



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

April 2010

QUESTIONS TO ASK MYSELF WHEN I STUDY THE BIBLE (4)

To a child of God, studying and meditating upon the message of the Bible ought to be an enjoyable undertaking: “*O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day*” (Psalm 119:97). While we find great pleasure in investigating the message of God’s word, we also recognize that studying the Bible is a serious undertaking. We should approach such a task with diligence, reverence, and prayer.

Is there anything in the context that explains or at least helps us understand the meaning of a particular word or statement? This, too, is an important question that I need to ask myself when I study the Scriptures. The immediate “context” of a Bible passage refers to those statements or verses that come just before or after the passage we are examining. We might think of the immediate context as those words or instructions that are close by. In some cases, we have to look beyond the statements that are “in the neighborhood” to those that are further away, but still within the overall theme of a particular book. For our present study, though, we will confine our attention to taking into account things that are stated in the *immediate* context, as we look for assistance in understanding the meaning of the biblical text. Here are a few examples.

John 11:11,12 – When Jesus and His apostles got the word that Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, was sick (11:3), Jesus told them, “*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up. Then His disciples said, ‘Lord, if he sleeps, he will get well.’*” About what kind of “sleep” was the Master speaking? In what sense was Lazarus sleeping? Here is an instance in which the Bible will provide us with the explanation if we will just continue reading. The next two verses (11:13,14) make the Lord’s meaning crystal clear: “*However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead.’*” So, in this case, “sleep” means “death.” The Bible says so. Where did we learn this truth? From the immediate context. Though this is a rather easy example to understand, applying the same principle will assist us as we study more difficult passages.

Ephesians 2:14 – “*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.*” In this verse, the pronoun “He” goes back to the words “Christ Jesus” and “Christ” in the previous verse. So, Jesus is the One that made “both” one, but who or what is intended by the word “both?” If we will look back at verse 11, we will find the answer: “*Therefore remember that you, once*

Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands.” The “uncircumcision” points to the Gentiles, and the “circumcision” refers to the Jews. So, the “both” that are made one through Jesus’ peace offering are the Jews and Gentiles. Of course, that oneness takes place among Jews and Gentiles after the flesh only when they obey the gospel, which puts them into the Christ and his spiritual body, the church (3:6).

1 Thessalonians 4:16 – “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*” It is a fact that the dead in the Christ will rise “first.” But the question is, “first” in comparison to whom or what? Those who teach the theory of Premillennialism, the false teaching that the Christ will return before He begins a literal reign for a literal 1,000 years, say that the word “first” points to the *righteous* dead being raised first, then later there will be the resurrection of the *unrighteous*.

The context of 1 Thessalonians 4 teaches something very different. In the last verses of this chapter, Paul by the Spirit is speaking about two groups, but the groups about whom he speaks are *not* the godly versus the ungodly. Paul has spoken about those that “*sleep in Jesus*” (4:14). Those are the same as “*the dead in Christ*” (4:16). Who composes the second group about which Paul writes? It is those saints “*who are alive and remain*” on the earth until the Christ comes again (4:17).

Thus, Paul is *not* comparing the righteous and unrighteous. The context says nothing about those outside of the Christ. Paul gives the answer to this question: “What is going to happen to those saints that have already passed from this life? Will they be able to share in the glory of the Lord’s second coming?” They will, indeed. In fact, the dead in the Lord will be with Him first. Here is the order of events that relate to the saints of God: “first,” the Lord will raise the faithful *dead* ones, then the faithful *living* ones “*shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” (4:17). The context proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Paul is speaking only about Christians – (1) those that are already dead, and (2) those that will continue living until Jesus comes again. The lost are not a part of the discussion in this context.

Context is extremely important. Paying close attention to it will help us understand the truth and will also keep us from making unwarranted conclusions.

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE WORLD OF NOAH'S DAY, THE ARK, AND THE FLOOD (1)

The message of Genesis 6-8 is a fascinating one. Here is a brief synopsis of this notable section:

Chapter 6 – Sin calls for destruction and an ark;

Chapter 7 – Noah enters the ark and the flood begins;

Chapter 8 – The flood ends and Noah exits the ark.

It has thrilled small children to hear this message told in a Bible class or perhaps from their parents or grandparents. These three chapters record real, historical events. Mature people, and not just kids, can learn a bunch from what transpired in those days.

First, consider **the world of Noah's day**. What was the pre-flood world like? In many respects, the people of Noah's time did what people of all generations have done: "*They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage . . .*" (Luke 17:27). In one sense, though, the people of that time made a name for themselves, but not in a good way. The Bible says of them, "*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*" (Genesis 6:5). Constant evil thoughts led to evil conduct, conduct that the Lord counted as "corrupt." "*So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth*" (Genesis 6:12). Note that they were not born corrupt, nor did the Lord corrupt them. They corrupted themselves. No finger pointing at Adam or God could hide the reality that they were corrupt because they chose to be.

The fact that the people of the pre-flood world are described in the Bible as "wicked," "evil," and "corrupt" points to an inevitable conclusion: though there was no written message from God at that time, there was a law of God to which all people were held accountable. Where there is no law, there is no transgression or sin (Romans 4:15). One cannot break or violate a law that does not exist. Thus, the fact that there was sin in Noah's generation clearly shows that God had a law that was in effect at that time. In fact, there has never, I repeat, *never*, been a time in mankind's history when men did not have a law from God to which they were amenable. The world in which Noah lived was doomed to destruction because of disobedience to God.

Despite the fact that wicked behavior dominated the scene, the pre-flood world had access to the grace of God. It is sometimes said that in the Old Testament era there was no grace available. Read your Bible, my friend. The Bible says that "*Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD*" (Genesis 6:8). God's prophet Jonah later proclaimed that God is "gracious" (Jonah 4:2). Because Jehovah's nature does not change (Malachi 3:6), He was gracious in Noah's day, too. Others had access to His grace just like Noah did, but they chose to live in rebellion to the Gracious One.

Yes, the world was cursed in the days before the flood came to destroy it. But, on the other hand, that ancient world was also greatly blessed. How is that?

First of all, it was blessed to have the example of Noah. What people of any time period would not be benefitted to have in their midst such a person as Noah?! In contrast to the darkness that prevailed, Noah was "*a just man*" that "*walked with God,*" doing "*according to all that God commanded him*" (Genesis 6:8,9,22). In addition, Noah's generation was blessed to have him serve as "*a preacher of righteousness*" (2 Peter 2:5). There is always a great need for God's people to live and teach His truth!

So, Noah was surrounded by wickedness, yet in such a perverse society he walked with his Creator. No doubt, it was a challenging environment in which to try and serve the Lord faithfully, but that is exactly what Noah did. His example serves as a reminder to all of us that, though the whole world is filled with wickedness (1 John 5:19), we can, yes, we **can** serve God faithfully. Let us not cry that the corruption around us makes it impossible. Let us not whine that it is too tough. Let us refrain from making excuses for our failures by claiming that we are the victims of an awful environment. Noah faced the task of living in an environment that was wicked to the *n*th degree. Yet, what do we see in his life? He walked with God. Why? Because **he chose** to do so. God calls for you and me to be separated from the world, too.

What about the world of Noah's day *after* the flood? It was a world with a greatly reduced population. Eight people; that is right, only eight people survived the flood (1 Peter 3:20). It was also a world with divine guidance. After the flood ended, God gave instructions to Noah and his family about a number of activities (Genesis 9:1-7). Those were instructions for all people everywhere that Noah's family would be responsible for (1) keeping and (2) communicating to future generations.

The post-flood world was also a world with promise. God's plain pledge was, ". . . *never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth*" (Genesis 9:11). God's promise was not that there would never be any more floods. Rather, He said that there would not come a flood of *that* magnitude – one that would destroy the whole world. A rainbow's magnificence far exceeds the beauty that we see in it with our physical eyes. It is a sign, a reminder from the Almighty that no more world-destroying floods will ever take place (Genesis 9:13-17). God, Who is faithful, will keep that promise until the world ends.

There is another fact about the post-flood world that we must not miss. It was still a world in which people had to deal with sin. Noah, who had been so diligent and faithful, sinned by getting drunk (Genesis 9:20,21). The flood came to cleanse the world of evildoers, but after the flood ended, sin continued in the lives of our ancestors. Such serves as a solemn reminder to all of us that we need to be on guard lest we stumble and fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

-- Roger D. Campbell

HOW CAN I OVERCOME TEMPTATION?

Every person is tempted to do wrong. Does the devil play a role in this? Of course, he does. The Bible calls him "*the tempter*" (Matthew 4:3). He is our enemy, who like a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he might devour (1 Peter 5:8). Satan tempts all men through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). He is powerful, but we know that first century saints were able to overcome him: ". . . *you have overcome the wicked one*" (1 John 2:13). With God's help we, too, can overcome him. Just what can you and I do to overcome his temptation? Here are some "must" items:

1. First, we must have a strong desire to overcome him. In some sporting events, there can be tie scores. But with Satan, there will be no ties. We will either defeat him, or else he will defeat us. If we are going to overcome him, then we must first possess the desire to do that. Ask yourself, "*How strongly do I really desire to overcome Satan?*" The Bible says, "*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never fall*" (2 Peter 1:10). Diligence to overcome comes from desire.

2. We must resist Satan. Overcoming the devil does not happen by accident! "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*" (James 4:7). Some Christians fail to overcome temptation because they never really try to resist the tempter. How can we resist him? "*Resist him, steadfast in the faith*" (1 Peter 5:9). What else helps in our resistance? "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*" (Ephesians 6:11).

3. We must fill our hearts with God's word. If our heart (mind) is filled with the word of God, then we will know what is right and wrong in the sight of God and this will help us be prepared in advance when the devil tempts us. The Psalmist wrote, "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You*" (Psalm 119:11). Christians are instructed, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" (Colossians 3:16). If we will follow this instruction, then we will be better prepared to overcome the evil one.

4. We must imitate the example of Jesus. What did Jesus do when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness? Each time He was tempted, He said to Satan, "*It is written,*" then quoted the word of God. Like Jesus, we should use "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Ephesians 6:17) when we do battle with the tempter.

5. We must flee from iniquity and spiritual danger. "*Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on*" (Proverbs

4:14,15). The New Testament says, "*Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. . . Flee also youthful lusts*" (2 Timothy 2:19,22).

6. When tempted, we must look for a way of escape. ". . . *but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Where is the way of escape from temptation? We must seek for it.

7. We must watch and pray. Jesus told His weary apostles, "*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41).

The devil does not want any of us to go to heaven. He uses every means at his disposal to get us off course. If we are serious about overcoming him, then each of the seven things that we have noted above is essential in our fight against him.

-- Roger D. Campbell

“BUT WHAT CAN I DO?”

We may sometimes feel that we are of little or no value to the Lord's Cause. We might think of ourselves as being less talented or less useful than other Christians. The truth is, regardless of whom we are, each member of the church is important and can be helpful. "But what can I do?" Consider:

Like *Barnabas*, exhort other saints to cleave to the Lord (Acts 11:23).

Like *Abraham*, instruct your offspring to serve the Lord (Genesis 18:19).

Like *Daniel*, be instant in prayer, even in difficult circumstances (Daniel 6:10).

Like *Andrew*, try and bring your family members to Jesus (John 1:40-42).

Like *Onesiphorus*, refresh and serve those that need special attention (2 Timothy 1:18-20).

Like *Paul and Barnabas*, visit the brethren (Acts 15:36).

Like *the early saints in Thessalonica*, demonstrate that you abound in your love for other Christians (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

You are right: you cannot do everything. You are also correct in saying that other people do a lot of things better than you do. All of us could make such an admission about ourselves. Still, there are so many things that each soldier of the Christ can do. Let us be about our Father's business.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Ephesians 6:10-17 – “PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD”

Do those words sound familiar? They should. They come right out of the text of Ephesians 6:11, which in its entirety reads, "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*" That armor is given in order to help Christians "*be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might*" (6:10). There are four important truths or principles that every child of God needs to recognize in connection with the charge to "*put on the whole armor of God.*"

First, the Lord wants us to use **the Right Armor**. What armor does the Lord prescribe for our spiritual well-being? It is not the philosophies, traditions, commandments, or creeds of men. It is not trusting in riches, trusting in self, or trusting in other humans. God specifies the armor that He wants us to use. He calls it "*the armor of God.*" Surely He knows what is best for us. What does this God-prescribed armor include? Loins girded about with truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (6:14-17). Brothers and sisters, this is God's plan for making us ready to do battle with the wicked one and his servants. If we are thinking properly, then we understand that no other armor can get the job done, and if we fail to use the right armor, we are doomed to failure, period! Failing in the battle with the devil is not an option for those that really want to go to heaven. Let us make sure that we use the right armor.

Second, the Lord wants us to **Do the Right Thing with** the armor of God. He does not simply tell us to *know* about such armor, nor does He simply say to *recommend* or *speak highly* of such armor. No, here is what God instructs us to do: "take up" (6:13) and "put on" that armor (6:11). That means that God wants us to make the proper application in our lives of those truths that are set forth in Ephesians 6:14-17. It is not enough just to know what God's armor is, and it is not sufficient to have such armor available. Our God wants us to use the truth, show our faith, and demonstrate righteousness. Once we identify the right armor, then we must actually put it to use in our own individual lives. Is that not why the Lord has given it to us in the first place, in order that we might use it in our spiritual warfare? Being a Christian means more than just believing the right things. It

also includes living the right way, which can only be done when we actually put on God's armor.

Third, our Lord wants us to put on **the Right Amount of Armor**. You see, God has not only designated the proper armor for every "*good soldier of Jesus Christ*" (2 Timothy 2:3), but at the same time He also tells us just what amount of that armor we need to use for our spiritual safety. Listen to how much armor God wants us to use or put on: "*Put on the whole armor of God . . . Therefore take up the whole armor of God . . .*" (Ephesians 6:11,13, emphasis mine, *rdc*). Does God have a good idea here? Of course, He does! Our heavenly Father certainly knows what is best for His children. Let us not try to sneak by by using just a portion of the armor that God provides for us. We need to use every single portion of that armor. God said so. Let us trust in Him to know what is best for our soul's salvation.

Fourth, the Lord wants us to put on the right armor for **the Right Reason/Purpose**. Again, why is it that God has prescribed and provided "the whole armor of God?" That you and I "*may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil . . . may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*" (6:11,13). Our motivation in using God's armor is not to impress others, make a name for ourselves, "move up" in the congregation, or win over the heart of a person for whom we have developed strong personal feelings. Our Lord wants us to put on the whole armor of God in order that we can stand against and be victorious over Satan. Let us never lose sight of the seriousness of this battle: it is a matter of life (eternity in heaven) and death (eternal separation from God).

Brethren, God's battle plan will work. If each soldier in the army of the Messiah will prepare him/herself with the entire armor of God, no force in the world will be able to stand against the Lord's church! In our efforts to "*put on the whole armor of God*" and overcome the devil, let us remember those four truths that we have considered. The Lord wants us to: (1) use the Right Armor, (2) Do the Right Thing with God's armor, (3) put on the Right Amount of Armor, and (4) use the right armor for the Right Reason or with the Right Motive.

--Roger D. Campbell

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