

# THE BEREAN CHRISTADELPHIAN ECCLESIAL NEWS

A monthly magazine devoted wholly to the Berean Christadelphian Ecclesial welfare, with the object of providing Ecclesial news, exhortations, articles and information of fraternal interest to the Brotherhood. Defending the original, foundation principles upon which the Truth was uncovered from darkness and upon which the Christadelphian movement was developed. Opposed to the dogmas of papal and protestant christendom. Upholding the Truth as The Berean Christadelphians since 1923.

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God Willing, The Berean Christadelphian Ecclesial News will be published monthly as an avenue of providing information of Ecclesial interest to the Brotherhood. Ecclesial news and correspondence, Fraternal Gathering notices, special activities and upbuilding exhortations are encouraged. This is an effort to upbuild and prepare us in heart and mind for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS COMING SOON AND WILL REIGN ON EARTH

## **Ecclesial News**

**LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas** - Lord willing, Memorial Sunday 9:30 am; First principles class 11:00 am. Bro. Bob Widding  
1490 Joyner Dr. Conway AR 72034. Telephone 501-329-5013. Cell phone 501-680-6499. piano  
.techno@gmail.com

Dear brethren and sisters in Yahshua Anointed,

It has been some time since our last communication. Around November to January brother Jim and sister Terri Rankin of the Holladay Tennessee ecclesia stopped by for an evening visit which was enjoyed by all. The weekend prior to the Hye Gathering, brother Fred Higham, sister Kay Stinchcomb and her two children, TJ and Tiffany of the Detroit ecclesia spent two days with Mary and I. Saturday afternoon we invited an Unamended Christadelphian couple, their children, and one nephew over for an afternoon visit. The word of exhortation was given Sunday morning by brother Fred.

Brethren and sisters are asked to please note our home phone number as the best means of contact 501-329-5013; also a change of address in the BEN Ecclesial listing published earlier in the year to: 1490 Joyner Dr. Conway AR 72034.

Visits are welcome by any passing through the greater Little Rock area. Please call or email ahead.

Fraternally,  
Bob Widding

**HOUSTON**, Texas – Sunday School 10am (Nazareth Revisited); Memorial 11:10am; Study Class 1pm (Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy); 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday 1pm (Open discussion, roundtable Bible class); Wed. 7:30pm (The Minor Prophets). Meeting Hall address: Bro. Michael Kramer, 8008 Junius Street, Houston, TX 77012

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus,

It brings us great joy to announce that Greg Maier has joined the Berean Brotherhood. Having come from another group he was interviewed and found to be of the same mind. After giving an excellent confession of faith on Saturday, he was given the right hand of fellowship on Sunday Sept. 2, 2007. Greg is the son of sis. Brenda Lauck and stepson of bro. David Lauck. He is also joined in our ecclesia by bro. Ted Maier. Those who may wish to send congratulatory comments and or words of encouragement to our new brother can send them to 14796 Cedar Land Loop, Willis, Tx. 77378 or by e-mail to gvmaier@yahoo.com.

On a sadder note we must announce that our Sis. Carolyn Dylla has withdrawn fellowship from us. May God give her strength in her time of need. We pray that she may return to fellowship soon. Please keep both of these in your prayers.

On behalf of the Houston Ecclesia,  
Bro. Michael Kramer

## FRATERNAL GATHERINGS & ACTIVITIES

(To be held Yahweh Willing)

- HENGOED FRATERNAL GATHERING**.....**Mar 7–9, 2008**  
8 Gwaun Henllan, Ammanford, Carmarthenshire, SA18 2FD, West Wales, UK. Telephone +44 1269 591924
- NORTH CAROLINA–VIRGINIA STUDY WEEKEND**.....**May 31–Jun 1, 2008**  
Bro. Dale Lee, (757) 620-6639, dleecpa@cox.net
- LAMPASAS FRATERNAL GATHERING**.....**June 13–15, 2008**  
Bro. Ricky Hurst, PO Box 1381, Goldthwaite TX 1-325-451-4075
- HYE FRATERNAL GATHERING**..... **July 23–29, 2008**  
Bro. Curtis Hurst, Rt.1, Box 40, Mullin, TX 76864, USA. 1-325-985-3868  
**Study Class Topic: Hebrews 1-13; Bible Readings**

## The Shepherd Of The Sheep

*“Verity, verily, I say unto to you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1).*

We may wonder why, in introducing such a beautiful and comforting picture, he should start out with the dark and negative aspect, but unquestionably divine wisdom has a good reason,—and it is profitable for us to ponder on it.

In such a picture, we are apt to be entranced with the beauty, and forget that the goodness of God is hedged with very narrow limits and solemn warnings, and it is “*severity*” and not “*goodness*” to all who ignore those warnings.

The flesh always wants to do it “*some other way*”—some way that pleases us. This is the whole basis and significance of the temptation of Christ: “*Some other way.*”

There is only one way—GOD'S Way: and we have to keep relentlessly bringing ourselves back to it. “*Some other way*” sums up the whole lesson of the chapter—the whole story of salvation.

It is all comprised in the climactic, joyful agony of the Garden of Gethsemane—“*Not my will, but Thine, be done. He that loseth his life shall find it. A thief and a robber.*”

A thief is that which is devious and deceptive—anything not perfectly honest and pure and in harmony with Truth—  
*“Thou desireth Truth in the inward parts.”*

A robber is that which is violent and aggressive—anything that seeks its ends by force and pressure and self-assertion. These are the two basic ways of the flesh.

*“He that entereth in by the Door is the Shepherd of the sheep.”*

This parable has a wide range of application. We see this by the fact that Jesus says (v. 7). *“I am the Door,”* and in verse 11, *“I am the Shepherd.”*

He is both. He is also the Sheep. He is everything. This is the first great lesson: **HE IS EVERYTHING.**

This is the ideal and conception to which we must gradually, painfully, stumblingly, but steadily shape our lives, so that we may, more and more peacefully, and truthfully, and understandingly, say with Paul—*“To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

Until we have reached this point, we have not found peace. We are not, in the fullest sense, in the fold and of the sheep. We have not in the fullest sense, brought ourselves into a true, intimate, and saving relationship to the Good Shepherd—*“To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

*“To him the Porter openeth.”*

If Christ is the Door, and the Shepherd, who or what is the Porter? Is that Christ, too? Yes, in a sense it is. At least, it is the spirit of Christ—the *“Spirit of Christ in the Prophets.”*

It is true we cannot force these types too stiffly and mechanically. We must rather by meditation gradually feel the depth and beauty and fittingness and interrelationship of the symbols—gradually absorb the spirit of the picture. To pin each aspect down mechanically and unalterably is to destroy the life and depth and movement, to make it flat and dead.

The Porter is the Guardian of the Door: the Rejector of the Unfit: the Examiner and Approver of all who enter in. Basically, it is the Spirit of God, the Word, the Truth: but it takes various forms and manifestations.

In a very large sense, Moses and his God-inspired writings constitute the Porter—the Chief Servant in the House of God, preparing for the entrance of the Son—the Schoolmaster to lead unto Christ—*“Moses wrote of me. . . All things written in the Law must be fulfilled concerning me.”*

Moses was something very special to God. God made this clear when Aaron and Miriam questioned his position —

*“My servant Moses is not so: with him will I speak mouth to mouth”* (Num. 12).

*“... as a man speaketh unto his friend”* (Ex. 33).

The same chapter records—*“The man Moses was very meek, above all men upon the face of the earth.”*

And Paul says (Heb. 11) he—*“Esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.”*

His Christlike character was the secret of his special relationship to God.

The way to this special intimacy with God is open to us all. It is just a question of how much we really want it, and what we are prepared to give up to get it. It is not given lightly. There must be sacrifice. But it is given freely to those who seek it with all their heart.

In another harmonious and related sense, John the Baptist was the Porter. John—the last and greatest of the long prophetic line of which Moses was pre-eminently and outstandingly the first and the head. Of John, Jesus said—*“Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John. To him the Porter openeth.”*

From Moses to John the faithful Porter guarded the Door. Finally the Great Shepherd came, to whom they had all given witness, and on Jordan's banks the last great Porter opened the Door of the Fold—

*“Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”*

We note again the strange depths and beauty of the symbolism. Jesus is not only the Door, and the Shepherd, and the spirit of the Porter—he is also pre-eminently the Sheep—the Lamb of God—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

*“To him the Porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice”* (v. 3).

**“THE SHEEP HEAR HIS VOICE.”** This is the second great lesson and testimony of the parable. This is the test and badge of the true sheep. So many claim to be his sheep who refuse or neglect to “hear his voice”—who ignore his testimony and instructions when they run counter to their own fleshly thoughts and desires.

But the true sheep are eager and anxious to learn and to conform to the holy spirit of his teachings. They freely recognize their helpless inability to direct their own steps unaided. Though the way he leads is narrow and hard, and many turn from it to the pleasant way of the flesh, the true sheep say with Peter—

*“Where shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life.”*

There are many, many voices calling to the sheep—pleasant, and desirable, and wonderfully appealing voices. But there is one voice of the true Shepherd of Life, one gentle voice which says—*“Regardless of all your natural, animal feelings, THIS is the best, and highest, and most joyful way. And he calleth his own sheep by name”* (v. 3).

He is calling US by name. It is not a formal, standard, chilling, impersonal, blanket, form-invitation, but the warm, living, personal, individual approach of intimacy and love.

He knows and addresses each one separately and affectionately, as a close and beloved friend. He knows each one of us if we are his. He knows all our problems and hopes, our sorrows and our joys, as no human being of our acquaintance, however intimate, can possibly know them.

The personal relationship between the Shepherd and each sheep is the key to all the living power of the Gospel of Salvation. Salvation is a matter of personal communion and unity with Christ. We MUST establish that personal unity: everything depends upon it.

Christ must be real and close to us—more real and more close and more intimate than any human relationship.

We must live constantly in the atmosphere of this close companionship—always pausing to renew it as we awake each morning; always closing the day with thankful meditation on its blessings.

Under a different figure, he emphasizes this in the Parable of the Vine—*“Abide in me, and I in you. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing.”*

*“Without me ye can do nothing.”*

Attached directly to him, as part of him, looking constantly unto him, drawing continual strength from him — we bring forth fruit unto holiness and righteousness.

On our own, no matter how hard we try, no matter how good our intentions, we struggle vainly, and flounder, and sink.

But here the figure is the Shepherd and the Sheep.

The typical characteristics of sheep are: helplessness, defenselessness, non-resistance, submission, complete dependence on the care of the Shepherd, and the need of leadership and guidance.

These characteristics are not what the world considers desirable, but they are the characteristics of wisdom and life for man in his weak, mortal state.

Sheep seem to be the animal most closely associated with man from the beginning, both practically and symbolically the one particularly and providentially provided to supply his needs in food and clothing, and also symbolically to fill his spiritual needs.

Although we are not specifically told at the time, from every consideration, and from the reference in Revelation to the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” it would seem clear that it was a lamb whose skin God used to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve, in token of the Great Sacrifice later to be made in the fulness of the times.

And the basic sacrifice of the Law—the Daily Sacrifice—was a lamb, offered each morning and each evening perpetually.

*“He calleth his own Sheep by name.”*

In modern sheep-raising, the individual aspect is lost. They are raised impersonally in the mass. This is very efficient, but mass efficiency has a way of destroying the individual life and meaning of things. All progress is not progress.

Sheep respond to the individual approach of love and care. They lose their shyness and fear and blank non-individuality. They develop personal affection and attachment. Doubtless, in the marvelous Providence of God, all living creatures are this way in some degree; certainly human beings are.

I was greatly impressed with this characteristic of sheep in Texas, and with the deep lessons in shepherdship and inter-responsibility that it teaches. I have seen sheep raised as pets who would not stay with the common flock, nor follow the common habits of sheep, but who wanted always to be with those who had raised them and shown them affection and care.

Salvation—and the proclamation of salvation—is in many ways a very personal and intimate process.

There is no such thing as an “*ecclesia*.” It is a convenient fiction, like a “*corporation*,” but it has no tangible reality. There are only individual brethren and sisters.

The more closely they are knit together in heart and thought and love, the more fully the ecclesial entity emerges, but we must always clearly think of the personal, individual sheep, and never blur our vision into just seeing the flock as a mass.

Truly, great and spectacular things can be done with flocks, as such. Power and wealth and influence are always built on manipulating the mass. The multitude wanted to make him a king—and how easy it would have been! How much great and spectacular good he could have done for the masses, as their king!—*“All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”*

Did he not have a duty—a responsibility—to operate on the largest scale—to spread “good” as widely as possible, to as many as possible? It is the argument of the well-meaning of the world today. And many, too, who should know better, say we should seek Divine ends by worldly, co-operative means.

But he chose the slow, hard, unspectacular, individual way. He chose to be a simple, obscure shepherd, and to call his sheep one by one, by name.

We cannot deal with ecclesias as masses. We cannot think of them as masses. It is the modern, efficient, lifeless, natural way. We must consider the sheep individually—get to know them individually—approach them individually in love.

This is why Paul fills the salutations of his letters with so many names. He thinks of them all separately, one by one. He could not, being Paul, forbear that word of loving remembrance for each one.

*“He calleth his own sheep by name.”*

The more individual people we know—truly know in the sense of getting heart to heart in mutual understanding and sympathy and comfort—not to criticize but to sympathize—the fuller and richer and more Christlike is our life—the closer we are to the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

The more we are self-centered in our own affairs and interests and personal welfare and enjoyment, the emptier and cheaper and more useless is our life. As we shall read together soon (John 12:24-26)—*“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone”*:

*“But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit—We must each die, to bring forth fruit.”* Continuing, verse 25—*“He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him FOLLOW me.”*

Returning to chapter 10—

*“He calleth his own sheep by name; and leadeth them out.”*

There is a being kept safely in the fold, and there is also—at the same time—a being led out under the care and guidance of the Shepherd.

The first “leading out” is when we are called: when the Shepherd first calls our name, calls us unto him, invites us to be part of his flock—to accept his love and care, to put our faith and dependence in him.

This is a leading from death to life, from bondage to freedom, from the loneliness and helplessness and purposelessness of a sad natural life to the joy and friendship and companionship of the glories and beauties of eternal things. He leads us out of the blind, wandering mass of shepherdless sheep, and gives our life a meaning and a purpose.

There is also a daily leading out of the fold. Each day as we arise to the day's activities, we must listen to the Shepherd's voice, and follow him. Only when we are consciously and faithfully doing this are we safe.

We are never on our own. We do not set our own course. We do not choose our own path and circumstances in this life. When we try to, we are lost, wandering, self-willed sheep.

It is a characteristic of sheep to tend to forget to listen to the shepherd, to wander thoughtlessly, and to go astray and get lost, and get into danger and harm. They must be watched over, and called, and reminded. Here the type is perfect.

In another parable the love and care and concern of the True Shepherd for the lost and wandering sheep is beautifully and comfortingly illustrated. He searches the dark mountainside till he finds it.

But the individual lesson for us is to give constant heed to the Shepherd's voice, and keep close to him. Some lost sheep are never found.

As soon as the sheep loses touch with the Shepherd, it is on the wrong path and in danger. Many things in this life can attract the attention away from the Shepherd's voice—pleasing and attractive and desirable things.

It is certain that if we always keep our personal relationship of love with Christ strong and clear and uppermost in our minds, we would never do anything to grieve him—never do anything out of harmony with his goodness and holiness.

There is no power like the power of intimate, personal affection. It is this we must develop toward the Shepherd by meditating on his goodness, to combat all other influences in our lives.

*“And when he putteth forth the sheep, he goeth before them”* (v. 4).

This is the mark of the True Shepherd, as hearing his voice is the mark of the true sheep. The True Shepherd “goes before” and leads the way. So Christ has experienced all things—been “tempted and tried in all points like his brethren.”

He sets no path before them that he has not trod. The most secret and intimate of our personal struggles — he has known them, and understands.

He does not direct or instruct; he demonstrates and leads. He is the model of beauty, the pattern of holiness, the great and perfect example of the dark, glorious bittersweet Way of Sorrow, Joy, and Peace.

He gave up all things in this life that are sought after and considered desirable, and he unswervingly followed the one straight course of doing the Father's will always, and thinking only of the welfare of the sheep.

He was given a life-long course of self-denial and submission and humility to follow, even to the cruelest and most exposed and shameful of deaths, and he unhesitatingly followed that path in perfect patience and love.

It is on the basis of this life of sacrifice for us that he asks our love, and offers his love to us.

Love, to be sound and true, must be based upon a mutual recognition of spiritual excellence. It is true we must love, and manifest love toward, all mankind. It must be a basic aspect of our character to dedicate our lives to the good of all. Jesus loved the rich young ruler, even as the young man rejected him for the sake of riches.

But this is a different thing from the love spoken of when it is said of Jesus—

*“Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end.”*

This was the deep, personal, reciprocated affection of and for the true sheep. It is said specifically of John, as distinguished from the others, that he was *“the disciple that Jesus loved.”*

Why did he single out John for this distinction. Undoubtedly because there was in John the most to love.

Love—true spiritual love—is the joyful, enlightened, mutual attraction of spirituality—and the deeper the spirituality, the deeper the love. It is by contemplating the beauties of Christ's life and character—its infinite superiority over the common life of natural, animal man—that our love is deepened and developed. And we learn from the Song of Songs that Christ's love for those who are his is built on the same spiritual foundation.

To become a part of Christ's love, we must constantly strive to make ourselves spiritually lovable.

We must, therefore, constantly endeavour to develop beauty of character, and eliminate all fleshliness and selfishness and ugliness and roughness. This eternal principle of spiritual attraction is strikingly illustrated in verse 17—

*“THEREFORE doth my Father love me: because I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

Not because Jesus was His Son, but because he was perfectly and lovingly obedient, even unto death. Jesus says himself of natural relationship—*“Who are my mother and my brethren?”*

And Paul said (2 Cor. 5:16)—*“I would not even know Jesus Christ after the flesh.”*

The flesh is nothing. Only the spiritual relationship counts—only the sweet spiritual oneness of the heart and thought and character—*“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

He overcame and put to death in his nature all of the things that stand in the way of perfect love.

Love—real, true, sound, spiritual love—is not something that just happens. It is strictly a matter of cause and effect—spiritual cause and spiritual effect. God loved Jesus because he, in loving obedience, dedicated his life to goodness and unselfishness and the service of others, and therefore made himself spiritually lovable. God will love us only on the same basis: He is no respecter of persons.

True spiritual love is the result of the irresistible attraction of mutual spirituality; and it is not a small, selfish, suspicious, restrictive, possessive, exclusive thing—like natural, fleshly love. Love “believeth all things, hopeth all things, beareth all things, endureth all things.”

And finally—when at last we shall see him face to face, and no longer *“through a glass darkly”*—UNDERSTANDETH all things.

It has nothing in common with the flesh—

*“The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.”*

God is Love—pure Love—because He is Spirit.

*“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

*“So ought we to give our lives for the brethren.”*

May God help us to follow this narrow way of life—to rise out of the weakness of the flesh into the joy and power of the Spirit!

The most unlovely and unlovable thing is selfishness and smallness of mind—self-centeredness—thinking of ourselves, talking of ourselves, seeking our own desires and welfare. This is the natural man: ugly and repulsive in the sight of God. This is the sad and self-destructive perversion of man's true noble place in the purpose of God. God may pity such, because of its pitiable emptiness and ugliness, but He cannot love it, or accept it to Himself, for it is ungodly and of the flesh.

Each grain of corn, says Jesus, must fall to the ground and die, before it can bring forth fruit.

It cannot stay wrapped up in its own hard shell. It must fall, it must come low; it must make contact with the ground. It must face exposure to the weather and the open sky—the raw, unsheltered realities of life.

It must soften, and open up, and give of its own inner substance to reach out roots all around it; it must reach upward, toward the Light and toward the Sun; it must by the marvelous power of that Light, long gazed upon, transform dead substances into growing, living, reproducing cells—before it can bring forth fruit, and justify its existence, and be a vital, living part of nature's glorious cycle of life and interdependence and mutual support.

Christ is the great example in far more things, and in far more ways, than we ever dream of. He is the Way, and the only Way. The sheep must follow the Shepherd—closely and all the way—if they desire to share the life he has.

Toward the end of the chapter (v. 34), Jesus calls attention to those remarkable, almost unbelievable, words of God to His people, through the Psalmist—

*“I have said, Ye are gods, and every one of you children of the Most High.”*

*“YE ARE GODS.” This is our high calling in Christ—*

*“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God.”*

*“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.”*

*“If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall LIVE!”*

*“I have said: Ye are gods!”*

What do these things mean to us? Are we preaching, living, manifesting just HALF a Gospel—just a dead skeleton of words?

Or does our witness to the world have the life and power of complete personal dedication? John said—

*“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!”*

*“And when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”*

*“Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”*

How could anyone who truly HAS this glorious hope in him help but purify himself, and never rest until all the oppressing impurities of mind, body, and spirit have been put away.

The power—the driving force—is the love of the Shepherd

*“We shall be LIKE HIM, for we shall see him as he is.”*

It is not holiness and glory as such that we must contemplate. These alone are fearful things—infinately, hopelessly above our mortal frailties and uncleannesses and limitations.

We are creatures of weakness and ignorance and continual, frustrating failure and disappointment—with ourselves and with our circumstances. And yet, it is such as we are that are called to holiness and purity and godliness and strength.

It would be a mockery of our weak mortality, except that the call is in the resistless power of love—

*“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us. . .”*

*“I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. . .”*

*“Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends.”*

THIS is the power of salvation! THIS is the path to joy and hope—

*“That a man lay down his life—give up everything for his friends.”*

We see many letters in the newspapers from soldiers in Vietnam, letters from men who love life and do not want to die, but who—FOR AN IDEAL—have risen to the joy of laying down their lives for their friends.

These are people of the world. They do it misguidedly for a corruptible crown. They do it in darkness concerning the glorious Gospel of Life. A contemplation of them is very humbling, very self-searching.

Man—the selfish, sinful, lustful, earthbound creature—has great God-given capacities of nobility and self-sacrifice, if he is deeply moved by an ideal—if the right chords in his heart are found and struck. The secret is finding the ideal, the motive, and the power.

What of us? How do we stand? How do WE compare—the self-professed children of God—with the nobility and selflessness and bravery and sacrifice to which men of the world sometimes rise?

*“Ye are gods: and every one of you children of the Most High.”*

Are we LIVING as such—as something very special in the earth? Can we honestly stand forth to the world and say—

*“Examine how we live; examine our love and devotion, our selflessness, our dedication to the welfare of others and of all mankind—we who claim the lofty title and position of children of God.”*

We have recently read together again the marvelous 119th Psalm, every word of which extols the inspiring beauty and transforming power of the Divine Word—that which alone can change us from men to gods, from impurity to purity, from death to life.

It is the greatest of all mysteries: and yet it is no mystery at all. It is simple cause and effect.

The Word will transform us: expand our minds, enlarge our hearts, purify our thoughts, banish our fears, open our understandings, and give us the power to be glorious, holy, eternal sons of God in the midst of a wicked, fleshly, sinful, perishing world—IF we will but let it in to do its work—if we will expose ourselves enough to it.

*“MY sheep HEAR MY VOICE, and I know them, and they FOLLOW ME.”*—they hear his voice, and they follow him.

*“The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.”*

What is it that we shall not want? Is it a promise of material sufficiency? It cannot be, for many of God's most faithful children have experienced bitter lack in that direction—even to loss of life itself.

Is it spiritual sufficiency? To limit it to any particular need is to limit it unjustifiably.

*“I shall not want” goes much deeper. It is an inner, peaceful FRAME OF MIND—a way of life, a quiet, joyful acceptance of whatever does or does not come: seeking nothing, desiring nothing, knowing God's way is best, and that all things work together for good.”*

*“The Lord is my Shepherd.”*

Herein, in this assurance itself, all wants and all needs are fully and abundantly satisfied. There is nothing else to want—nothing else worth wanting. If we have God, what else can there possibly be that we lack? He knows so much better than we do what we need, and what is best for us.

IN THE FULL, THANKFUL, JOYFUL ACCEPTANCE OF THIS FACT IS PEACE, AND JOY, AND LIFE EVERLASTING.

If we have this, we are complete; we are satisfied: we are content. We have all we need, all we could ask. If anything is added, we are thankful, and we enjoy it; but we feel no urgency or especial desire. Everything else is relatively secondary and unimportant—*“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”*

*“Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall have rest unto your souls.”*

*“Be content with such things as ye have.”*—and be thankful for God's loving hand in whatever may come—of good or ill, of gain or loss, of pleasure or pain—all is of His love and wisdom—*“The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.”*  
—Bro. G.V. Growcott

## Two Bookends

I would like to discuss today the 2 bookends of the bible, they are two of the most disputed, and misunderstood books, the one because they claim that it is just too amazing to believe it is true and the other is too amazing to believe will happen,

We find ourselves back in the book of Genesis in this new year, this book has many important things that we should think on. When looking at this beginning book it would be a mistake to just look at this book and not also think on what we have just read in Revelations. The two books are closely related. They in fact go hand in hand.

In Genesis we see the beginning of things, in Revelations we see how they finally work out.

We see in Genesis the Physical Creations.

Gen 1:1 *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."*

In Revelations we see the Revelation of a spiritual creation:

Rev 3:14, *"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;"*

Does every one here know what the first lie told in the bible is? It is a lie still told today. The lie is the lie told by the serpent that *"Thou shalt not surly die."* Today we see that same lie in the belief of the immortal soul and heaven going.

In Genesis the Serpent speaks:

Gen 3:1, *"Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"*

In Revelations the Serpent is restrained:

Rev 20:2, *"And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years."*

We can see the Promises are given in Genesis,

Gen 15:18 *"In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:"*

We can see it being kept in Revelations,

Rev 21:23-27, *"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."*

In Genesis the Curse is given:

Gen 3:17, *"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."*

In Revelations it is removed:

Rev 22:3, *"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him."*

In Genesis Sorrow and death make their appearance:

Gen 3:16-19, *"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."*

In Revelations they are removed:

Rev 21:4 *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."*

In Genesis access to the Tree of Life is removed:

Gen 3:24, *"So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."*

In Revelations the access to the Tree of Life is restored:

Rev 2:7, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

In Genesis access to Paradise is removed 3:23,— “Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.”

Whereas in Revelations the access is restored.

(Rev 21:25), “And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.”

What a Glorious time it will be in that future age when those found acceptable are in the kingdom, when sorrow and signing shell flee away.

So as we sit here at the beginning of this new year and at this beginning of the new week, we remember our elder brother, who has opened to way to the tree of life. And we ask for his soon return.

*Bro. Beryl Nathan Snyder*

## **Dr. Thomas and Bro. Roberts Preaching in Mumbles**

On Wednesday, August 4th, about twelve o'clock at noon, father and I, accompanied by brother Newport embarked in a small yacht, called the *Mystery*, belonging to a friend of brother Newport, and employed occasionally in the fish trade between Weston-super-Mare and Cardiff, a seaport town in South Wales on the opposite side of the Bristol Channel. Our object was to get to Cardiff, and there book by rail for Swansea; and it was thought as the distance was short, a trip on the water would be somewhat of a diversion, while economizing time, and space and money in the process of travel. The first part of the trip was pleasant enough, but when we got away from the shelter of the hills, pleasure was out of the question. Out on the open sea, the wind blew fresh and strong, and the waves rose high and broken, while the passing clouds dropped their contents on the water below. The vessel being small, her pitch was short and violent, and soon caused my head to swim, and all feelings of pleasure to take their flight, leaving a painful sense of endurance in their place. The wind ever changing, seemed unusually fickle, and made our little voyage long. It was five o'clock before we arrived at Cardiff, which under a steady breeze, we could have reached at three.

Being put on shore with our trunks, we parted with brother Newport, and proceeded to the station, whence the train soon started for Swansea. On getting out to change carriages at Llandore, we were met on the platform by several brethren, who rode with us the rest of the way. Leaving the train at Swansea, we were greeted by several other friendly countenances. Introductions given and salutations exchanged, we parted with all but two,—brother W. Clement and his son D. Clement, who accompanied us in a conveyance to the Mumbles, which is about five miles from Swansea. The conveyance stopped at a house fronting the sea, which was to be our abode for a fortnight. Alighting, we were received at the door by brother and sister Roberts, who had arrived a few hours before us. This was not an unexpected pleasure, but had been previously arranged for mutual comfort and recreation, and for the more effectual subsequent service of the truth. For this, we were entirely indebted to the kindness of the Mumbles ecclesia who had arranged to place a whole house and unlimited hospitality at our disposal for a fortnight, and had invited brother Roberts and household to absent himself from Birmingham toil for that time, and take a little relaxation at their charges.

Mumbles has already been celebrated in Christadelphian annals. It is a fishing village, lying among rocks and valleys, at the western side of Swansea bay which faces south. The principal part of the village lies at the base of the cliffs, overlooking the bay, toward Swansea. It is the home of between forty and fifty brethren and sisters, whose struggles in passing out of the darkness of error into the light of truth, have also before been narrated. Details concerning the lectures delivered there, will be furnished by brother Roberts.

In accordance with the hint at the close of the foregoing, the Editor continues the narrative. The first fact to be mentioned is that just before the Dr.'s arrival, a painted board, defining the nature and object of the meetings held within “Zion Chapel,” was affixed outside, by the side of the door. Concurrently with this step, it was resolved to abandon the name heretofore borne by the building, and to call it a Christadelphian Synagogue. The wording of the board is as follows:—

### **“CHRISTADELPHIAN SYNAGOGUE.**

The CHRISTADELPHIANS meet within on Sunday Morning, at 11 o'clock, for

WORSHIP AND THE BREAKING OF BREAD, and on Sunday evening, at six o'clock, for the proclamation of the truth, as set forth in the writings of Moses and the prophets, (and the teaching of) Christ and his apostles, in contradistinction to the writings and teaching of the clergy of

**THE CHURCH OF ROME AND HER HARLOT DAUGHTERS,**

(The Church of England and Protestant Dissenters,)

On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, at half-past seven o'clock, for the reading and consideration of scriptural subjects, to all of which meetings, the public are respectfully invited. All seats free. No collection.

‘To the law and to the testimony; if they (the clergy) speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.’”

As may be supposed, the exhibition of this board excited no little comment among the villagers and the numerous holiday visitors which at this time of the year throng the neighbourhood for the benefit of the sea air. To all and sundry, it was a puzzle and a curiosity, and theologically an eyesore and an irritation, though in truth, but an unvarnished statement of facts. The facts, however, not being palpable to the common understanding, the statement of them is not intelligible. This is natural and cannot be helped. It must not, however, deter from a faithful course.

We cannot expect to be understood by the multitude who worship the beast. Our aim is to bear a testimony against them, at the same time endeavouring to speak the word of God plainly and without offence, for the enlightenment and salvation of such as have it given to them to believe. Historically, Rome is THE MOTHER CHURCH; she is the Mistress and Mother of Churches: Apocalyptically, this is the Mother of Harlots and of the abominations of the earth. The Spirit of God, and not we, is responsible for the “rudeness,” the distastefulness of such a description as applied to the ecclesiastical systems of the times in which we live. Those who are of the flesh disrelish the strong facts and declarations of the spirit; they sympathize with the sentiments and feelings of those who by the spirit are condemned. This also is natural, but “those who are after the spirit must mind the things of the spirit,” (Rom. 8:5); and not suffer themselves to be led astray by the delusive piety which would falter in the war against the spirituals of wickedness in the high places. The weapons of this war are not carnal, but include painted boards and printed announcements, and every other method of presenting a testimony to our fellow-men.

Next to the board, the printed “bills” challenged attention and excited hostility. Here again, the truth was the cause of offence. The Mumbles ecclesia, thoroughly acquainted with the limited population of the place, and knowing their relation to the faith which is strange and novel but not new, decided upon a “strong” intimation of the meetings to be held in connection with the Doctor’s visit. Accordingly the following announcement was issued:—

“ZION CHAPEL, MUMBLES.

### **THE PEOPLE DECEIVED BY THE CLERGY!**

A warning from the Word of God, by the  
Christadelphians. “Why will ye Die?”

LECTURES BY DR. THOMAS,

Of the United States, Author of *Elpis Israel*,  
&c.; and

ROBERT ROBERTS,

Of Birmingham, Editor of the *Ambassador*, &c. The Christadelphians of the Mumbles, once more testify to their neighbours of every sect, that they are labouring under a strong delusion, which will shut the Kingdom of Heaven against them, and that they are ignorant of the salvation, and the way thereof revealed in the Bible. The Christadelphians give them another opportunity of learning the right way.

Thursday, Aug. 5th, at half-past 7 o'clock, by Dr. Thomas. Sunday, Aug. 8th, at 3, by Mr. R. Roberts. Sunday, Aug. 8th, at half-past 6, by Dr. Thomas. Monday, Aug. 9th, at half-past 7, by Mr. R. Roberts. Tuesday, Aug. 10th, at half-past 7, by Dr. Thomas. Thursday, Aug. 12th, at half-past 7, by R. Roberts. Sunday, Aug. 15th, at half-past 6 o'clock, by Dr. Thomas.

On Sunday, August 8th and 15th, a meeting will be held at half-past 10 in the morning, for the breaking of bread; after which an address will be delivered by Dr. Thomas. To the whole of the above meetings and lectures the public are respectfully invited.

Bring your Bibles. No collections. Seats free.

Good meetings were realized. The opposite was feared by some, who doubted the policy of speaking so plainly. Policy is a relative thing; it all depends on circumstances. Circumstances, in this case, were presumed to favour a bold attitude, and results justified this view. Different circumstances would have made a difference. The case of Cheltenham is an illustration. Here, a large audience was brought out by a bill, designedly mild, when a placard of the Mumbles type would have had the opposite effect. The philosophy of the matter is evident. In Cheltenham, the truth was a total stranger among a conservative

people, who would have mistaken a bold placard for the effrontery of shallow-brained infidelity; in Mumbles, the truth was a next door acquaintance, whose eccentricities were known and anticipated with a sort of neighbourly interest.

The audiences, for a place the size of Mumbles, were large, and the attention marked. The “Rev.” J. Howard Hinton, a false prophet of Baptist fame—none the less false for thinking himself true, and intending to be true—was among the hearers one evening. He did not repeat the visit, though he had the opportunity, from which it is to be inferred he considered the truth unworthy of his attention, and paid court to it once as a matter of curiosity only.

The proceedings were favoured (?) with notice in the columns of the *Cambrian*, the most influential journal in South Wales, representing and circulating among the family, professional, and mercantile respectabilities that go to make up “society;” in religion, conservative; in politics, belonging to the moderate party. Notice from such a quarter, though sure not to be flattering, was calculated to draw attention to the truth, and, therefore, of some service. The best service a man can render the truth, who will not accept it, is to oppose it. This will help the truth, when passive indifference might hinder. The *Cambrian* notice is as follows:

#### “CONTROVERSIAL PREACHING.

“The drum ecclesiastic” was beaten with much vigour this week in the Mumbles. The Christadelphians took their innings, and had the game their own way. On one of the chapels is a board, having painted on it the hours and the nature of the services conducted within it, with a tolerably sweeping assertion, to the effect, that the clergy of all denominations were preventing the people to whom they preached from entering the kingdom of Heaven. The ordinary minister of the place was assisted by two other gentlemen—one from England and the other from America—who lectured several times, and did not forget to have a fling at all Christendom, with the exception of their noble selves. On Catholics, Protestants, and Dissenters they were terribly severe. “The Old Harlot” and her daughters received no mercy from them, and a feeble attempt was made to caricature the Bishop of Oxford and one of his curates and holding a discussion about prevenient and subvenient grace, in the sacrament of Baptism. It is not very easy to gather all of a man’s creed from listening to one of his sermons. But the most important peculiarity of the religionists seems to be, that they consider man to be by nature destitute of an immortal soul, and that there is no difference, unless he be regenerated, between him and the beasts that perish. “As the one dieth, so dieth the other,” Solomon has said, and he was praised for having said so, though, as this particular fact is so evident, there is but little ground for eulogizing his wisdom on account of it. This any observant person may easily know; but speaking on the same subject, he has given the world instruction which no amount of observation could possibly teach. He has said that the body shall return to the earth as it was “and the spirit to God who gave it”—a statement which, in the minds of unsophisticated people, will go far to settle the controversy between Christadelphians and themselves. But suppose that these moderns could establish all that they assert, *cui bono?* Would it make the world more moral, or supply higher motives for the practice of virtue than those supplied by the orthodox Faith? It would certainly impair rather than strengthen the reasons for good living, and would therefore be of no practical value, if it were the creed of Christendom.

The author of the *Vestiges of Creation* used to tell us something about our great, great, great grandfathers being frogs and fishes, and while the recent expounders of a new theology do not preach the development theory, they are equally uncomplimentary to humanity. There is no difference between a man and a horse, said one of them—between men and beasts that perish. Of course, it is not the business of the Bible to be complimentary to our sin-stained nature, and yet we think that the Bible, has complimented man exceedingly. He made him in His image, and His Son died to save him—and to say the least of it, this would have seemed a foolish act on the part of the All-Wise, if He had regarded man as a calf or a pig, or held him of no more value than a worthless and wicked lump of clay, as the new lights of theology would have us believe. But we are beginning to argue, rather than report, and we must therefore restrain ourselves. What struck us as peculiar of the teachers aforesaid is, that they have a genuine hatred of learning. For religious purposes, at least, they esteem education as worse than useless. For them there must be no Minister of education, and no seminary beyond the dignity of a hedge-school. Universities and colleges are their aversion, and yet they unconsciously betray the benefit of learning, when some of them quote Greek and try to translate it, and one of them has called one of his books *Elpis Israel*, which we don’t think to be ordinary English. Their attitude, too, is peculiar. A book in the hand and a Bible *under the arm*, is, with one of them, a favourite posture. But how did they get that noble English Bible, of which, Englishmen, at least, are justly proud? In how many tongues did their inspired authors write and speak? We shall not be wrong in saying Four; nor shall we be far away in asserting that the Scriptures would have been still an unknown volume to us, were it not for the pious and profound learning of men whose invaluable services to their race modern wisecracks contemptuously despise. Dead language would have kept it for ever in the place which they now assign to the unregenerate. It was learning that rolled back the grave-stone from the sepulchre in which unknown tongues would have kept it, and said to the book which has blessed the world, “Come forth!” But we are deserting from the course prescribed for us; and can therefore only add, that, if these apostles of a new religion have nothing better to tell us than that we have no souls, the majority of mankind will, in the future, as in the past, prefer the choice of Cato. *Sis. Eusebia Thomas narration of Dr. Thomas visit to Britain—Christadelphian—1869*

### Problem solving

The next place of call was Glasgow. Here the misfortunes which have attended the truth from its first introduction to the town, still continue, to the grief of all good men and true, of whom there are some to be found even in Glasgow. We do not refer to the various outside factions, which in connection with one man's name or another, put forth some profession of the truth, but make it void through admixture with crotchet or tradition, or put it to open shame by their practices. Of these, little good can ever be expected; they are part and parcel of the theological chaos, apocalyptically represented by the Old Mother and her Daughters, and must be left amongst the hopelessly incurables till the Lord come, who will make a clean sweep, and organise the world anew. With them, misfortune is chronic; sorrow loses its edge from use; but it is different as to those who had leagued themselves for the defence of the gospel. Good hopes were entertained that by unity, love, and zeal, they could wipe out the stain from which the truth had suffered for years in Glasgow; and establish in the midst of it a warm, intelligent, healthy, loving testimony that would win its way in so vast a population, and perchance develop a prosperous ecclesia to the praise of Christ's name and the good of every soul concerned. These hopes have not been utterly destroyed, but they have been considerably weakened by the state of circumstances which the Editor found existing.

Discord has riven the ecclesia. Nine have withdrawn from fellowship on account of alleged misconduct on the part of one of the remaining sixteen; and refuse to resume their places until the one in question is expelled. This is a matter of deep regret. It is one of those cases that bring painful consciousness of the absence of the regulating authority that existed in the apostolic churches; when inspired men sat as judges, and gave decisions which were binding. In the absence of such authority, what are we to do? We can only proceed on certain general principles, to which all rational people will consent. A brother accused of wrong-doing, and denying the accusation, is entitled to have the benefit of investigation. That investigation must be conducted by the ecclesia, or brethren appointed for the purpose, in whom the rest have confidence. Whichever method is adopted, the voice of the majority must rule, for there is no other principle upon which a decision can be arrived at; the views of the majority in such a matter should bind the rest. The minority could not be aggrieved or compromised by it, because on a question of fact, there may always be mistake, and the minority if composed of reasonable minds, would give in to the probability of the majority being right upon such a question, and be prepared to waive all doubt in favour of the deliberate decision of the greater number. Even supposing the minority were morally convinced that the party accused was a Judas, they would not be justified in giving effect to their impressions in the face of doubt and a favourable opinion on the part of a majority. It is in a case of this description that we are not to judge. In a case of open, undoubted, unrepented sin, duty would compel dis-fellowship, but where the sin is denied and in dispute, and a majority think the accused innocent, the only rational course is to give the accused the benefit of all doubt, and let fellowship take its routine way. Those who fear complicity with sin in such a case have only to remember that Judas was allowed to remain in the company of the disciples until he made himself manifest; and they must also realise this undisputable fact, that the present state of the ecclesia, is one in which good fish and bad, swim together in the same net, until the net is drawn to the shore to have its contents classified at the coming of the Lord.

All cases of doubt must needs be left to the unerring Judge, who will render to every man according to his ways. Many such cases there will always be in the present state, and if we resolve to withhold our fellowship till perfect holiness prevail in every professing saint, we may make up our minds for a hermit life. In such matters we must follow Paul's injunction, "Judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness; and make manifest the counsels of the heart."—I Cor. 4:5. It is to be hoped the seceders will realise the force of these considerations, and sinking all doubtful questions, return to the obedience and the breaking of bread from which at present they have departed. Let the good overcome the evil: calamity indeed will it be if the petty mischief of gossiping tongues, is to keep honest men and women from the path of duty. It should be the part of the latter to see that no such thing could possibly take place. Let them stick to their posts, whatever the devil may do, instead of letting him drive them into the corner. Let "No surrender" be their motto, while the strife continues between good and evil,—a strife which will rage among men till the Messiah returns to break the neck of wickedness, and establish righteousness in all the earth.

There is a very effectual method of preventing the evil that has happened in Glasgow, and that is, by carrying out Christ's rule, which is exactly suited for all such emergencies. If a wrong is done, it is the duty of the brother or sister wronged to go to the wrongdoer and obtain satisfaction if possible, failing which, to take others, and finally, should no success be realised, to lay the matter before the brethren and sisters collectively. Until these steps are taken, the brother or sister wronged has no right to report the grievance privately; and when he or she attempts to violate this rule, the party to whom the complaint is addressed, should refuse to hear anything except in the presence of the accused. The adoption of this simple rule would prevent an enormous amount of mischief. It would stop the tale bearer who separateth very friends, and nip many a conflagration in the bud. No doubt it would deprive the gossipmongers of many a feast, but their loss would be the general gain.

*Christadelphian—1868*

## **Polygamous Tendencies in Relation to Fellowship**

Polygamy is opposed to the principles of Paul, who, in all his writings, only recognises "one wife."—(Titus 1:6; Eph. 5:31, 33; 1 Cor. 7:2, 12–27.) This is sufficient for us, without discussing the case of the ancients, who lived under a different order of things. We are subject to Paul as the appointed teacher of the Gentiles.—(1 Tim. 2:7; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 4:1.) "If

any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I (Paul) write unto you are *the commandments of the Lord.*”—(1 Cor. 14:37.)

If polygamy is anti-apostolic, then is it our duty to withdraw from the polygamist, whether he is so in practice or principle only; for Paul has laid down this rule: “Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions which he have received of us.”—(2 Thess. 3:6) A man’s knowledge of the truth goes for nothing, if he is disobedient.  
*Bro Robert Roberts—1870*

## Debates

It is time to suspend the discussion of this subject (in its ecclesial bearings). We shall probably make no further publication on the matter after this number. Enough has been said to enable all to come to a decision, so far as that is possible. Debate *per se* is interminable, and not profitable after a certain point is reached. Beyond that point, nobody’s mind is changed, and the continuance of debate becomes a mere splashing in a pool—with worse results than wetting clothes. The nonappearance of further communications will, therefore, be understood. We conclude with a parting reference to one or two in detail...

Men of God are lovers of peace. The children of the devil are not so: they are “lovers of debate,” and never in such high feather as when there is some cause of dispeace in motion. Born fighters and brawlers are all men more or less, but some are tamed.  
—Bro. Robert Roberts—1897

I was in no state of health to undertake a debate; and there does not now exist the need for encouraging debates that there was in the beginning. They were useful in those days in getting a hearing for the truth, but now we can get the ear of the public without them...

There is a time to debate, and a time to refrain from debating. The present time is a time for the consolidation of faith in the love and works thereof, and not for discussing whether there is such a thing as faith or not. The coming of Christ will catch some in the act of disputing the existence of such a personage. How foolish they will seem. The course of true wisdom, after the survey and test of all the facts, is to prepare for his coming in the induction of that state of mind and line of conduct, that will be acceptable to him. This is not to be attained by “perverse disputings with men of corrupt mind,” but by the sincere and meditative studies and exercises which the study of the Scriptures, and prayer will gender...My natural man would have said “Meet and thrash every one of them:” it can easily be done, so far as argument is concerned.  
—Bro. Robert Roberts—1896

## Dignity of Speech

Speaking once of a certain popular London lecturer, my father observed that he “descended to the kitchen for his illustrations” and by doing so robbed his lecture of that scriptural dignity which should characterise all our discourses whether to strangers or brethren. With this I am in perfect agreement. “Cultivate dignified forms of speech” was, I believe, one of brother Roberts’ expressions. At home I fortunately had every incentive to follow this rule, for I never once heard an undignified, much less a vulgar or profane expression, escape the lips of my beloved mother, who was the very embodiment of modest dignity. Neither have I ever heard a vulgar expression nor a questionable illustration, no, nor an illustration calculated to raise a laugh, in any of my father’s lectures or exhortations—his illustrations were dignified, well chosen, and scriptural. So that when I came to reflect on a figure of speech (“soft soap”) I thoughtlessly made use of recently in a conversation I felt a bit ashamed of myself. What I meant and should have said was “oil on troubled waters” or “balm of Gilead,” or “soft answers to rough questions that turn away wrath.”

I remember brother Roberts saying that the word “beastly” should “not enter the vocabulary of a saint,” and so I think of many other words that should not enter in, namely, “he’s got a bad egg”; “I had a rotten time”; “He’s only half-baked” or “half-soaked”; and so on *ad nauseam*. There is good reason for the warning in the exhortation, “let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt.”

And so also in the use of profane expressions, because these likewise coarsen the mind. Just as “flippancy of speech begets flippancy of thought,” as brother Roberts said again, so likewise in the use of insincere and affected forms of speech: these constitute “the bane of intellect.”

My mother’s precept and example, as also that of brother Roberts, was “addict yourself to sincere, simple and dignified forms of speech, and don’t say what you don’t mean.” Which brings to mind the further apostolic exhortation “let nothing escape the lips but that which is good to the use of edifying that it may minister grace to the hearers” (or words to this effect) as you will remember. So let us observe and profit, and so become more acceptable to God and man in preparation for permanent association with him of whom it is written “Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into thy lips,

therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.” As it is written again: “He that loveth pureness (cleanness, free from contamination, purity) of heart, for the grace of his lips, the king shall be his friend,” and again, “The word of a wise man’s mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself,” and yet again “A gracious woman retaineth honour.”

The heart is the fountain whence our words originate for good or evil, as it is written: “Out of the abundance (outflow) of the heart the mouth speaketh”; so that if our fountain is freely fed from the fountain of the water of life, in other words, if “the word of Christ dwells in us richly” by diligent daily reading, meditation and prayer, we shall reflect His glory in the grace of our speech—“singing and making melody to God in our hearts (in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs)—to Him whose bountiful care no tongue can recite, it breathes in the air, it shines in the light, it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain, and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.”

The foregoing is taken from a letter written by a brother to a sister, who sends it with the name of sender erased. Despite its stilted style it contains a great deal of truth, and may well be laid to heart by those who are tempted to the opposite extreme of too colloquial and vulgar speech. The phrase “descended to the kitchen for his illustrations” should rather be “descended to the gutter.” The Bible frequently takes its parallels from the kitchen: “A cake not turned” (Hos. 7:8), “A seething pot” (Jer. 1.), “The deep to boil like a pot” (Job 41.), “Flesh within the cauldron” (Micah 3.), “As black or as hot as an oven” (Hos. 7.), “Shall burn as an oven” (Mal. 4.), and many more instances might be given. The desirable form of our words may be summed up in an excellent illustration from the kitchen, “Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt, that ye may know how to answer every man” (Col. 4:6).

*Christadelphian*

*The*

## **Ecclesial troubles**

The little community (numbering between twenty and thirty), have had their troubles internally, as it is probable every ecclesia will, until all are gathered into the presence of Christ, and purified by assortment. “Woe unto them by whom offences come.” This is Christ’s declaration, and ought to be duly considered on all hands by one as well as another.

*Bro. Robert Roberts—1870*

## **Christadelphos, the Symbolic Soldier of the Faith**

Who is Christadelphos? This may be illustrated by inquiring who is John Bull? or who is brother Jonathan? or Monsieur Johnny Crapaud? or, Scripturally, who is the Rainbow Angel? They are all of them symbolic, not individual, personages. They represent nations of men in political organization. Christadelphos and the Rainbow Angel are the “Holy Nation” in the present and future state.

Christadelphos is Christ’s brother, constituted of many individual brethren, whose function it is to “fight the good fight,” and to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” It was that section of them meeting in Hoboken that published the handbill. They sent it in white envelopes, sealed and prepaid, to a hundred and twenty clergymen, in New York City, besides others in the Hobokens. But not a whisper has been heard concerning it.

*—Bro. John Thomas—1869*

## **Sheep Without A Shepherd**

Your notification of the withdrawal of your ecclesia from another ecclesia, on the ground of the latter’s endorsement of the evil conduct of one of its members, was duly received “last fall,” and a notice of it was written for *The Christadelphian* and put in type, and appeared in the first proof of the Dec. number, but there being an overplus of matter, just the length of the notice referred to, it was struck through, with the intention of the printer keeping it over till the following month. The printer however, lifted it out, and “distributed” it, which we did not know till the time came for making up the next number, and as both copy and proof of it (though diligently searched for) could not be found, and there was a pressure of other things, it was allowed to slip.

The “notice” consisted of a few remarks by way of declining to publish the intimation of withdrawal. We said, and we now repeat, that its publication could be of no service, as brethren at a distance would not be bound by the attitude which you had thought right to assume, without the opportunity of forming a judgment in the matter. To make it known as a matter of intelligence was not desirable.

It was not required for the purpose of setting you right with visiting brethren, because it would not set you right, as they would have to go into the matter again on visiting, in order to find out whether you were in the right or not. The announcement of it would evoke explanation from the other side, and give them a right to the publication of it, and thus the *Christadelphian* would be involved in a discussion which might be to the hurt of many and could be to the profit of none.

The only course is to localize the evil, if the evil must continue. Keep its existence in the dark, except where it must be known. Doubtless such a way of working savours a little of ecclesiastical anarchy, but this cannot be helped. Anarchy is the order of the day in relation to the polity of God. It is trodden under feet. We are as sheep having no shepherd. We can have no rule in the absence of rulers. It is a lamentable state of things, no doubt, but we cannot mend it by shutting our eyes to it and trying to act as though we were under the rule of a system. We must make the best of an evil state. This requires wisdom and patience on all hands.

We are a crowd picking our way through the dark with lamps. We are not a regiment. Christ will be here by and bye to organize the crowd, dead and living, casting out those who do not serve his purpose. Then we shall have order and system and rule to our hearts' content. As to your queries on resurrection and judgment, they are anticipated in our answer last month to "G.M." The other subject is one upon which there is less disagreement than appears. Unanimity will grow with time. We cannot add to what we have said. The contradictions you refer to are only apparent. They arise from a mixing of terms referring to different periods. *Bro. Roberts Answers—1870* [*The Guide To The Formation and Conduct of Christadelphian Ecclesias* - Based of the experience of thirty years experience (1884), was the outcome of the lessons such as noted above.]

## Meditations

The truth is sacred: it is God's property: and should be handled accordingly. Those who hold it, possess a talent for which they will have to render solemn account. The truth has not been given by God for the gratification of any carnal lust It has been given for God's glory. Let those who fight for the truth remember this—both in lecturing, exhorting, and debating. Let them "earnestly contend for the faith." Let them keep silent rather than contend merely for the sake of a mental combat, or for the purpose of displaying their abilities, or of injuring an opponent in the personal sense. God takes delight in an earnest contender, but a pretender. He abominates. "What has thou to do to declare My statutes?" is the divine rebuke to the latter. An insincere speaker (and falseness will show itself) is also a very unprofitable spectacle to man. The characteristics of such an one are: abuse, sophistry, carping, self-assertion, etc. Men who aim at promoting God's glory work upon the lines that He has laid down. In fact His glory can be advanced in no other way. They make known His word faithfully (Jer. 23:28), they fear not to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts. 20:27), they speak as the Oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11), meekly (1 Pet. 3:15), boldly (Ephes. 6:20), and without respect of persons (Jas. 2:1). Men who "give attendance to (Bible) reading" have to brave the opprobrium of being called by very unpleasant names. The world hates an open Bible.

If we occupy our spare moments in reading the newspaper, nothing will be said. If we occupy but a twentieth part of the time in reading the Bible, the result is—What? This is a question that Bible-readers can feelingly answer. The trial though discouraging is designed to work good. It will strengthen character, and lead the way to great reward. It will train us to be "strong and very courageous." Let us not forget that there is a book of remembrance written for them that fear the Lord and think upon His name (Mal. 3:16). The world is very wicked. This is evidenced by its shameful antagonism to the Bible and its faithful readers. As it was in Christ's day so is it now—the Word everywhere, but its contents shamefully despised. Then Moses was lauded, whilst his teaching was ignored. Now Jesus is lauded, whilst his doctrines are blasphemed. Now, as then, a fearful time of retribution is ahead. The world-wide distribution of the Bible involves a responsibility which men but little dream of. Ere long they will be brought to their senses. "Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 5:24).

Oh the folly of poor puny man! Although he cannot make a fly, nor foretell the events of to-morrow—although a headache will incapacitate him, and a little poison extinguish him—yet he hesitates not to sit in judgment on the ways of God. Inability to explain the will of God in permitting evil to prevail upon the earth, is not a logical reason for affirming that God has cruelly blundered in the matter. The withholding of full light concerning it may be a part of the means by which He has afforded us scope for displaying that confidence which is the reasonable ground of acceptance with Him. With a smaller estimation of our own demonstrably imperfect and untrustworthy judgments, we should be more inclined to adopt a wise view of the question.

If God had power to foresee the evil—to foretell it—to manipulate events throughout it—to determine its length—to appoint a glorious future as the outcome of it (and the Scriptures show that He had the power in each of these respects), can we question His wisdom in permitting it? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Surely His power and intelligence, especially His goodness as in the Gospel seen, compel us to trust Him on points whereon He has not fully spoken. Let us follow Abraham, who halted not, but believed when brought face to face with incomprehensible items in the Divine communications. The beginning of wisdom is to believe that God in all things knows best, and to believe that His mind is infallibly revealed in His Word. Apart from this conviction there can be no mental rest, but perplexing uncertainty and miserable speculation.

"If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jno. 13:14). The lesson here is too plain to be misunderstood. We may travesty the words, as the Man of Sin has recently done, by literally construing them; or we may, which is far more likely, give them the go-by. The lesson was needed, or it would not have been given. The humility inculcated is not natural to us. Unreformed man is proud and consequential—he loves a position of

authority. Let us not confound humility with shyness—with that mental imperfection which makes the head droop, the face blush, which inclines us to take a back seat, and robs us of our courage. Christ's humility was active and practical—it had back-bone and go about it. Let us develop it. It is not always agreeable to take the place of a servant, especially to those whom we think our inferiors. But this is what Christ requires—an industrious, loving humility—a serving of others (irrespective of their standing) as occasions offer.

Our mission is to serve—to do good—and every position of life in which we may be placed, will provide us with countless opportunities. If we realise our mission—if we are obedient to the words of Christ—there will be no haughtiness, no domineering, no supposed superiority. It is not necessary that there should be any abandonment of ecclesial or social positions to carry out Christ's precept. The thing is for every one, be he father or child, master or servant, presiding brother or hall-keeper, to see that he fills his position, not for his own selfish ends, but as a means of blessing to others. *The Christadelphian—1890*

## **Analecta Apocalypticæ (18)**

### **The Ecclesia at Thyatira**

Thyatira stood forty-eight miles east of Pergamos. It was a city of Lydia on the Lycus, a branch of the Hyllus, anciently called Pelopia, but now Akhissar by the Turks: that is, "the White Castle," from the great quantity of white marble there abounding. Only one ancient edifice is left standing. The rest, including the clerical bazaars, or "churches," are so destroyed that no vestiges of them are to be found. The principal inhabitants are Turks, who have eight mosques in Akhissar, while the Greeks, calling themselves Christians, have no edifice indicative of the former pre-eminence of their mistress, "the woman Jezebel," among Thyatirans. So effectively has "the Son of the Deity, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and his feet like to incandescent brass," fulfilled the threatening, saying "Behold, I cast her into a bed, and them committing adultery with her into great tribulation; and I will slay her children with death." The only vestige of Christianity there is a few ignorant and superstitious Greeks calling themselves by the name Christian," to which they are no more entitled than the Turks.

In the inscriptions of these apocalyptic epistles, none of the cities are addressed, as if each city were an ecclesia. In the English Version, that to the Ephesian saints is inscribed "to the Angel of the Church of Ephesus." This style of address is in accordance with the notions which prevail in the synagogue of the Satan, where a city or a nation are regarded as synonymous with a church. Hence, in the nomenclature of "the Satan, as they speak," we have the titles, "the Church of Rome," "the Church of England," "the Church of Scotland," "the Church of Ireland," and so forth; so that all born of the flesh, and of the will of man, in these places, not avowing themselves dissenters, are regarded and claimed as bona fide members of "the church by law established" — established by the law of flesh and blood, which is the Devil. But the Scriptures recognize no such churches. They contain no epistles addressed to such. These are the several branches of the Synagogue of the Satan, whose angels are the men constituting the "Holy Orders" of the apostasy. The apocalyptic epistles are severally addressed "to the Angel of the Ephesian ecclesia," "the ecclesia of Smyrneans," "the ecclesia in Pergamos," "the ecclesia among Thyatirans," "in Sardis," "in Philadelphia," and "the ecclesia of Laodiceans;" but, whether saints of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, or Laodicea, they were all, who held fast the name and denied not the faith of the Spirit, the ecclesia, or invited ones, "in the Deity, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Anointed." They boasted not in the ecclesiasticism of their native cities or countries, but in the Lord.

#### **Lydia Introduces the Truth**

The Christian faith was, doubtless, introduced into Thyatira by Lydia, whom Paul and his companions first became acquainted with at Philippi, a city of Macedonia. She was "a worshipper of God belonging to Thyatira, but for the time being sojourning at Philippi as a seller of purple." Paul met her at the proseuchi, by the river side (Acts 16:13), beyond the city walls. She had gone there with other devout women to offer prayer to the living and true Deity. It was "on the day of the sabbaths," or, as we say, on Saturday, by which we may infer, that Lydia was a devout Jewess, or Gentile proselyte, belonging to the synagogue in Thyatira. Luke, who was present, says, that "the Lord opened her heart to assent to the things being spoken by Paul; "and the result was, that she was baptized. Thus, Paul planted, but the Lord gave the increase; and the case shows under what conditions the increase was given. Certain things were being spoken by Paul. The things being spoken were "the truth," or "Gospel of the Deity, which he had before promised by his prophets in the holy scriptures" (Rom. 1:1,2); and that truth, "as it is in Jesus." Paul could speak no other things, and none other would have opened Lydia's heart, or understanding to an affectionate comprehension such as the Lord would have acknowledged. The truth spoken is the Lord's instrumentality for the opening of men's hearts; and where the truth is neither heard nor read, there the hearts of mankind remain unopened, and are found to be occupied by all "the depths of the Satan, as they speak."

The reader will observe, that before the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, she was already "a worshipper of God." This fact proves that a belief in, and sincere worship of, the true God is not sufficient for salvation; if it is, why did the Lord open the heart of His worshipper to receive Paul's teaching? But it is not sufficient; for since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, salvation is predicated on believing the things concerning the kingdom of the Deity, and the name of Jesus Anointed, and being baptized into that name. Any teaching in opposition to this, belongs to the departments of the synagogue of the Satan, apocalyptically designated as "Balaam," and "the woman Jezebel."

Lydia's heart, or understanding and affections, were opened. She desired that others should share with her in the benefit she had received. She therefore introduced Paul to "her household." We are not informed whether these were worshippers of God as well as Lydia; or whether it was composed of men and women, or exclusively of the latter. The probability is, that as she had come with purple goods from Thyatira, she had a retinue of male and female attendants and friends. The men of her company would look after the goods in their transshipment, and exhibition for sale in the bazaar, while the females would assist in the sales, and render any personal service she might require. Hence, "her household" may have been quite numerous; for visiting cities for the sale of goods in those days was a more onerous affair, and required more personal service, than in these, when companies supply the place of private enterprise. Her household may have been Jewish, or mixed; probably purely Jewish, as she was of that faith; be this as it may, she introduced Paul to them, that he might speak the same things for the opening of their hearts which he had for the opening of hers. "As his manner was," he declared the testimony of God, and reasoned with them out of the prophets concerning the expected Son of David, and King of Israel, called the Christ. His testimonies and arguments commended themselves to their honest hearts, which opened through the force of conviction to the obedience which the faith enjoins. As the result of the whole, Luke tells us in Acts xvi. 15, that "her household was baptized." Lydia and her household were thus, by faith and baptism, added to the name of Jesus Anointed, or "the Lord the Spirit;" and an ecclesia of Thyatirans was created, so that when they should return to that city, they would become the nucleus of the apocalyptic ecclesia to which the Spirit writes; and "the house of the Deity, which is the ecclesia of the living Deity, the pillar and the foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

But after this Paul visited Anatolia, or Asia Minor, in which Thyatira was situated and flourished, and, although we have no account of his visiting that city, there is every reason to believe that multitudes from Thyatira visited him. In Acts 19:8-10, it is expressly said, that Paul while at Ephesus disputed and persuaded the things concerning the kingdom of God, first, for three months in the synagogue there, and afterwards daily in the school of one Tyrannus for two years, "so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." No doubt many of these were immersed by Paul or his companions, and on their return to Thyatira received into the ecclesia already there.

The creation of the ecclesia among the Thyatirans after this manner occurred about thirty-five years before the dictation of this epistle to their "angel," or eldership, by the Spirit. Ample time had, therefore, been granted them for the development of Christian character. In the general, it appears to have been commendable, though in a certain particular, they were reprehensible. The spirit of the Lord in the gifts he had bestowed had dwelt among them, and in their eldership, during the period of their ecclesiastical existence. The Son might therefore well say, "I have known thy works." Though the resurrected and anointed Jesus was invisible to them, the gifts of the spirit they possessed had been sent by him, and as long as they continued, were a perpetual memento of his existence at the right hand of power, and of his perception and cognizance of all that was transpiring in all the ecclesias of the Habitable. "The grace and the truth," says John, "came by Jesus Anointed," who, as David predicted, and Paul testified, "ascended on high, and received gifts for men." Hence, wherever those gifts were, there also were the presence and power of the personal, or individual, Son of the Deity, who speaks in these epistles as "the Spirit," on the principle that "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and therefore God, or DIVINE POWER.

The works of the Angel were conspicuous for "love, and service, and faith, and endurance." Such an eldership must have been in the general in a spiritually healthy and efficient state; and which argued also a wholesome condition of the Spirit's servants, called in the letter "my servants;" or, in the nomenclature of the synagogue of the Satan, "the laity." It is "the leaders of the people cause them to err;" but where the leaders are faithful, this cause of error is wanting. The leaders corrupt the people, and when the people are corrupted, the seducers are enthroned and flourish; and the people come at length to delight in the corruption that destroys them.

### **Two Classes of Leaders Emerge**

The ecclesia among the Thyatirans became an arena upon which the two classes of leaders displayed themselves. The one class were characterized by a more abundant love, service, faith, and endurance in the days of John, than in the days when they were originally constituted the Star of Thyatira; while the other class was characterized by the idolatrous, meretricious, and murderous wife of Ahab, "the woman Jezebel," who slew the prophets of Yahweh. The former were the Antipas in Thyatira whose devotedness sustained the truth against the machinations of all its enemies, heretical or pagan. Their "love" was not like that of the Satan's — a love of "divine things" as far as agreeable to our animal instincts, and compatible with our worldly prosperity and peace. The love of the Antipas was the fulfilling of the law; the doing whatsoever Jesus had commanded, by which they evinced that they were his real friends. Many of the Satan's synagogue who rejoiced in Jezebel, possessed spiritual gifts, and could speak with tongues, and prophesy, and understand mysteries, and had the knowledge, and the faith to remove mountains, and bestowed their goods to feed the poor; and not only in some cases gave their bodies to be burned; but in crowds rushed to martyrdom, till the pagan authorities refused to kill them; and told them to become their own executioners. Still, as Paul intimates, they were nothing; for they were destitute of "love." So it is now. Though papists and protestants, Jezebel and her children, have not the gifts, yet they largely bestow of their goods to feed the poor, and in many instances have, and would again, sacrifice their lives for what they call "the gospel;" still like their predecessors in apostolic times, they are nothing but sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal, because they are destitute of the love commended in the Thyatirans. This was "long suffering and kind," even to an excess rebuked by the Spirit in the letter before us; for they permitted Jezebel-teachers and seducers to speak, instead of putting them to silence at once. These were envious, boastful, puffed-up, of unseemly behaviour, seeking their own, easily provoked, evil thinkers, who rejoiced in the mystery of iniquity, which was finally established by their means. These were the characteristics of Jezebel and her children,

John's clerical contemporaries, and the official fathers of the professional soul-savers of modern christendom. Their co-apostolic predecessors like themselves were destitute of "love," without which men cannot be saved. "Love," says Paul, "rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Paul's clerical contemporaries did not rejoice in the truth; but relinquished their original hold upon the name and denied the faith of the Spirit. Our clerical contemporaries are in the same condemnation. They cannot, if their lives depend on it, inform the public what "the truth as it is in Jesus," consists in. They are ignorant of its system in toto, and therefore cannot "believe all things and hope all things," and consequently have not the love of which this faith and hope are constituent parts.

The service of the Star-Angel in Thyatira, like its love, had increased. Their last works were more than their first. They contended earnestly for the faith originally delivered to them; like the Antipas in Pergamos, they held it fast, and were therefore in a position to overcome; for the power of victory is our firm and hearty belief of the truth. They were the pillar and support of the truth in Thyatira, where it might have flourished to this day if their successors in office had been "faithful men able to teach others." But this unfortunately was not the case, so that the fountain being poisoned at the head, the waters became bitter, and the people died. The evil had begun to work by A.D. 98, the epoch at which the Spirit addressed them through John. Forty years before that the Mystery of Iniquity was at work; but it had not yet triumphed in Thyatira. It was, however, hard at work there professedly opposed to Paganism, and at the same time doing its best to paganize christianity. The Mystery of Iniquity had its apologists in all the ecclesias. In Ephesus, they falsely styled themselves "apostles;" in Smyrna and Philadelphia "Jews;" and in Laodicea, they said, they were "rich, and increased in goods, and had need of nothing." But the Spirit pronounced them "liars," "vanquishers" and "wasters of the people," the Satan, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," and, as in the letter under consideration, the Woman Jezebel.

*Arranged from the writings of Bro. John Thomas by Bro. Bob Widding*

### **What Does That Mean?**

*"Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?" Ezekiel 14:3*

What is it that these elders of Israel did that was considered so bad by God that He would not even allow Ezekiel to talk with them?

They had "*put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face.*" What does that mean? They put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Some other priority was already occupying their heart before they came to God. Let's speculate a little, could it have been their position in Babylon, their desire for status or wealth? Maybe their homes or material possessions causing them to stumble, or could it have been the TV shows, movies or internet sites they were viewing that was being set ahead of God and causing them to stumble into iniquity? We are not told what the issue was and it may be, as it is with us, that each one of us has our own and different temptation that causes us to stumble into iniquity.

Their sin was not open idolatry, but the "setting up of idols in their hearts." They were influenced by the pagan thoughts and practices around them, and had allowed these to gain preeminence in their hearts so they no longer gave primary allegiance to Yahweh. They should have recognized those temptations and followed the course required to eliminate them as outlined by Christ in Matthew 18 verses 8-9:

*"8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.*

*9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."*

Instead of casting these stumblingblocks far from them they dwelt on them in their minds and set them up as idols, something they idolized and sought after, thus usurping the position that is reserved for God. John finishes his first epistle with these words. "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.*" Paul informs us in Colossians 3:

*"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

*2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

*3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

*4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

*5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, concupiscence (evil desires or lust), and covetousness, which is idolatry."*

Brothers and sisters we live in an age of materialism where we are bombarded on every side with advertising which tells us not to be satisfied with what we have, go out and buy the latest and newest. Let us not set up idols in our hearts which become stumblingblocks causing us to fall into iniquity. God will not tolerate it. *Bro. James Sommerville*