



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

February 2010

QUESTIONS TO ASK MYSELF WHEN I STUDY THE BIBLE (2)

What questions should I ask myself when I study the Bible? In our last article on this topic, we looked at one significant inquiry that we always need to make: “Who is doing the speaking?” In other words, what I read in a particular verse – who said it? Now, let us move on to a second major question: **To whom is this message spoken?** If I fail to ask this question, then inevitably I will make some false conclusions about the Bible’s message.

The day before He was put to death, our Lord said, “Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me” (Mark 14:18). Was Jesus predicting that a Christian of modern times who communes with Him in the breaking of bread (1 Corinthians 10:16,17) would betray Him? No. He made that statement to “His disciples” (Mark 14:16), specifically identified in the next verse as “the twelve” (14:17). The context makes it clear who was being addressed. It is a simple, well-known reference, but the principle is of great importance in our efforts to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). We absolutely must pay attention to whom a message is spoken or written.

God once said, “Do not go down to Egypt” (Genesis 26:2). Should we conclude from this that it would be wrong for a child of God to go to that country today? God made that statement to Isaac, the son of Abraham. There was a famine in the land of Canaan, but unlike Isaac’s father who had gone to Egypt during a famine in his days (Genesis 12), God told Isaac to dwell in the land of Canaan. It was a one-time instruction for one person under special circumstances. In the New Testament, we read that an angel of the Lord instructed Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt in order to escape the harmful hand of Herod (Matthew 2:13). In addition, since the Master wants every person in the world to hear His gospel (Mark 16:15), it would certainly be proper for His people to go to Egypt in our day.

Jehovah declared, “and the swine . . . is unclean to you” (Leviticus 11:7). Some believe that this statement restricts anyone living today from eating pork. The context of the statement made to someone (identified as “you”) about swine being unclean indicates that this was a charge given through Moses and Aaron “to the children of Israel” (11:1,2). It was a part of the Law of Moses, which was a covenant between the Lord God and the Israelites (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). Jesus took away that covenant in order that He might establish His new one (Hebrews 10:9). His testament declares

that “. . . every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:4). If one chooses not to eat pork, that is his/her prerogative. However, to quote Leviticus 11:7 and say that the Bible forbids eating pork would be trying to bind a law that is no longer in force.

Many of our denominational friends endorse the teaching that a lost person can be saved by praying for forgiveness. One of the verses that is quoted extensively in denominational tracts or booklets is 1 John 1:9. It is quoted as proof that a sinner can be saved through confession of sins in prayer. What does the verse say? “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But, that passage was not addressed to non-Christians. It was spoken to those who were already children of God. How do we know that such is the case? A bit later in that same epistle, we read, “I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” (1 John 2:12). The recipients of the Book of 1 John were forgiven before John ever wrote to them. That means they were already children of God. Thus, the statement in 1 John 1:9 about receiving forgiveness by confessing sins was never intended for those that have not yet become Christians. It is given as a privilege for members of the church.

Proponents of denominationalism sometimes say that the Lord’s spiritual body is made up of different denominations, claiming that these “churches” are the “many members” about which we read in the Bible. Paul’s Spirit-guided instruction was, “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body” (1 Corinthians 12:20). First of all, there were no modern-day denominations in existence at the time Paul wrote those words. Second, the context makes it plain that Paul was writing about individual people, not groups: “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (12:27). When the apostle declared that “you” are the members, whom was he addressing? The whole letter was written, “To the church of God which is at Corinth” (1:2). The individual members that made up the body of the Christ were not modern-day denominations, but rather the Christians in Corinth.

Hopefully the Bible examples that we have considered will help us have a more productive study of the Scriptures. Remember, keep your focus on who it is that is being addressed in any Bible passage.

-- Roger D. Cambell

LESSONS FROM THE WORSHIP OF NADAB AND ABIHU

Aaron, the first high priest of Israel and brother of Moses, had four sons (Exodus 6:23). Though Eleazar was the son that succeeded Aaron as high priest (Numbers 20:28), most Bible readers are probably more familiar with two of his other sons, Abihu and Nadab. Why is this so? Because of the divine record of their tragic mistake and subsequent death that is found in Leviticus 10:1,2.

It is written, "*Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, and put fire on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD*" (Leviticus 10:1,2). This passage is recorded in the Bible "for our learning" (Romans 15:4), so we need to ask ourselves, "What can we learn from this history?" Let us consider three fundamental points that we can learn from the worship of Nadab and Abihu.

WORSHIP TO JEHOVAH IS A SERIOUS, SPECIAL AFFAIR.

Contrary to what some are now advocating, not everything that one does in life is worship. Worship is different from other activities. It is something unique. To worship the God of heaven means to give honor to or pay homage to Him. Such involves the meditation of the heart. Note what God revealed immediately after Nadab and Abihu died regarding His attitude toward worship: "*By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified*" (Leviticus 10:3).

In the Book of Psalms it is written, "*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker . . . Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at his footstool – he is holy*" (Psalm 95:6; 99:5). Worship is not entertainment. It is not play time. It is not a time to have a private conversation with others about worldly affairs.

In our worship to God, we must show our reverence for Him. Such would include truly worshipping in spirit or from the heart (John 4:24). Would it not also be the case that God's children should dress in such a way that it is obvious that in their minds, worshipping the Almighty truly is a special affair? We find it downright disturbing, yes, nothing less than appalling, that today some Christians attend the services of the church dressed as if they were going to a party or to participate in some type of sporting activity. Let us not forget: worship is both special and serious.

NOT ALL WORSHIP PLEASES GOD.

Nadab and Abihu worshipped God, did they not? Yes. but obviously God did not accept their

worship! This is a strong warning to us for it shows that there is such a thing as false or unacceptable worship. In fact, in this case those who were worshipping the Lord were from His own chosen nation. Thus, sometimes the Lord God even rejects the worship of His own children (consider Isaiah 1:11,13, where it is said that God told the Israelites not to bring any more sacrifices to Him because He would not accept them).

Many people seem to think that *how* we worship is not really all that important. Supposedly, all that really matters is that we worship in some way. This is the teaching of Satan! Look, the first worship about which we read in the Bible was the worship of Cain and Abel – Cain's worship did not please God!

Remember, Jesus said, ". . . *the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*" (John 4:23). The Christ also said that it is possible for worship to be "*in vain*" (Mark 7:7). Let us be careful that our motive in worship is always to please the Lord God, not please ourselves or other men.

TRUE WORSHIP MUST BE BASED ON THE COMMANDS OR WORD OF GOD.

Just what mistake did Nadab and Abihu make? They offered a fire before the Lord "*which He had not commanded them*" (Leviticus 10:1). Thus, the idea for using that particular fire came not from God, but from the minds of those two sons of Aaron. Their mistake was doing in worship that which God had not authorized. Man must not add to or take away from God's instructions (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18,19).

In worship, we must do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Because we now live under the new covenant, in our worship we must do only that which is authorized by the teaching of the Christ (2 John 9; Galatians 1:6-8). To go beyond the doctrine of God's Son in our worship is to act according to the desires or commands of men, not God. God-pleasing worship is always based on a "thus saith the Lord."

How do we know that God created all things in six days? The Bible tells us so. How do we know that God created man in His image? The Bible tells us so. And, how do we know the manner in which the great Creator wants His children to worship Him? Again, the Bible instructs us about how to worship properly. Christians do not live by the teachings of the Law of Moses as Aaron and his sons were required to do. However, there are important principles of worship that we need to learn and apply from the divine account of Nadab and Abihu's unlawful activity and tragic death.

-- Roger D. Campbell

“BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?”

The Book of Luke records a unique event which took place sometime during the last four months before our Lord was killed. Shortly after raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee, where He came upon ten lepers (Luke 17:11,12). An amazing thing happened that day, as each of those lepers was healed by the Son of God (17:14,15).

Then, another astonishing thing took place. Of the ten who were cleansed, only one returned to thank Jesus and give glory to God. One would think that under such circumstances there surely would be an expression of thanks from all of them, but, instead a mere 10% returned to thank the Master and hear Him say, *“Your faith has made you well”* (17:19). As with so many other events in Jesus’ life, once you read or hear this historical account, it really sticks with you.

Just now we want to focus our attention on the Master’s question: *“But where are the nine?”* (17:17). Ten men were lepers, not just one. All ten lepers were in a pitiful condition and needed Jesus’ help, not just one. All ten lepers were cleansed through Jesus’ power and compassion, not just one of them. Yet, nine out of ten failed to express their thanks and give glory to God. We shake our heads in amazement, but is it really that uncommon for humans to fail to be grateful for the blessings that they receive from the hand of God?

God’s word speaks so plainly about our need to be thankful for what we have. The saints in Colosse were given this simple instruction: *“. . . and be thankful . . .”* (Colossians 3:15). We further read the charge, *“Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18). Just what is there for which Christians ought to be thankful?

We certainly ought to thank Jehovah for the natural and physical blessings that He showers upon us. He *“makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* (Matthew 5:45). Is not the One Who *“gives to all life, breath, and all things”* (Acts 17:25) worthy of our praise and thanks? Alas, great multitudes believe that they enjoy physical blessings all because of the work of their own hands or through their own wisdom. With a full stomach, nice home, and unnumbered material possessions, the proud and worldly wonder, *“Why do I need God?”* Their attitude reminds us of the hogs that we used to feed when we lived on the farm. Those creatures never did look up or stop chewing when we tossed the corn in front of them. No, no thanks from either the hogs or the unappreciative, worldly minded.

We also need to express our thanks to God for His spiritual blessings. The Bible says that God has provided all spiritual blessings in the Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Through the great sacrifice of His Son, He gives us salvation (John 3:16). Through the Christ, He gives us the greatest victory, victory over Satan and the ~~grave~~ (1 Corinthians 15:57). Knowing that our

blessings come from the Lord ought to do two things: (1) put us on our knees to give Him thanks and (2) put us on the move to obey His will.

In the human realm, we need to be mindful of all that others have done for us. We truly are debtors to those who have been our helpers in life. We owe our gratitude to those people who have assisted us in both the physical and spiritual aspects of our life. Our parents, other family members, friends, neighbors, teachers, brethren in the Lord, and the list just keeps growing. All of these need to know that we appreciate all that they have done (and maybe continue to do) for us. One message that I often saw in the past continues to stick in my mind. It consists of four words that were put on a sign and then hung on walkways over busy streets in Taiwan. The sign read *“Chang shwo sye-sye,”* which means, *“Say thank you often.”* That is a pretty simple message, but unfortunately one that is too often neglected in our time. The idea that the sign expresses is a correct one, not because it is part of the Chinese culture, but because it is in harmony with what the Bible teaches.

Brothers and sisters, where are the nine? Where are those members of the congregation who had their sins cleansed by the blood of Jesus, but have now decided to live their lives without Him? Many have forgotten that they were purged from their sins (2 Peter 1:9). Some have left their first love, returning to their life of fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. Others have become entangled with man-made doctrines and now count themselves as members of denominational groups. Regardless of the reason why people have stopped faithfully following Jesus, we need to be concerned about them and show such concern by going to them and trying to show them what the Bible says about what they need to do in order to be restored to fellowship with Him (1 John 1:7-9).

Good people, *“Where are the nine”* during Sunday Bible study? Why should we consistently have more Christians in attendance for Sunday morning worship than we have for Bible study? If folks are physically unable to be present for the Bible study, that is understandable. Other circumstances may also prevent one from being at a Bible class, but we fail to understand why some find an extra session of study that lasts no more than forty-five minutes to be such a challenge or even a burden. Where are the nine when the saints gather for Bible study one night of the week? Why is the attendance of *“mid-week”* Bible classes so pitiful in some cases? Are we not grateful for the Lord’s sacrifice for us and the opportunity to study His word with our brethren in the Lord?

We sing songs of thanksgiving to our Creator. We frequently express our thanks to Him in our prayers. That is all as it should be. But, let us make sure that we thank God not only with our lips, but also by the lives that we live for Him.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Philippians 1:20-24 – “TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN”

In Philippians 1:20-24, we read Paul’s reflections on which would be better – to remain on the earth and labor in the Kingdom, or to leave this world to be united with the Christ. It is a section in which we come face to face with the realities of both life and death. What do we learn in this passage about Paul’s life and mental outlook? Let us take a look together.

Paul’s **Task** – After speaking about the possibility of being delivered (from prison), Paul wrote of his *“hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death”* (Philippians 1:20). Whether Paul remained alive physically or died, his duty to the Christ was to magnify Him. In every age of man’s existence, the number one task of humans has been to reverence the Lord and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The Bible’s message for all Christians everywhere is: *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31). Regardless of what any other person does, or does not do, the major focus of every child of God ought to be to magnify or glorify the Lord in his body. That was Paul’s number one concern. Our physical body is more than a majestic arrangement of cells and organs. It is to be used “for the Lord,” not for self-centered desires and fleshly lusts (1 Corinthians 6:13).

Paul’s **Life** – *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* (1:21). The one word that Paul used to describe his life was “Christ.” Paul was certainly not claiming to be the Anointed One. Rather, his whole being, his very purpose, his daily walk, was so closely bound to the Lord Jesus that he could honestly say that “Christ” was his life. If a person is so devoted to and gives his all to his job, we might say that his job is his life. If one is so dedicated to and gives his entire heart and soul to his family, then we could say that his family is his life. What one word would best describe *your* life on earth? Again, Paul was so committed to Jesus and His Cause that the Christ – *He* was the apostle’s life, his whole reason for living. Hear what else Paul said about his earthly life: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). Is that what the world and our God see in us? Do they see that our lives are centered in the Christ?

Paul’s **Potential Gain** – *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* (1:21). Paul does not deny the reality of death. Unless we are alive when Jesus comes again, we all will exit this world through physical death (Hebrews 9:27). Let us be clear: death is *not* a “gain” for every single person. When one dies, that ends any earthly suffering that he might have

endured due to disease or other physical infirmities. that ends any earthly suffering that he might have endured due to disease or other physical infirmities. Yet, if he does not die “in the Lord” (Revelation 14:13), then there is no real gain. If he does not die in the Lord, then he must face a never-ending suffering known as “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46). On the encouraging side, though, is the reality of enjoying eternal life in the world to come (Mark 10:30). That blessing, also described as *“the crown of life,”* is reserved for those that love the Lord (James 1:12). Or, as we have seen in Philippians 1, the true, spiritual “gain” is for those who magnify the Lord (1:20) and whose life can be called “Christ” (1:21).

Paul’s **Labor** – *“But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor . . .”* (1:22). If Paul could have sung “I want to be a worker for the Lord . . . I will work, I will pray, I will labor every day, in the vineyard of the Lord,” would there have been any evidence in his life that he really did work for the Master? Without doubt! Paul was not interested in receiving the praises of men. He simply wanted to be a servant of the Christ (Galatians 1:10). He taught the lost, he edified the saints, he lifted the spirits of the downhearted, he served those in need, and so much more. Those that glorify God are those that bear much fruit. Jesus said so (John 15:8). Where there is no labor, there can be no fruit. You and I will never be apostles. So what?! We can still work for the Lord! Yes, we *must* work for Him. There was a part of Paul that wanted to remain on the earth and work with and for the church (1:24).

Paul’s **Desire** – There was a choice, though, that Paul said was far better. What is that? *“For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”* (1:23). From Luke 16:19-31 we learn that after death, one (one’s spirit) goes to a place known as “Hades.” There, those that have been faithful to the Lord will be “comforted” (Luke 16:25) and are said to be *“present with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:8). While heaven is our ultimate hope and final place of rest (1 Peter 1:3,4), there is a sense in which departed saints are “with Christ” (1:23) in Hades. My brother or sister, what is your greatest desire in life? If it is anything other than living in such a way that you will be able to depart to be with the Lord, then do not expect your death to be a “gain,” because it will not be.

We will never write inspired letters like Paul did. Hopefully we will never be in bonds as he was when he wrote the Book of Philippians. But, we *can* emulate his attitude and work ethic. We *can* imitate his devotion to our Lord. Think on these things.

--Roger D. Campbell

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