down unto thine house. And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents; and my lord Joab, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, ***I will not do this thing***” (2 Sam. 11:8-11).

Hence then David sought to destroy Uriah, by the hands of the enemies of Israel:

“... it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die” (2 Sam. 11:14-15).

So it was that David destroyed Uriah by the hand of the Ammonites – in a manner that was similar to faithless Saul’s attempt to destroy David by the hand of the Philistines (1 Sam. 18:25). Indeed, the Jews had Jesus himself put to death by the hand of the Romans.

Nathan the prophet was instrumental in inducing David to repent. He came to David, and described a scenario which mirrored the actions of David, albeit in a veiled way, and invited him to pass judgment upon the wronged party. David, in his response, went beyond the requirements of the Law, and pronounced his verdict: “David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, as Yahweh liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die ...” Then Nathan revealed the real application of this scenario: *“Thou art the man ...”*. Whereupon David confessed his sin: “I have sinned against Yahweh”.

This is the background for several of the Psalms, particularly Psalms 32 and 51, which we are to shortly consider. But it is significant to note that there are also a number of allusions back to these events in the New Testament book of Romans, and chapter 2.

ALLUSIONS IN ROMANS 2

Romans chapter 2 reads: “thou art inexcusable O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another; thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things” (verse 1). So, as in condemning “the man” of Nathan’s story, David was condemning himself. Verse 22 reads:

“Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery”

– which fits David’s example as an adulterer. Verse 16 speaks of “the day when God shall judge the secrets of men”, whereas 2 Sam. 12:12 records the words of Nathan: “thou didst it secretly”. Again, verse 24 speaks of how “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you ...” which echoes verse 14 of 2 Sam. 12: “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die”.

But interestingly, as an allusion of how a Gentile – Uriah was a example to a Jew, we read in Romans 2:

“... when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness” (Rom. 2:14-15).

Uriah had the principles of the law written in his heart, and his conscience would not allow him to go home, when he should be contending on the battle front with his lord Joab.

However, whilst in Romans, we look to chapter 4, a few pages later, which alludes back to David’s repentance, and acceptance before his God:

“... to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, he faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:5-8).

David then, is an example of the ungodly being justified by faith. It is interesting that the last two sentences from this quote come from Psalm 32; another Psalm to do with the repentance of David following his sin with Bath-sheba. This Psalm reveals that his sin played heavily upon his mind. Before he confessed it before the prophet, David speaks of how it troubled him greatly: “when I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my groaning all the day long” (Psa. 32:3). But having confessed it, he spoke of the blessedness of the man who is forgiven, as cited above.

It is against this background that we turn to Psalm 51, which again details David’s confession, and request for forgiveness:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. **Wash me** thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me” (Psa. 51:1-3).

Notice the washing here: the washing away of his sin. His sin came about as a direct result of seeing Bath-sheba washing herself upon the roof of her house. That was the beginning, when his lust drew him away, being enticed

by that which he saw (Jas. 1:14). But now, the penitent David beseeches Yahweh to blot out his sin, and to wash him from it.

There does seem to be an allusion here, to the Trial of Jealousy as described in Numbers chapter 5. This chapter describes the procedure to be followed if a man suspected that his wife had committed adultery. As part of the process, the priest had to take some of the dust from the floor of the Tabernacle, mix it with water, and give it to the woman to drink. There were a number of curses that were written in a book, which the woman would experience, should she be found guilty. These curses were then blotted out of the book by the same water that the woman was to partake of: if found not guilty, she would not experience the curses described.

In the case of David, it was he who was guilty. Some speculate as to Bath-sheba's own willingness to participate, but the record does not condemn her for what took place. In this procedure, if the woman was innocent, the curses were blotted out – but David in recognizing his own guilt, asked for his sins to be blotted out instead.

Returning to Psalm 32, in it, David spoke of his troubled conscience (Psa. 32:3) and subsequent relief at having made confession:

“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Yahweh; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Psa. 32:5).

Indeed, as we saw above, the first verse of this Psalm is cited in Romans 4, and given a general application to believers:

“... David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:6-8).

The true believers in Christ have their faith imputed as righteousness, and are amongst the justified ungodly. The Lord has blotted out their sin because of their repentance (Acts 3:19), after the example of David of old. By contrast to Uriah, whose condemnation was written, as he was overcome by the Ammonitish power, it is said of Jesus that he has “forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:13-15).

We can take great comfort from the examples of both David and Uriah – a Jew and a Gentile. David, despite committing adultery and murder, was forgiven the iniquity of his trespass. And Uriah's heart, rather than indulging in home comforts, was with his lord Joab on the front line of the battle. He was condemned by the writing of the letter sent by his hand, and overcome by the power of the Ammonites. Interestingly, his name means: "Yah is my Light." The Lord Jesus has spoiled principalities and powers, and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances against us. We can look forward in faith and anticipation, so that being delivered from the works and kingdom of darkness, we can be given "the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12).

Christopher Maddocks

Responding to The Word

In the various contexts of our daily readings, we come across many people's attitude to the Word: some who feared and trembled at it, and others who rebelled against, and despised it. In all of these things we have examples for our learning: examples of faithfulness, and examples of disbelief. We shall consider both, in our pursuit for exhortation and encouragement.

THE KING OF JUDAH

Jeremiah chapter 36 recounts the giving of a particular revelation to Jeremiah, when he was in prison. So "Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Yahweh, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book" (Verse 4). Those who initially heard it, had the approach described in Isaiah 66 (above): "**they were afraid both one and another**, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words" (Jer. 36:16). So they approached the king, Jehoiakim, and arrangements were made to read the words before him. His reaction, however, was very different:

"it came to pass that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. **Yet they were not afraid ...**" (Jer. 36:23-24).

Here is the example of the Apostasy down through the Ages. Many times men have sought to suppress and destroy the words of the Living God, but by His Grace it has survived through to our day. "Yet they were not afraid ..." – this

is the natural man: **“There is no fear of God** before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18). So it was that through his lack of obedience to Divine requirements, the king was overcome by the power of Sin, as vested in the Babylonian army.

THE KING OF BABYLON

The events we have just described took place, we are told, “in the fifth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah king of Judah” (Jer. 36:9). Chapter 25 verse 1 spoke of events “in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah King of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon”. We see then, that Nebuchadnezzar’s first year was the fourth of Jehoiakim, and that therefore Jehoiakim’s fifth year was Nebuchadnezzar’s second. Interestingly, the events of Daniel chapter 2 are said to have happened “in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar” (Dan. 2:1) – and this therefore means that these events happened in the very same year as Jehoiakim sought to destroy the Word of God. And what a difference we see in the attitude of this Gentile Monarch! Following the revelation of the Image described earlier in this chapter, we see Nebuchadnezzar’s response: “The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is that **your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets**, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret” (Dan. 2:47).

The very same year in which Judah’s king despised and sought to destroy the Word, Nebuchadnezzar recognised the greatness of Israel’s God, and the revelation that was made known to him. Even so it has been from the cutting off of the Israelitish olive branches (Rom. 11), that because of the Jewish rebellion against their Messiah, Gentiles come to accept and embrace Israel’s Hope, and look forward to that day when the kingdoms of men shall have an end, with the God of Heaven’s kingdom being established in their place.

It is interesting to note that Nebuchadnezzar’s recognition of Israel’s Deity goes beyond lip service: it would appear that when the Babylonian army came against Zedekiah’s forces, they did so in recognition that they were doing the will of Yahweh. So Nebuchadnezzar **“gave charge concerning Jeremiah** to Nebuzar-adan that captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee” (Jer. 39:11-12). So Babylon’s king knew about the prophet Jeremiah – could that have been through Daniel? We know of a certainty that Daniel was familiar with Jeremiah’s prophecies, for Daniel 9:2 tells us that he understood them. Could it be therefore that Daniel, who had access

to the King made request concerning Jeremiah? This seems even more likely when we read Jeremiah 40:

“... the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said unto him, Yahweh thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. Now Yahweh hath brought it, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you” (Jer. 40:2-3).

How marvellous is this! The captain of the guard not only knew about Jeremiah: he also knew that the Babylonians were bringing the judgments of God upon the place, because of Israel’s disobedience! How appropriate are the words of Proverbs: “whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed (Jehoiakim): but he that feareth the commandment (Nebuchadnezzar) shall be rewarded” (Prov. 13:13).

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

By contrast to Judah’s King, Jeremiah delighted in the law of Yahweh. 2 Kings 22:8 describes how Hilkiah the high priest “found the book of the law in the house of Yahweh”. Jeremiah (Hilkiah’s son - Jer. 1:1) seems to allude to this discovery, in saying “thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart ...” (Jer. 15:16). Desiring to assimilate the word of Yahweh into his very being, Jeremiah sought after the bread of the word. The Psalmist wrote: “Taste and see that Yahweh is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psa. 34:8), and this is what Jeremiah did. Trusting in Yahweh’s power to save, he sought to devour the spiritual bread that had been found, and which Jehoiakim sought to destroy.

However, preaching the message of the Word had personal repercussions for Jeremiah:

“... I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of Yahweh was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily” (Jer. 20:7-8).

Here, we can identify with the experiences of the prophet. Not that we, in our day, suffer the same degree of persecution; but that as we proclaim the gospel message, we will invariable find ourselves mocked, and reproached. But how do we deal with this situation? The human tendency is to stop preaching: to

cease that which is bringing reproach upon us. That was Jeremiah's initial approach:

"Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer.20:9).

Jeremiah tried to evade his duty, to cease from speaking Yahweh's Word. But in practice, he found that he could not: the Word was as a fire in his bones: he could not help himself from withholding it. Herein we see an example for our own circumstance: do we ever feel that others might mock us for the things we believe and stand for? Are we ever reluctant to preach the word regardless of the consequences? Jeremiah provides the answer. Let us preach in earnest, and leave the consequences to Yahweh, knowing that at the last, He will plead our cause.

THE APOSTLES

The Apostles also had this same attitude of mind. They were called, and commanded by the religious leaders of their day, "not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus". How did they respond to this?

"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19).

Again:

"We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)

And yet again, the prophet Amos wrote in a similar vein:

"the lion hath roared, who will not fear? Adonai Yahweh hath spoken, who **can but prophesy?**" (Amos 3:8).

When the word of Yahweh is sent forth, though it may fall on deaf ears, it will nevertheless accomplish the purpose for which it was sent – of this there can be no doubt (Isa. 55:11). We are but agents, part of the overall process by which men and women are given the opportunity to come unto Israel's God,

and be sharers of the glory yet to be revealed. Some – even many – may disbelieve, but that makes no difference as to the accomplishment of Yahweh’s overall purpose: “what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea let God be true, but every man a liar ...” (Rom. 3:3-4).

ZEDEKIAH

Returning to the example of Judah’s wayward kings, we see the attitude of mind of Zedekiah towards the prophet, who had been imprisoned for speaking out the words of Yahweh:

“Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from Yahweh...?” (Jer. 37:17).

Notice, Zedekiah was a man of shadows: he would not approach the prophet directly, but “secretly”. So the word came:

“... And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon” (Jer. 37:17)

In the next chapter, we read of an ultimatum given to Zedekiah by the prophet, that if he would surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, he and his house would live. But if he resisted: “then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.” (Jer. 38:18).

How did the king respond?

“And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen unto the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, ***and they mock me***” (Jer. 38:19).

What a contrast we have between Zedekiah and the prophet! One who was mocked, and persecuted by his own people for the Truth’s Sake, and an old and foolish king who would no more be admonished (Eccl. 4:13). Fearing the people, and how they would mock him, Zedekiah went forward to his own destruction rather than obey the commandments of Yahweh.

OURSELVES

Against the background of the various individuals we have considered, we see examples of belief, and unbelief. In the Bible that we have before us, we have a powerful thing: the “power of God unto salvation” to those that believe. How do we approach the Living Word? The Thessalonians set forth an example:

“when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thes.2:13)

The Word is a living power, able to transform the lives of those who receive it. It is not a passive thing, but rather, once it is permitted access to men’s hearts, it works within them dispelling works and thoughts of darkness, that ultimately Yahweh be glorified. So, we do not receive it in the same way as we might read books and novels etc written by the heathen that tantalise the fleshly disposition of all men, but as servants of the living God, it becomes an influence for good, being “able so save our souls.”

Again, the well-known words to Timothy:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Notice the point here: if we contract a workman to do some repairs or building for us in our houses, how would we react if when we came home at the end of the day and the workman had done nothing? Even so, we have a work to accomplish, labouring in the Word and in the doctrine. Only if we assimilate the principles of the Word of God into our hearts and minds will it be able to have an effect upon us, preparing us for the coming day of glory.

And yet again, more well known words to Timothy:

“till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine ... take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:13,16).

Notice particularly the command to “give attendance to ... *doctrine*”. In our day, the preaching of doctrine is increasingly unpopular. Folk don’t like to hear

the doctrines, and so there is a move towards so-called “non-doctrinal preaching”. As a substitute for the doctrines that give life, some ecclesias engage in other activities, such as Teddy Bear Picnics. As justification, they point out the numbers that they have been able to get to attend – yet their attendance is based on activities that have nothing to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the Word that saves, and if we remove that word from our preaching, we are presenting nothing but an empty husk that can accomplish nothing.

In all of these examples we have seen, they direct our minds to our Master and Redeemer: the One who was the “word made flesh”. He did not shirk from the preaching of the Word, even though the adversary crucified him for it. In him, as our Elder Brother, we have the supreme example to uphold. We see in the bread and in the wine before us the emblems of Christ’s obedience to His Father’s Will. As we partake of these things, let us therefore “taste, and see that the Lord is good”, and resolve to receive, follow, and obey the calling of the Gospel. Only by this means can we obtain entry into that glorious kingdom-age to come.

Christopher Maddocks

Vanity and Glory

DAILY Readings: — DEUT. 20.; ECC. 12.; ACTS 12. We have been singing and praying together, dear brethren and sisters: —

*“Sate with truth and love
Our hungry souls:
Fill from Thy springs above
Thine altar bowls.”*

Short of the immortal satisfaction of the Kingdom of God, these are the occasions upon which we can most closely approximate to that satisfaction, for here we partake of the truth and love of God, that ministration by the Spirit which supported even our Lord Jesus Christ in the days of the flesh. It all focalises in Christ, whether we are reading from Moses, from Solomon, or from the apostles of our Lord and Saviour.

We are reading together in the first portion of our readings the last book of Moses, the book of Deuteronomy—a book which Christ read; a book from

which he quoted in repelling the temptations in the wilderness; a book which spoke of him beforehand, and concerning which he said to his own countrymen, “Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me, for Moses wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” The more we read of Moses’ writings the more we believe Christ’s words. We have been reading some of Moses’ utterances in this 18th chapter, and the occasion is striking—it is rebuke, and prohibition of what is still most popular in these last days of the Gentiles, witchcraft and necromancy; it means literally a divining from the dead, and that is the outstanding feature of the popular cultus of spiritualism which is founded on the first lie, “Thou shalt not surely die.”

THE PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES

These practices were current in the land of Palestine in Moses’ times and were sternly prohibited to Israel. “The Lord thy God hath not suffered thee, O Israel, to do so. He will raise up unto thee a prophet like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken. The Lord spake unto me, saying, I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”

Moses then spoke thus of the prophet who was to come, and he has come, and Jesus is he; and even the strange military orders that we have read—that is, those who have read them in chap. 12. this morning—are not without their bearing on Christ, both antitypically as concerning the truth, and more literally as concerning the literal warfare of the age to come.

When the hosts of Israel went to war the officers were to speak, and say: “What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it.” What a merciful provision and how unlike “the times of the Gentiles.” “And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.”

A Jew pleaded that before a Gentile court during the late war, but, alas! the military officials were not Jews. But this is the part that affects us: “What man

is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." And that applies to the Truth's warfare—do not be fearful and fainthearted, lest you affect your brethren. It is better not to enter the battle at all than not to go into it with the determination to fight through.

And now in connection with the cities; when they came to a city they were to proclaim peace to it—of course, on terms of unconditional surrender. If it accepted peace the inhabitants were to be tributaries and serve Israel; if not, there was war. But in the war they were not to destroy the fruit trees, which was another merciful provision. But then there was an exception to this matter—there were certain cities and certain people altogether devoted to destruction and extermination.

THE AMORITES

The Amorites were given 400 years to fill up the cup of their iniquity; then there was brought upon them a chosen generation of Israel to take possession of their land. That is what is going to happen in the earth, and there will be the same discrimination. We see it in the prophecy of Daniel—the fourth beast is devoted to utter destruction. "I saw till the beast was destroyed, and his body given to the burning flame." The others were spared, answering to the type in Israel's time. There are peoples not so responsible as the European body politic—nations afar off, who have not had the same opportunities. They will come up; the Word of God will come to them, and if they submit, it will be meet. But that European system is doomed, destruction is before it. And as regards Rome itself, in that terrific vision of the Apocalypse it is blotted out like Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus in Deuteronomy, even in that unpromising chapter, we see how it connects with Christ.

As we look at the last chapter of Ecclesiastes it has a pathetic illustrative point to it this morning, in the recent death of our old sister Emerson, aged nearly 100. She has long been a sort of land-mark among us. "Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt cry, I have no pleasure in them." We read this, of course, in connection with the youth of Christ, and we have this singular and beautiful reflection with regard to him, that he never knew old age. "Take me not away in the midst of my years," was his prayer; and yet he was put to death, but immediately restored to life. He was a young man when he died, and a young man when he rose; he will be a young man for ever. But although

he knew no old age as so pathetically portrayed by Solomon, yet he fulfilled to the uttermost the opening exhortation of this chapter: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.”

We look at Jesus, at twelve years of age, tarrying behind in Jerusalem, hearing the doctors, and asking them questions, and all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. Of course, he is the outstanding illustration of this, though there are others in the Scriptures. We look at Joseph—a young man, a righteous young man—getting into trouble first of all because he brings an evil report of his elder brothers to his father, and getting into bitter trouble later on, until, as a type of Christ, he is exalted to lordship over Egypt.

We look at Moses, a “goodly child,” and cannot doubt that the seeds of the covenants were sown in his mind by his parents, and it brought forth fruit in his dispute with the Hebrew. What if it brought about his exile? We know his mission and its nature, and what remains in the Kingdom of God.

If we look through the history of Israel we get another illustration in good King Josiah, who instituted such striking reforms in Israel. And in the New Testament have we not Timothy, Paul’s son in the faith, who knew the scriptures from a child, who was beloved by the apostle, and concerning whom he said to the brethren, “Let no man despise your youth.” And coming down to this meeting, are there not many present who have given attention to this exhortation: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth”? There are; well, what comfort there is in it!

What a pathetic and beautiful picture this is. “While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them, while (for thee—we must understand this implied “relativity”)—while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened.” (They will exist when thou art gone, but not for thee). “Nor the clouds return after the rain.” What a figure of the brief vapour of human life, which “appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away.”

And so this figurative language goes on. “In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble”—the poor old man, with trembling hands and bowing knees, and toothless jaws coming together, darkening eyes and deaf ears, and fear concerning heights — “and the almond tree shall flourish.” This is the earliest of trees to blossom in the land, and with its masses of white blooms

very suggestive of the idea here of old age. "And the grasshopper shall be a burden." The verb is reflexive here — "shall be a burden to itself," or, as R.V. margin, "shall drag itself along." The angular lines of the grasshopper are very suggestive of an old man, bent and bowed down, with elbows stuck out, with a stick in his hand. "And desire shall fail, because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern." "Then," says the preacher, "shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

Yea, and the wise man will recognise it to the full, whether in youth or in old age. "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," said the Lord Jesus. The spirit is not the man, it is God's. The man is that organism in the divine image, held together by the Spirit of God, energising him by the mode of life, whether by blood, refreshed by the breathing of the atmosphere, or that higher life, of which we know nothing experimentally. The Spirit of God in that higher life renders a being independent of atmospheric conditions, so that he can ascend from the Mount of Olives to the Father's right hand. Man is the result of a combination of spirit and matter, of God's design. Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He expired, he literally died, and there was no Stephen, except "in the book of God's remembrance."

"Vanity of vanities" is the conclusion of this book, but with this reservation—there are words of life, of God. This life is vanity, but there is a better life, and with a hint of this better life, the preacher concludes, "The words of the wise are as goads, and are as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." Ah! the Lord Jesus was "the Word made flesh," he dwelt among the Israelites, and he was "the Good Shepherd," and he has the Word of Life. In the last crisis he said to his disciples, when many forsook him, "Will ye also go away? And they said unto him Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

There is the "One Shepherd," and the Word of Life, and the exhortation to us now is as strong as it was to Israel in the days of the Preacher, "By these, my son, be admonished." If his remark in that time had point concerning books, what is it now? "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." You will observe that the word "duty" is in italics. The Hebrew here is pretty well untranslatable, it means the whole existence, the *raison d'être*, as the French

say, the whole object of man's being, expressed in the words of the Apocalypse, "For thy pleasure they are, and were created." Anything else is an abortion. The words of the wise are as goads, and there is a reason behind it: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

And so we pass from the preacher of old times to the preacher of Christ's times, and onwards, and in the Acts of the Apostles, what have we before us? First of all, Peter's defence concerning preaching to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. There is something there to reflect on, and it harmonises with the position of the Amorites as described in the book of Deuteronomy. There was a sharp distinction drawn between Israel and the nations, and it figures for a moment in the episode of Peter going to the Gentiles. The distinction was so sharp that Peter needed that triple vision to break down his scruples. Even then the disciples said, "You went in to the Gentiles!" Peter said, "Truly so, but why? Under what circumstances? The Almighty by His vision broke down my scruples, and convinced me, and when I preached the Holy Spirit attested the work. What could I do in the circumstances?"

What could you do? They could only rejoice that the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles, and so it was. Even the personal experiences of Peter bring before us another and a very beautiful theme. He was apprehended by Herod the king, to please the Jews: "He killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people." But there was another proposal than Herod's at work, and that was God's; and so he was liberated in the night by an angel. Let us try to picture the scene: this man, bound, sleeping between two soldiers, and guards standing at the prison door, and presently he is conscious of a touch, and hears a voice saying, "Arise up quickly." Who is the speaker? This was an extraordinary thing in a prison, where no one is supposed to intrude. Angels' visits may be "few and far between," but there are many on record in the Bible, and a study of them is most enlightening, and, moreover, comforting.

Supposing any of us were in extremis in any way, God could liberate us like this. How would we like to be warned like this one night: "Put your clothes and boots on and follow me?" Well, this man had that experience. It was not the end of the matter, but it was an angelic deliverance. We have the assurance

of the Psalm: “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” They need not be visible; they need not touch you or command you to rise and dress; they can manipulate the forces round about you, and did so to the fathers of old. “Cast thy garment about thee and follow me,” said the angel to Peter. “And he went out and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision.” It reminds one of the allusion of Paul afterwards; he saw visions of paradise which were so real and substantial that he could not say whether they were real or not. And here is a man who had an experience so amazing that he could not say if it was real or not. The end will be like that. We have read, and thought, and talked about it, but at the end we shall be like the rest of them — “fall at his feet as dead.” But if we are of the type of the prophet Daniel, the angel will lay his hands on us, and say, “Rise up.” So we look back on these things, and realise that the things which happened to the apostles are still possibilities. We are in “the latter days,” when the Lord says he “will send his angels to gather his elect from one end of the earth to the other.”

We look at the Holy Land of old, and think of the experiences that are recorded of this angelic ministration. We look at Abraham, with his son laid on the altar, and the angel of the Lord arresting him in the act of slaying his son, and directing him to slay that typical ram of sacrifice. And right through the scriptures we might refresh our memory. We look at Moses, exiled for 40 years in a foreign country, until it would almost appear that his hope was getting a little dim, for he did not circumcise his youngest son. Yet one day the angel appears, and he is sent to deliver Israel. We look at the prophet Daniel, and see how he was delivered by the angel from the lions’ den. We look to our Lord Jesus Christ even, and see how angels heralded his birth; how an angel appeared at the right side of the altar of incense, before the birth of “the prophet of the Highest.”

What a beautiful coincidence here with the type and ritual—the angel at the side of the altar of incense; how naturally you drop to the right meaning. In the Apocalypse the prayers of the saints are said to ascend from the altar of incense. It is a very real thing that we are face to face with here, though it does not seem so. The things seen are those which obtrude themselves upon the senses. Paul assures us that the unseen things are the eternal, and on these occasions, we try to see “him who is invisible,” so that when he is visible, he may look upon us with favour.

CC Walker, The Christadelphian, 1925, PAGE 445–449.

The Epistle to Philemon

Short is the sweet epistle of Philemon that has been read this morning. But though short, it yields long-running clues to very vast matters; and though written to a man long dead, it is found to have a bearing on many who are alive at this day. The clues it supplies take us into the presence of important facts that are beyond our personal cognisance, but about which we are enabled, by its means, to have as much positiveness of conviction as if we had seen them. It might be likened to the conclusions a man is justified in drawing, who picks up a piece of written paper somewhere with writing on it. There is quite a number of positive conclusions that he would be able to come to if he were of a thinking turn. There is first the paper. Paper is made: it does not grow. Therefore, though he never saw the mill where it was produced, he would say "There is, or has been, a paper mill somewhere." Next, there is the writing on it: it is proof of the existence of the art of writing, which may not seem much of a conclusion in our familiarity with that art, but which might, in certain circumstances, be a very weighty conclusion. Next, the making of those marks proves the employment of some kind of a darkening element with some kind of a marking instrument. It proves the ink and the pen, and it proves the holder of the pen, for pens do not write of themselves. The finder of the piece of paper would be as certain that a living man had held that pen as if he had seen him; and though he had never seen him, he would be positive that being a living man, he breathed and had lungs and a heart, and the various other vital organs of a living body. And all these conclusions he would be justified in entertaining as positive convictions about which there could not be the least doubt, though they were but deductions from the finding of a small piece of paper on the ground.

Now in this epistle to Philemon, we have, as it were, a small piece of paper from which, if we rightly reason, we shall be able to draw equally positive conclusions on vastly more important matters. We take the very first word in it—"Paul." To what does this lead? We ask, who was Paul? If we had nothing but the piece of paper, we might not be able to know. But the piece of paper gives us the question: and it sets us on the path to find the answer. We apply at the accessible sources of information. We ask "Is anything known of Paul, the writer of the letter to Philemon?" We get our answer as distinctly and as reliably as if we asked who Napoleon was; who Alexander was; who Homer was. By what is called "the consensus" of all the sources and forms of testimony in the case, we learn that Paul was an active traveller, and preacher and agitator of the first century. We ask why he travelled, what he preached,

what he agitated about? The statement of Festus sums up all we can learn. "Concerning one Jesus who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." Was he always of this mind? No: at first he aimed to destroy the faith he afterwards preached. What led him to change his mind? Evidence that the Christians whom he persecuted were in the right. What sort of evidence? Conclusive argument? No: the evidence of his senses: he saw Christ: and seeing is believing. But why should change of belief set him a-travelling? It did not do so. He took to travelling because Christ commanded him to do so, telling him it was for this very purpose he had appeared unto him, that he might make him a witness and a preacher and an apostle. And as a matter of fact he did travel and preach extensively, and produce conviction in many minds, and among others in the mind of Philemon to whom this letter is addressed. Thus we become as certain of the reality and activity and faithfulness of Paul as if we had lived in the first century, and witnessed his proceedings: and this brings with it a personal application of moment to us all: for that which in Paul's preaching concerned Philemon and many others in that day concerns us, viz., that "God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead."

So much for the first word in this piece of paper—"Paul." Now for the second: "a prisoner." Paul a prisoner! See where this leads. Why did Paul describe himself as a prisoner? It is the worst thing a man could say of himself in ordinary circumstances. If you hear that a man otherwise favourably introduced to you has been in prison, what is the effect but to produce a strong feeling of painful surmise and aversion? Your suspicion is stirred: your antipathy excited. You feel as if you don't want to have anything to do with such a person. Explanation may alter the feeling: but that is the first feeling produced. Why did Paul call himself a prisoner? Because he was a prisoner. He was often a prisoner, as he said elsewhere: "in prisons frequent" "suffering bonds as an evil doer." He foresaw it would be so, as he said in his farewell speech to the Ephesians: "And now behold I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city that bonds and afflictions abide me" (Acts 20:22). What was the cause of these bonds and afflictions? Christ himself stated the cause in the communication he made to Ananias at the time of Paul's being chosen: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." It was his testimony for Christ that led to his acquaintance with the inside of prisons. Hence he styles himself in this letter to Philemon as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ," and says to Timothy,

“Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me his prisoner” (2 Tim. 1:8). What was the “testimony” in the case? Was it a mere argument in favour of the principles of Christ? Was it a mere formulation of the evidences of proof of Christ’s resurrection? Nay, it was “testimony” in the primary sense of the term: the evidence of those who had seen what they spoke of: the testimony of eye-witness. “We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were EYE WITNESSES of his majesty;” so said Peter; and so in affect said Paul; “last of all, he was SEEN of (by) ME ALSO” (1 Cor. 15:8); “Have not I SEEN Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 9:1). “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee (Paul) that thou shouldest . . . see that Just One and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth, for thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast SEEN and HEARD” (Acts 22:14). For declaring what he personally knew to be a fact, namely, that Christ was alive,—Paul was “a prisoner.” We have to consider whether this does not prove the truth of his declaration. Who goes to prison for a lie? Who carries on an imposture that brings no benefit, but lands a man in constant “bonds and afflictions”? Such a thing is contrary to the universal habit and practice of men. Perseverance in a declaration that brings evil and not good never yet sprang from any cause but sincere conviction. Paul was convinced he had seen Christ; it wants but one step more: “therefore he saw Christ.” This might not follow in any case: but it follows in Paul’s case with peculiar force from Paul’s own character, from the circumstances under which he saw Christ, and from the activity and the success of the other apostles before him, whose word he sought in vain to arrest and destroy.

Look at these points briefly, one by one, first, Paul’s letters and speeches are evidence of Paul’s intellectual lucidity. He shows great discrimination between facts and impressions; evinces subtle and incisive power to appreciate the bearings of involved matters, and a pre-eminent disposition to follow truth with faithful docility. If the robustness of mind required for the production of Paul’s letters—(this reasoning is apart from the co-operation of inspiration)—if the mental force required for such an authorship cannot be trusted with regard to the sight of the eyes, it is clear that no man can be trusted, and that such a thing as trustworthy evidence is impossible. But this is contrary to all experience; every man whose honesty is proved can be trusted, and is trusted every day, with regard to affairs of eye-sight: and trustworthy evidence is a matter of everyday occurrence and acceptance. Second, the circumstances under which Paul saw Christ yield another guarantee that he really did so, and

did not merely think he did so. It was in the presence of a large group of witnesses who had no favour to Christ; it was in the open day; it affected them all in a physical manner, throwing them all to the ground; and it left its special mark on Paul who was struck blind, and had to finish the journey without his eyesight, by the leading of others who guided him by the hand. In addition to this, they all heard the voice that addressed Paul in Hebrew in the midst of the brightness that dazzled him. Thirdly, the events preceding Paul's journey to Damascus lend a powerful confirmation in the same direction. What took him there? The activity of the Christians. To what was that activity due? To the persistent public testimony of the twelve apostles and their assistants. What was the nature of that testimony? Personal testimony—the testimony of personal knowledge—the declaration of their individual knowledge that Christ had risen based upon precisely the same order of experience by which any man knows that any man is alive—seeing him, hearing him, feeling him, conversing with him during a period of time spread over several weeks. The fact of Christ being alive was established by every rule of evidence before Paul came on the scene, and quite independently of his own interview with Christ near Damascus. Consequently his testimony, though strong enough in itself to entitle it to be received on its own merits, has a powerful substratum of pre-attested facts that places it beyond all doubt in the judicial weighing of evidence.

Where then do these words “Paul a prisoner” land us? They land us in the conviction of Christ having risen, and of his therefore being now alive, and therefore of his having human destiny in his hand. They land us in the presence of Christ at this moment; for when we consider what is involved, Christ living means Christ near every one of us. In him dwells all the power of God to know and to see and to do. His message to the seven Asian ecclesias shows him “walking in the midst of the churches” and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart, and causing every one to find according to his own way. Therefore we have a light brought into our life and a Providence into our ways, and a power into our motives that men lack who have no faith in Christ's resurrection. True, we walk by faith, and not by sight, and therefore not so easily as if we stood related to things we could see. Still, when faith has attested facts to work on, it acquires wonderful strength, even power enough to lead a man to lay down his life if need be.

If we are guided thus far by the words “Paul a prisoner,” what shall we say to the next three words: “of Jesus Christ?”

We look round and ask, Is anything known of Jesus Christ? We discover at once that it is not a name of yesterday. It is a name in all books of any time for 1,800 years past. It is a name of the first century. Our piece of paper takes us right away to that time at a stride. The epistle to Philemon was written 1,800 years ago. Of that there is no manner of doubt with whatever wonderful degree of success some may have reasoned themselves into a fog on the subject. Hence we may disengage ourselves from our own day with all its dreary oppressive surroundings, and fly in imagination right away back to the first century, and there ask our question: Who was Jesus Christ? And what a plain and what a wonderful answer we get when we obtain all the accessible information. Jesus Christ we learn has been recently crucified.

We ask the populace, Why? They say, because he was a deceiver of the people. Others say, "Nay, he was a good man who was hated by our rulers because he found fault with their ways." Others say, "He was more than a good man: he was a wonderful man; and such as we never heard of before." We ask, "What was wonderful about him?" They answer: "He cured multitudes of people without medicine." We ask, "Did he cure them in a natural way?" They answer "No: he did nothing but speak the word: and whether it was a palsied arm, a blind eye, a tied tongue, a deaf ear, a shrivelled leg, or raving madness, it was perfectly cured. Nay, more than that, he restored life to the dead. More than that, he could multiply bread at will, and feed thousands with a few loaves. He could walk on the water and not sink: most wonderful of all, he could stop a storm by telling it to stop." We ask, "What became of him after he was crucified?" They answer, "Oh, he was buried: but his disciples say he rose again." Has he disciples? Yes. Where? Everywhere. In this town? Yes. Can you direct us to them? Yes—such and such a place. We go: we ask, "Are you believers in Jesus Christ?" They answer, "Yes." We ask, "A man who was crucified?" "Yes;" "And who is dead?" "No, he is not dead." "Was he not buried after he was crucified?" "Yes, but he rose again." "How do you know?" "Because we have seen him." "All of you?" "No, not all of us, but some of us." "Which?" "Well, in the first place, there are the apostles, and there are their companions, including several educated intelligent ladies, and there is a large company of about 500 that saw him at one time." "Are there any of these with you?" "Peter is with us." "Can we see him?" "Yes." "Where and when?"—such a place and time. We go: "Are you Peter?" "Yes." We understand you are a believer in Christ and in fact one of his apostles?" "Yes." "You believe he is alive?" "I do." "Why?" "Because I have seen him." "Seen him?" "Yes, more than once." "Since his crucifixion?" "Since his crucifixion." "There is no mistake about it?" "Impossible." "Why?" "Because others were with me and we ate and drank with him, and talked with him: and this happened on several occasions. It wasn't all on one day, though if it had been all on one day, I could no more have been mistaken than I am about your asking me these questions. It

extended over six weeks in all; and then he took his departure from us.” “Where did he go?” “He ascended in our sight and disappeared in the sky.” “Is such a thing possible?” “All things are possible with God. The man who could walk the sea—I saw him do it—could ascend the air. The man whom God raised from the dead, God could take to himself away from the earth. Besides, that is not all.” “What else is there?” “He told us he should send upon us the same power that he had, and that we were to wait in Jerusalem till it came. We did so: and the power came, and we can do the things that he did.” “Can you heal the diseased and raise the dead?” “We can: and speak in languages we never learnt.” “May we see this power put forth by you?” “Certainly.” “When?” “Any time you choose to fix.” “Now.” “Very well: what language shall I speak in?” We mention one. He speaks in it. We recognise it. We mention another. He speaks in that. Then we say, “But about the healing?” “Well, are there any sick?” “We go out into the street, and quickly discover some cases of disease in the houses. We return and bring one or two of them. He heals them on the spot. So that they walk out hale and sound men. We propose to bring the others.

He says, “You need not trouble. Only tell me of them.” We do so. He says, “They are now made whole at this moment: go and see.” We go and see, and find it is so. We return, and say, “What is the meaning of this?” He says, “The meaning is that Jesus is the Son of God, whom God sent as the propitiation of the sins of the world, whom He raised from the dead in pledge thereof, and through whom He purposes to redeem from sin and death all who believe in Him and obey Him.” We ask, “Do you preach him then?” He answers, “Yes, in every city, the work has been going on for a long time.” “What do the people say to it?” “Some say it is madness. Our rulers say it is blasphemy and try to stop us by persecution.” “Do any believe?” “Thousands.” “Notwithstanding the persecution?” “Yes: they cannot deny the evidence of their senses.” “In the miracles you mean.” “Yes, and we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard.” “Does the persecution bear very hard?” “Sometimes: but recently there has been a great easement.” “How is that?” “Through a very striking circumstance.” “What was that?” “The man who had charge of the last outburst of persecution himself became a preacher of Christ in the very midst of it.” “How was that?” “Christ appeared to him and made him an apostle.” “You mean Paul.” “The same.” “We have heard of him.” “You should see him.” “We should like.” “You may.”

And Paul himself we should find in the land of the living at that time, and enquiring of him concerning all the circumstances, we should have everything stated by Peter confirmed; and matters perhaps further explained. He would inform us that the meaning of the whole matter was that “God who at sundry times and divers manners had spoken in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, had in these last days spoken by a son whom he had appointed heir

of all things.” By this, if we had been ignorant before, we should be introduced to God and his whole revelation and purpose, as disclosed to Moses and all the prophets who came after him.

The epistle to Philemon, followed up in its clues in this simple way, affords to us as much ground for certainty concerning all those things as the supposed bit of paper picked up anywhere with writing on it gives ground for certainty concerning the paper mill and the pen and the ink of the man who wrote it, and his physiological organisation. It only requires the exercise of a little strong common sense to see this: and surely the judgment that can see this will do the rest. It will not stop short with an abstract discernment of facts. It will not be unmoved as if it had discerned nothing. It will not go on as if there had been no Paul, and no Peter, and no wonderful Christ such as they preached. It will surely awake and arise to the glorious facts of the case, and open the heart to the reception of the divine proposals that come by their hands: proposals to have faith in God’s attested purpose in Christ, to yield obedience to the commandments of God: to accept the service of God: to come out and be separate from the world to God: that we may obtain the everlasting life of God at the resurrection that God will perform at the coming of the Son of God to establish the glory of God and set up the Kingdom of God in the earth which belongs to God with the fulness thereof.

Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian 1887 page 311–315.

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The Apostle Paul

“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord”

(1 Corinthians 14:27)

In this chapter, Paul also speaks about the role of Sisters in the ecclesia – which we have considered elsewhere (<https://bibleonline.uk/archives/20940>). However, there are those who try to undermine his teaching on the grounds that Paul was giving his own opinion, and that for some reason he was a “misogynist”, against women participating in the ecclesia. Again, it is argued that Jesus himself did not mention anything about the role of Sisters in his teaching – and as one of our adversaries has it, “Christ trumps Paul any time”!

But this not only misrepresents Paul’s teaching concerning Sisters - it also misses the point that his teaching is authoritative. The words that he wrote were “the commandments of the Lord”. Peter wrote of Paul’s words: “... as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16). Again, he speaks of how “Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you ...” (vs 15). Those who seek to undermine the words of Paul then, do so “unto their own destruction”. Not understanding his words, they “wrest” them, being “unlearned and unstable”.

But by contrast, the Thessalonian ecclesia recognised the truth of Paul’s words: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men but **as it is in truth, the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thes. 2:13).

Another illustration is Paul to the Philippian jailor: “they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And **they spoke unto him the words of the Lord**, and to all that were in his house” (Acts 16:31-32). These verses demonstrate that we disregard the writings of Paul at our peril - for by rejecting his words, we are rejecting the authoritative Words of the Lord! Rather than to reject the veracity of those writings in the Bible that disagree with our ideas, we must rather humbly stand corrected by them. The Word is profitable for correction (2 Tim. 3:16), and so we must approach it with reverence and respect (Isa. 66:2). Indeed, our own salvation may depend on it!

Christopher Maddocks