

# Scripture Truth

January - March 2008

John 1:1-34

Hold it fast - pass it on!

Walk worthy of the Lord

A Look at Nehemiah for Today

The power of the public reading of Scripture

# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

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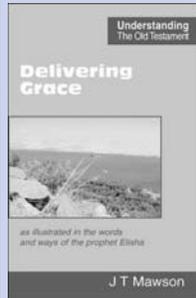
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# Hold it fast – pass it on!

Glenn Baxter

*A fine motto for a new year! Note Glenn's important point that "holding fast" means holding on to the very words of Scripture.*

Each believer in every generation of Christians has had passed down to him or her the precious truth of God. Each then has the responsibility to hold on to that truth, to witness to it, and to pass it on to the next generation. Paul wrote to Timothy: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13 AV). This verse is the subject of our article. And Paul also wrote, "The things that thou hast heard of me ... the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). We shall keep this verse in mind too.

Under God's guidance, Paul had sent Timothy, whom he valued highly (e.g. Philippians 2:19-23), to Ephesus to deal with matters of concern in the church there. Timothy was inclined to be timid and may not have been too strong physically (1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 1:7). Paul wanted him to understand the truth, to teach it and to stand firmly for it. In effect, Paul, the older Christian man, was passing on the torch of truth to the younger man, Timothy, and was encouraging him in turn to pass it on to others at Ephesus.

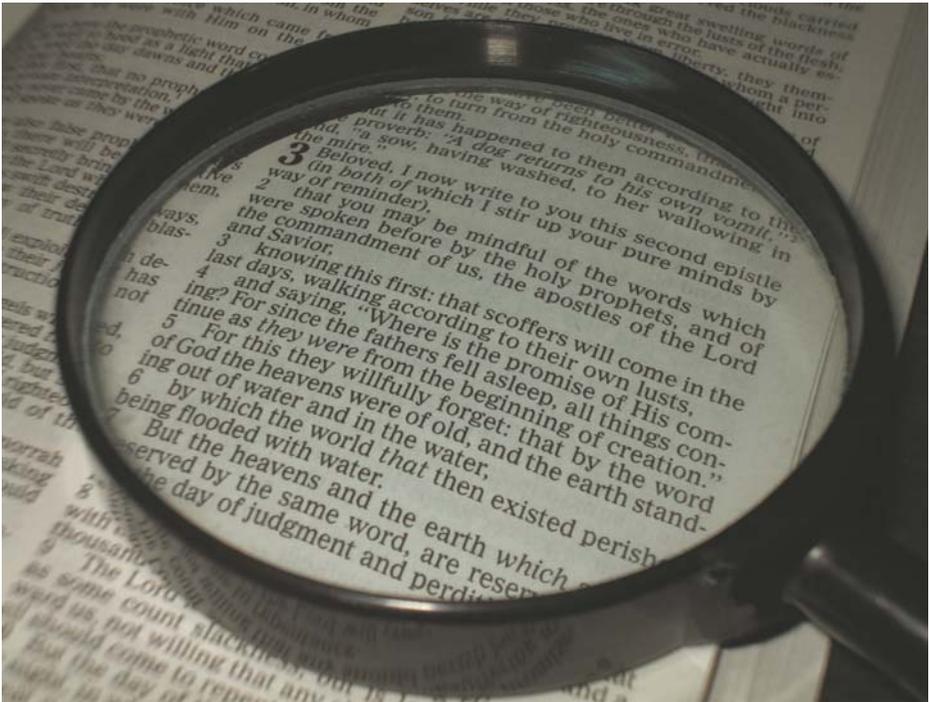
I would like to divide 2 Timothy 1:13 into four phrases and to think separately about each.

## "The form of sound words"

Or, alternatively: "the pattern of wholesome words." Now, there are some important messages in this phrase. When Paul wrote "form," or "pattern," he meant that Timothy should have clearly in his mind an outline of the truth of Scripture, know that truth and not allow himself to deviate from it. What is more, the phrase tells us that this outline of truth is based on *actual words passed down* to Timothy and to us. What and where are these words? Surely not just some vague reference to traditions passed down, whose accuracy and reliability may be open to







(22:18,19) to anyone who adds to or takes away from the words written in Scripture. Please note again that this warning refers to the actual written words of Scripture - the same idea as in our verse in 2 Timothy 1:13. The Holy Spirit wants to guard the very detail in the inspired words left on record for us. He wants us, in “passing on the torch,” to know and guard the actual words of Scripture.

The third verse in the short epistle of Jude reinforces our subject. Part of it reads, “It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” The body of truth that we have to fight for and defend is not being continually added to – it was *once for all* passed on to believers by the apostles - as a complete statement! Jude goes on in verse 4 to say why he needed to make this exhortation. Certain men had crept into the churches and were spreading teachings which were not in accord with the truth of God. These were ungodly men who had perverted God’s grace into lawlessness and immorality and were denying the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a time of apostasy, that is, of a falling away from a professed position of faith once taken. Jude urged believers to contend, or fight, to maintain allegiance to the body of truth set out in Scripture.



Peter also warns of false teachers being present among believers. I urge you to read the whole of chapter 2 of Peter's second epistle, but we only have space here for the first two verses: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And

many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Peter warns that these false teachers will be right there among professing Christians, spreading their evil teaching, but making it sound so plausible and attractive that many follow their ways. As the antidote, Peter then instructs believers to be mindful of the *actual words* of the prophets and the commandments of the Lord delivered through the apostles (2 Peter 3:2). Once again, the emphasis is on the detailed words of those divinely-appointed messengers. These alone should form the basis of what Christians believe and adhere to.

And the apostle John also added *his* voice to this warning. In 1 John 4:1-6, he warns that there are many false prophets; therefore what is said needs to be tested before being accepted. John gives a fundamental test in verse 2 for determining whether what is being said derives from the Spirit of truth or the spirit of error. "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." John was very concerned to emphasise that the teaching concerning the person of Christ is vital and must be held at all cost. This fits well with the Gospel of John, in which John portrays Jesus as the Son of God and reveals many distinctive truths about the person of Christ. Let all Christians take heed of John's instruction, and beware of anyone of any position who tries to put forward anything contrary to Scripture as to who Christ is and what He has done! John further says that "he that knoweth God heareth us" – i.e. listens to the apostles (v.6). The test is: is what is said true to the words of the apostles?

Finally on this matter I draw your attention to what Paul said in 1 Timothy 4. In verse 1 he writes that the Holy Spirit expressly warns that in these latter times some will depart from the faith through giving attention to seducing spirits and doctrines emanating from demons. In verse 16 he contrasts these doctrines with "the doctrine." In verse 6 we see again the emphasis placed by the Holy Spirit on the knowledge of the *actual words* of the faith. In that verse Timothy is urged to

remind his fellow-believers of these important things, in effect passing on to them the flame of the truth to hold and to guard!

So, Paul, Jude, Peter and John unite in the same emphasis that there is one, and only one, source of truth, that is, the Holy Spirit speaking through the divinely appointed prophets and apostles. We are warned to expect that the set of sound words which they wrote will be under attack from satanic sources and through individuals who may be within the church and masquerading as true believers.

**“...in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”**

But, in taking 2 Timothy 1:13 to heart, we must not at all forget its important last few words. These tell us *how* we are to hold the “sound words” heard from the apostles, namely, with a right spiritual attitude of “faith and love.” Our belief is not in a theoretical or academic set of words or ideas. Our belief is in a living Person, Christ Jesus, and the truth connected with Him. We hold that belief first of all in a living *faith* in God and His Word and we then show and share our belief in *love* to those around us. This would stop us being legalistic about the truth. Yes, of course we stand firmly for the truth of Scripture and don’t move on the fundamentals, but we display and discuss the truth in love, trying to carry on the pattern established by our Lord as recorded in John 1:17 where it says, in contrast with the legalism of the Old Testament times, that “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”

**“Hold fast”**

I have deliberately left to fourth and final place the opening two words of 2 Timothy 1:13 - “Hold fast!” All that we have considered challenges me and you to *hold on to* that “outline of sound words” that each of us should have in our minds. That “outline” will not be magically imprinted in our memories. The imprinting happens only through regular and careful reading of the Bible, day by day, and by obedience to it.

Judges 7 is a thrilling record of a battle where only three hundred of God’s earthly people, the Israelites, were up against the vastly bigger army of one of their enemies, the Midianites. The Israelites were led by Gideon who, like Timothy, had started off as a timid man. Their strange weapons were a torch, initially covered by a pitcher, and a trumpet (Judges 7:16-18). The use they made of them is in verse 20:



“And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.” The torch in one hand threw light on the darkness around them, whilst the trumpet in the other sounded forth the noise of God’s people. Part of their cry was “The sword of the LORD.”

What a picture that is for God’s people today! Ephesians 6:17 says that “the sword of the Spirit is the word of God.” Psalm 119:105 records that “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Trumpets are often used in Scripture to convey the idea of God’s message being sounded forth (e.g. Numbers 10:1-10 and Revelation 1:10, 11). As Gideon’s little army held on to its torches and trumpets, so we today are urged both to hold on to what God has to say in His Word and to make His message clear to those around. This obedience to God’s instruction brought Gideon’s army a resounding victory. Today, as at any time in the church’s history, it remains the only way for ultimate victory, however large and formidable the opposition may be.

At the end of this second letter to Timothy, Paul warned of a time coming when many would not tolerate sound and helpful instruction, wanting instead teaching which is appealing to their natural instincts and easy to listen to - even if some of it is based on fables and not on God’s Word (2 Timothy 4:3,4) . I firmly believe that that time has come. It is for every individual believer to seek to teach and adhere to the truth as set out in the Word of God even if some others, even in our churches, are not particularly interested in it.

What a temptation it is at times to change what the Bible actually says, perhaps to try to make the message sound more appealing, or make it fit better with changing social, political or moral views or standards! But that is not God’s way, as we have seen from the verses which we have thought about in this article. To make such changes is to give in to the false teachers about whom we are warned.

At the small church which I attend, we have a few Christians in their teens and twenties. It is a great joy to see them grow in their knowledge and appreciation of the Word of God “which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23). It is a responsibility but also a privilege to pass on the torch to them and to pray that they might run faithfully with it, knowing and holding firmly to the pattern of sound words set out in the divinely inspired Bible.



# The power of the public reading of Scripture

Gordon Hughes

*“And [He] stood up to read” (Luke 4:16). What a reading of Scripture! For, as Gordon says, our Lord had only spoken nine [English] words of comment on it when the congregation marveled. Reading the Bible passage at the start of a meeting is not a minor formality but a major responsibility!*

## Introduction

In 1 Timothy 4, after encouraging Timothy to be an example to other believers, Paul writes, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (v.13 NKJV).

This instruction most likely refers to the *public* reading of the Scripture. *Personal* study of Scripture is of course absolutely vital for Christian growth, as much today as in Timothy’s day. Clearly Paul practiced it; hence his moving appeal to Timothy just before his martyrdom, “Be diligent to come to me quickly... when you come... [bring] the books, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:9-13). However, the NIV translates 1 Timothy 1:13 as “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture;” similarly the footnote in the JND Trans. gives, “reading out [to others].” The only two other occasions in Scripture where the same Greek word is used (Acts 13:15; 2 Corinthians 3:14,15) both clearly refer to public reading. And, signifi-

cantly, the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) uses the same Greek word in Nehemiah 8:8 for the important public reading of the Law of God.

Paul’s letters to Timothy breathe an atmosphere of love and concern for the spiritual wellbeing of his “son in the faith,” and for his development as a servant of Christ. They were written as Paul drew near the end of a long and fruitful life of Christian service. Indeed, it is believed that Paul was martyred shortly after writing the second epistle. In both epistles, then, Paul seeks to distil from his long experience those lessons which he feels would be most helpful to pass on to Timothy. This is the context in which he encouraged Timothy to “give attention to reading...”

It is important, then, to investigate why Paul insisted on this *public* reading.

## The power of God’s word

Obviously, in a day when relatively few people were able to read or rich enough

to obtain a portion of Scripture, public reading of Scripture was the only way in which it might be learned. But there is a deeper reason for public reading. Paul recognised that the words of Scripture were “given by inspiration of God [literally, ‘God-breathed’]” (2 Timothy 3:16). As such, they have a power beyond any words of man. It was this power which Paul wanted Timothy’s listeners to experience. Timothy’s preaching, exhortation and teaching were to be based on these God-breathed words, and not on any current fashions of the world.

The writer to the Hebrews recognises this same power of God’s word: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). We should look at this statement in some detail.

- *Living.* The word of God is from God Himself, the source of all life. As such, His words are able not only to give life but also to enhance the life that is given. So the Lord Jesus could rightly claim, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).
- *Powerful.* The Greek word used here, (*energes*, from which we get our word “energetic”), might also be translated “active.” It is translated as “effective” in 1 Corinthians

16:9 and Philemon 6. The student preacher, who delivered a trial sermon before his teachers, ended by asking, “Will it do?” His teachers replied, “What will it do?”! We should expect the public reading of God’s word to do things in the hearts and lives of the listeners. It cries out for a response.

- *Sharper than any two-edged sword.* In Ephesians 6:17, the word of God is described as “the sword of the Spirit.” The emphasis there is on its use against spiritual powers of evil. Here in Hebrews the emphasis is on its inner work upon the hearer. Man, made in the image of the triune God (Genesis 1:26) is himself a tripartite being – body, soul and spirit. In his body, man relates to the world around him; in his soul to his inner being, his thoughts and emotions; in his spirit to God. While this distinction is often made, it has to be acknowledged that the distinction between soul and spirit, as the words are used in Scripture, is not always easy to see. But the word of God is able to do its work separately in each of these spheres, speaking to us at the deepest levels of our being.
- *A discerner.* The Greek word used here for “discerner” is *kritikos*, from which we get our word “critic.” It challenges the “thoughts and intents of the heart.” Confronted by it, we find ourselves confronted

by God Himself. The word of God enables us to see ourselves as God sees us!

Let us now to look at some instances in Scripture where the power of reading it is seen.

### **Moses**

“And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD ... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do and be obedient” (Exodus 24:4-7). This is the first mention in Scripture of reading God’s word. Moses had been prepared by God for this special moment. If he had been brought up in a slave family in Egypt, he would never have learned to read. But, brought up in Pharaoh’s household, Moses “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). That wisdom would include the ability to read and write. On Mount Sinai, God had revealed His Law to Moses. Now, in his turn, Moses reads that Law to the Israelites. Without any urging from Moses, that reading produced an immediate response from their hearts: “All that the LORD has said we will do.” Alas! They would have to learn, as Paul and every other human being has learned, “For what I will to do, that I do not practise” (Romans 7:16). But the ready response was there!

### **Joshua**

“And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, [Joshua] wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses...

and afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law... before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them” (Joshua 8:32-35).

After the successful conquest of Jericho and the initial lamentable failure through disobedience at Ai, Joshua does what Moses had commanded to be done when the Israelites entered Canaan (Deuteronomy 27:2-8). He wished the people to learn both the blessings that would come from obedience to God’s word and the curses that would come from disobedience. Young and old alike, Israelite and stranger alike: none would be excluded from hearing God’s word. When Israel’s enemies heard of this public reading, they were roused to opposition. They recognised that God’s people, walking in obedience to His word, would represent an unassailable foe. They determined to attack Israel immediately, before they would have time to set out on this pathway of blessing (Joshua 9:1,2).

### **Josiah**

“And [Josiah] went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem – the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the

Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD” (2 Kings 23:2). Josiah, as a boy of eight years old, had succeeded to the throne following the disastrous reigns of his grandfather, Manasseh, and his father, Amon. Idolatry was rampant in the land. Now, as a young man of twenty-six, he reads for himself the words of the Law. That Law had remained hidden in the Temple and had just been discovered by Hilkiyah the priest, who gave it to Shaphan the scribe. Shaphan read it to the king. What a chain of blessing! In deep repentance for what he recognises as the sinful idolatry of his people, Josiah tears his clothes, humbling himself before God. So God promises him that the judgment which would otherwise have fallen upon the nation for their idolatry would be delayed.

Josiah now urgently calls the nation together to hear the word of God. As a result of that reading, the idols and idol groves are destroyed and the idolatrous priests executed (read 2 Kings 22,23). “With just one reading of God’s word, he changed the course of the nation.” (M.Williams)

### **Ezra**

“So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people... So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading... all the people wept when

they heard the words of the Law” (Nehemiah 8:4-9).

The original word for “distinctly” can have the meaning “translated.” All in that vast mixed multitude would hear God’s word in the form which would be best understood by them. That same lesson still applies today! The same word is used in Proverbs 23:32: “... stings like a viper” – such is the power of that word! The people were moved to tears of repentance.

### **The Lord Jesus**

“So He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read... So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (read Luke 4:16-30).

It is surely significant that this public reading of Scripture, taken from Isaiah 61:1,2, is amongst the first recorded acts of our Lord’s public ministry. It had a profound effect upon His listeners. They “marvelled at the gracious words...” We should note that this effect was produced largely by His public reading, since His own comments on the words had scarcely begun. That sense of *grace* would be occasioned both by the Lord’s choice of Scripture – He stopped short of reading “and the day of vengeance of our God” – and by the way in which the Lord read. Sadly, as the Lord continued to speak to the people, showing the grace of God that in

past times had gone outside the confines of Israel, they refused to listen to Him and would have killed Him.

### Jeremiah

“... this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you... It may be that the house of Judah will hear...” (Jeremiah 36:1-3). Not every response to the public reading of God’s word is good. Jeremiah was commanded by God to write down His condemnation of the people. The words were read first in the Temple before all the people. As a result, they turned to God in repentance. The words were then read privately before the king, Jehoiakim.

The king, stubbornly resisting the pleas of conscience, was so angered by what he heard that he cut the scroll in pieces and burned it (see Jeremiah 36). This negative response highlights perhaps even more sharply the tremendous power there is in the *public* reading of God’s word.

### Some practical considerations

We have seen examples of the tremendous power that can accompany the public reading of God’s word. It is surely important, then, for all who read publicly to take care that they do not blunt its cutting edge by reading it poorly. The following guidelines might be helpful:

- Recognise the tremendous potential there is for blessing in publicly reading God’s word. Recognise at the same time the responsibility involved in reading it. This is in no way to discourage the reader but rather to encourage him to seek the Lord’s help in reading it. That help is only a prayer away!

- Stand up. We have seen that this is what Ezra and the Lord Jesus did. We should follow their examples. Standing to read indicates a respectful recognition of the fact that what is being read is special. It is not an ordinary novel!

- Speak up. It is important that everyone should hear what is read. Some will prefer simply to listen to, and concentrate on, the reading, rather than to follow it in their own Bible.

- Read the passage through quietly beforehand so that you begin to understand its meaning. Only then will you be able to give the sense of what you are reading. It will become apparent which words of Scripture should be read more loudly e.g. the triumphant cry from the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Other passages may need to be read more quietly, yet still loud enough for all to hear. Also, if there are any difficulties in pronunciation, you have time to ask advice.

- Pause at appropriate places. In general, a comma will require a short pause; semicolons and full stops longer pauses. One example out of many should suffice to show the bad effect of failing to do this. “There were also two other, malefactors, led with Him to be put to death” (Luke 23:32). Failure to pause after “other” would class the Lord as an evildoer.

## Conclusion

Let us all appreciate more and more the tremendous blessing we have of being able to hold God’s word in our hands. Presented to our queen at her coronation, it was described as “the most precious thing that this world affords” – and that amongst a glittering array of precious jewels! Let us encourage both the private and the public reading of it and may the Lord richly bless it!

# Walk worthy of the Lord

David Anderson

*What target do you set for your Christian life? How much at the end of your life you would regret having limited it by a low target? "Only one life: 'twill soon be past: / Only what's done for Christ will last."*



Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers was not limited by low targets! In Colossians 1:9,10 he prayed (no less!), "that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner [which is] worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work" (ESV). Do you want to live a life that is worthy of the Lord? Or do you just want to live your life to fulfil your own aims, so long as it isn't (in your opinion) contrary to the Lord? There's a *big* difference! This article

assumes, or seeks to awaken you to, a deep desire to "walk worthy of the Lord."

"Walk" is the word used in the original, here and in many other places, to speak of Christian conduct, not pursued patchily or as a "one-off," but consistently, as a life-long, all-embracing, purposive lifestyle. Does "living for Christ alone" touch a longing chord in you, when you consider that He died for you? Who or what else could you want to live for, if you are bought by His most precious blood?

Living "worthily of the Lord" needs, so Paul's prayer here tells us, a "filling with the knowledge of [God's] will." In the context, this means, knowing what He wants the moral character of our lives to be. "Worthy of the Lord" means that, in God's estimation, our "walk" must be of like value to the walk of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! For the word translated "worthy" has the root-meaning of "weighed in the balance." Before modern internal-standard balances were invented, the thing being weighed (in this verse, my life) was placed on one pan and compared to the correct standard weight (the Lord's life) on the other pan. Everything you or I do in life must be such that everyone will say "that person's a true Christian. That person is Christ-like"!

How would the Colossian Christians "walk worthy of the Lord"? Paul went on to pray that their walk would be: 1. fruitful; 2. increasing; 3. strengthened; and 4. thankful (Colossians 1:10-12).

1. A walk "fruitful in every good work" springs from a character of life so complete that it brings pleasure to God in everything it does. In John 15:1-8 the Lord Jesus Christ



Himself referred to the necessity of His disciples abiding in Him, the true Vine, to achieve this objective.

2. A walk that is “increasing in the knowledge of God” is that of someone growing in, and by, the knowledge of God. This knowledge is what brings the growth. It is like the branches of the natural vine receiving sustenance from the plant itself.
3. A walk that is “strengthened with all might” says that I need to be fortified for the many difficult experiences of Christian living. Christians are, therefore, strengthened (“empowered”) not for performing supernatural acts, but for walking steadfastly and being able to endure life’s trials. Spiritual strength is also needed “for all long-suffering” towards people who prove to be contrary either to the Christian message, or to the Christian way of life. Paul recognises that we need to be strengthened according to the manifested power of God’s glory to exhibit these features of patience and longsuffering, with joy. It is above, and goes beyond, just putting up with adverse circumstances or difficult people!
4. “Walking worthy of the Lord” is also characterised by thankfulness! It is the “walk” of those who “give thanks to the Father,” the source of all of our blessings in Christ. Verse 12 explains why. “[He]...has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (NKJV). The amazing fact is that we share together the inheritance, the place of coming glory, in and with Christ (Ephesians 1:11). Our ability to respond to the Father comes from His having fully fitted us for this glory. He rescued us out of the control of Satan and brought us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, conveyed us out of the domain of darkness and into the new and eternal order. In this kingdom Jesus is Lord, and we must show this by our life-style, and walk worthy of Him! (Other references to thanksgiving in Colossians are: 1:3, 2:7, 3:15 & 17, and 4:2).



### Enoch walked with God

When Paul prayed that the Colossian believers would “walk worthy of the Lord,” he added “and may please Him in every way.” (1:10, NIV). Enoch’s “walk with God” actually achieved this: he lived a godly life in the corrupt antediluvian world (Hebrews 11:5; Genesis 5:22-24; 6:3-6).<sup>1</sup> Enoch had

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:5 quotes the Septuagint version of Genesis 5:22-24 where the word ‘pleased’ is used to translate ‘walk’.

constant communion with The Supreme One [El] for the 300 years of his life that followed the birth of Methuselah! But Enoch was not the only saint whose lifestyle pleased God. His great-grandson, Noah, also walked with God, whilst Abraham, Isaac, David and Hezekiah walked “before” God. There is much to learn from the lives of these Old Testament saints:

- Noah found favour with God and was preserved through the flood because he was a righteous man, blameless in his generation (Genesis 6:9 & 7:1). According to Hebrews 11:7 his righteousness was a practical outcome of his faith. He was altogether in life what he preached (2 Peter 2:5)!
- Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was told by God: “I am the Almighty God! Walk before Me and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1 NKJV). Because he obeyed the Almighty God [El Shadday], he was privileged to be called God’s friend (James 2:23).
- Isaac’s walk before God (Genesis 48:15) showed his unique respect for God and left an abiding impression on his son, Jacob, as shown by the divine name, “the Fear of Isaac.” (Genesis 31:42).
- David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), who “shepherded [Israel] according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands” (Psalm 78:72). He walked “before God in the light of life” (Psalm 56:13, ESV) and enjoyed the blessedness of such a walk (Psalm 1:1). When Solomon confessed this during his prayer for wisdom, God told him, “If you will walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days” (1 Kings 3:6, 14; 9:4). David was made the standard of comparison for all the kings of Israel and Judah that followed Solomon. For example, Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:38); Abijam (1 Kings 15:1-6); Josiah (2 Kings 22:2); and Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:3-4).
- Hezekiah was able to appeal to God about his illness on the basis that he had “walked before [Him] in truth and with a loyal heart, and...done what is good in [His] sight” (2 Kings 20:3 NKJV). His prayer was heard and he was healed (v.5).
- Finally, at the end of the dispensation, it is recorded about Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, “They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord” (Luke 1:6).

The letter to the Colossians, like that to the Ephesians, is designed to show that living faith in a crucified and glorified Christ must work itself out in every sphere of Christian liv-





ing: in assembly life, in family life and in secular life (3:10-4:6). Paul urges the Colossian believers to consciously repudiate the disobedient way of life of unbelievers, “in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these [things]: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (3:7-10). This is different to deciding what to wear each day. It is making a conscious decision *always* to wear the new man, that is, to reproduce the characteristics of Christ! Paul tells us that, to achieve this, we must fully depend on the Lord in every way: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (2:6-7). It is because we are complete in Him (2:10) that we can exhibit Him in our everyday walk.

But what about their relations with those unbelievers in whose lifestyle they had once walked? Paul tells the Colossians to “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time; [and] let [our] speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that [we] may know how [we] ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:5-6). In Colossians this exhortation (similar to that of Ephesians 5:16) follows Paul’s request for their prayers regarding gospel opportunities and proper use of them (vv.3-4). Thus his exhortation about “walking in wisdom towards those who are outside” is in the context of *effective witness*. Therefore “redeeming the time” means “looking out for, seizing, and making the most of,” the opportunities presented to us. However, our witness must be appropriate to the person and place, as well as the time. It will only be effective if it is backed up with a righteous lifestyle (see 3:8-4:1), especially as to our speech. This – as 4:6 states – must be “always with grace,” but “seasoned with salt.” Nor must our conduct compromise the truth of the Gospel, or condone wrong. There always must be the right balance between “grace and truth” (John 1:16-17).

“Walking worthy of the Lord” is a wonderful goal for Christian living. This should be “worthy” in other respects as well:

1. Our walk should be “worthy of the saints” (Romans 16:2). In the New Testament, the name “saint” applies to every believer because every believer has been “set apart” for God. *Therefore we must be holy in every aspect of our*



*lives*. In this verse the action, “worthy of the saints”, is particularly that of receiving another “saint” – Phoebe – for practical Christian fellowship. Do we “receive” in a manner worthy of “saints”? So often we ignore this injunction and seek reasons for refusal, even though we talk so much about “reception”!

2. Our walk should be “worthy of our calling” (Ephesians 4:1,17). In a previous article<sup>2</sup> we considered this by dividing it into “walking in love,” “walking as children of light,” and “walking circumspectly” (5:2,8,15).
3. Our walk should be “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). This wasn’t quite happening in the Philippian church due to some local disagreement. (What local assembly would not recognise its own failure in this?)
4. Our walk should be “worthy of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). This requirement is expanded upon in 4:1-12, where Paul emphasises the need for purity (to please God) and honesty (as a witness to others) in all our ways. In 5:18, he encourages believers to give thanks to God in every circumstance of life. It is in all the details of everyday living that we are to please God, the God “who has called us to His own kingdom and glory”! We also act in a manner “worthy of the Lord” when our priorities in discipleship give the first place to our Master (Matthew 10:37-38). And we act in a manner “worthy of God” when we look after the people of God, especially those involved in His service, ensuring that they are cared for wherever they are, on or off the mission field or in or out of active service! (3 John 6-8)
5. W. E Vine wrote, “The Christian walk is in newness of life, Romans 6:4; after the Spirit, Romans 8:4; in honesty, Romans 13:13; by faith, 2 Corinthians 5:7; in good works, Ephesians 2:10; in love, Ephesians 5:2; in wisdom, Colossians 4:5; in truth, 2 John 3 & 4; after the commandments of the Lord, 2 John 6. And, negatively, not after the flesh, Romans 8:4; not after the manner of men, 1 Corinthians 3:3; not in craftiness, 2 Corinthians 4:2; not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5:7; not in the vanity of mind, Ephesians 4:17; not disorderly, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 [& 11]”.<sup>3</sup>

My prayer is that you and I will, by grace and dependence, “Walk [live lives] worthy of the Lord” – that we will walk as He walked!



<sup>2</sup> “Walking with Christ,” in *Scripture Truth*, October 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See his *Expository Dictionary*, under “Walk.”

# A look at Nehemiah for today

## Part 14: Beware lest you fall (chapter 13)

Ted Murray

*“The ship should be in the sea,” said Dwight L. Moody, “But woe betide when the sea is in the ship! Similarly, the church should be in the world, but woe betide when the world is in the church!” The last chapter of Nehemiah has lessons on just this point.*

### Introduction

The history of God’s people on earth never has the perfect ending – not even in the millennium (Revelation 20:7-10). The fault always lies with the people whom God has blessed and not at all with the God who blesses. The last chapter of Nehemiah is no exception to this rule. *Positionally* the returned exiles were secure thanks to Nehemiah’s wall-building; but *conditionally* they had become lax through

the sense of well-being fostered by this security. The chapter deals with the important subject of separation from what is wrong, and what happens to the community and its members when such separation is neglected. It records failure of people in high places, and carelessness, or lack of diligence, in the daily lives of ordinary people. It seems sad that after all that the Lord had done for this people, failure crept in. The godly life of Nehemiah contrasts with

the failure of some of his contemporaries.

The first three verses of the chapter refer to a high point already described (cp. 8:18; 9:3) – the last day, that great, eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the word of God had again been read prior to the people returning home the next day. On this occasion they had read in Deuteronomy 23:3-4,



that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the congregation of God. The people had acted upon the written word, as reported in 9:2 and 10:28. They had been the obedient people (outwardly at least), rejoicing in what God had done and having made a solemn declaration to observe the Law and serve God (9:38ff). This was the scene that Nehemiah left to take up once again his duties in Babylon (13:6). What a different situation he found on his return to Jerusalem! Failure had affected every stratum of society – the priests, the Levites and the common people. But Nehemiah, with his customary zeal, set about the task of rooting out the problems underlying this failure.

#### **A fifth columnist**

It should be noted that he did not start with the common people, but rather with those who should have been an example, and who had the responsibility to maintain God's standards with regard both to the Temple and life in general. Nehemiah possessed the ability to perceive the problems, the personal courage to confront them, and the diligence to see the remedies through to completion. The chief culprit was Eliashib, the high priest and grandson of the Jeshua who had returned as high priest with Zerubbabel (12:10). Eliashib had made friends with Tobiah the Ammonite, who with Sanballat and Geshem had done his utmost to stop the rebuilding of the walls (4:1,3; 6:1).

Eliashib typified all that is opposed to God and His people.

For, when Satan finds one door closed, he looks for another. Hostility had failed; now he deployed friendship. Eliashib may have found in Tobiah a warm, likeable and entertaining person. Their relationship had blossomed to such an extent that Eliashib arranged for Tobiah to have a room within the temple precincts, which was formerly reserved for the priests charged with carrying out the daily sacrifices and worship. It had once stored the frankincense which typified that which was wholly for God (13:5). Eliashib was evidently more concerned with his position and the power that went with it than with his duties before God and for God's people.

Nehemiah was bitterly grieved. How often are we grieved about what is going on in the church today? Or has friendship with the world so far dulled our senses that we fail to notice the wrong? Nehemiah acted with his customary vigour, and "threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room." He then arranged for the room to be cleaned (today we may call this sanctification), so that the rooms could then be restored as storerooms for the items needed in the daily worship of God (13:8,9). We too have to be cleansed and restored in our worship of the Lord. Nehemiah's qualities are needed in the church today, where in some places entertainment is called

“worship,” and “worship leaders” are classed as artists. The very thing that Satan uses to lull the world is being used to take from the Lord what is rightly His.

Having had his goods thrown out, Tobiah is not heard of again. Surely the lesson for us is that we must rightly judge matters that arise that are contrary to the word of God, and deal with them so that they do not re-occur. Sadly, we find that we are still prepared to find a place within ourselves for things of this evil world, man’s world, that please and entertain us.

### Casualness

Then Nehemiah has to confront other problems. These come under three headings: i) casualness (13:10-13); ii) failure to observe God’s Law (13:15-22); and iii) mixed relationships (13:23-28). These are also problems that the church has to confront today.

We live in a society where it is the “in thing” to be casual. This is evident in peoples’ manner, dress, and indifference to the plight of others. Sad to say, people who tend to be “laid back” are often admired by others. Our God is not the author of confusion, and will have all things “done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:33,40). We have evidence in creation that God is a God of order, and further evidence in the fact that, as Galatians 4:4 particularly states, “In the fulness of time God sent forth his Son.” Repeatedly it is recorded in the Gospels that “the hour

[of the cross] had not yet come.” With God everything has a time and place. This also applies to the rhythm of human work, “Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22 NKJV). It is important to realise that we are only stewards of what God has given us, and will have to give Him an account of how we have used it. In the last chapter of Nehemiah, the situation had arisen in which the people neglected to give of their substance.

The house of God was neglected, and, due to this, the support needed for the servants of the temple was no longer forthcoming. Today, God does not demand tithes of grain and daily offerings of animals, but our time and money are needed to carry out His commission in

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this world regarding His church. Casual irregularity in meeting together and in giving is a problem today comparable with the problem of Nehemiah's day. It is sad when the church is looked at as a place in which we attend certain services at certain times, rather than as *the church*, the body of Christ, those in whom the Spirit dwells and whom He brings together. It is only when we fully realise this, that we accept that regularity of, and care concerning, upkeep and maintenance of the building are also quite vital to the gospel outreach to which we are commanded (Mark 16:15); and that the disease of casualness will be cured. This regularity and care also extends to our attitude towards the Lord's work on "the mission field," towards the persecuted church, and towards other fields of service for the Lord.

### A special day

Although the Ten Commandments, and particularly the Law of the Sabbath, were given to the nation of Israel, not to the church, nevertheless the ethics of those commandments apply very much to our daily living. Verses 15-22 of chapter 13 outline the problem of Sabbath-breaking that Nehemiah had to deal with. Today this manifests itself in Sunday trading, but the problem goes beyond shopping on Sunday. Of course we do not live in a Christian society in which there would be a general observance of the Lord's Day, but that does not entitle the indi-

vidual believer to conform to the behaviour of society at large.

Do we consider fully how we spend the hours at our disposal on Sundays? The time spent at meetings and travelling to and from them occupies at the most four or five hours. That leaves another twelve or thirteen waking hours: how do we occupy these? With sport on TV? Some other leisure activity? If Christians have been given a day of rest from work, which they call "the Lord's Day," let them give it all to Him in service and witness.

And does our code of dress give testimony to the fact that we set Sunday apart from the other days of the week? Some in the church today decry this code of behaviour as "tradition." But it did formerly convey to those around that some people reserved this day for the things of God. Jews were distinguished from the pagan surrounding nations by keeping the Sabbath.

Nehemiah's remedy was a drastic one: "Shut the Gates" (13:19). His action not only affected the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but also the pockets of the Sabbath-traders. It is not up to the church to determine what society does on Sunday, but believers, those who claim to love the Lord, ought to give testimony of that love, by their manner of life, dress and way of spending of their Sundays. Christianity is a "24/7" occupation! We have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Christ; we serve a new Master; and it is our

duty to occupy our time in His service until He comes (Luke 19:13).

### Marrying unbelievers

Nehemiah also found that the people had become lax in their relationships (13:23-38). They had taken wives from the neighbouring peoples of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Ashdod was a place of idolatry, where the temple of Dagon was (1 Samuel 5:2) – an idol thought to have been given a man’s features and the tail of a fish. It was a figure that looked good but could not walk. Similarly, a Christian contemplating marriage with an unbeliever is looking at someone with good appearance but unable to walk the Christian pathway. As a result the Christian’s capacity to work for God will be crippled. How dangerous for young Christians to look for such friendship with those who cannot walk the path that leads to glory!

Ammon and Moab were descendants of Lot’s incestuous relationship with his daughters. The friendships of the Jews of Nehemiah’s time with these people reminds us of how we all are affected by the lust of the flesh and how we need to be on our guard against it. The young people of Nehemiah’s time fell at this hurdle.

The result of these unscriptural marriages was seen even more in the children than the parents. They did not speak the language of Judah (13:24). Deliberate marriage to unbelievers often causes the Christian spouse to drift from Christian fellowship. How sad, when we meet them, to find that conversation dries up when the subject turns to the Lord and His church, when once it would have flowed freely. God can overcome in every circumstance; however the effect may be yet more drastic in the children.

So much did these alliances upset Nehemiah that he took his most violent action yet. He pronounced the offenders “cursed,” and made the people swear that they would no longer allow this to happen. He reminds them of the effect of marriage with pagan women even on Solomon “who was beloved by God”: how much more in their case (13:26-27)? Paul writes that we are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). It has also been said that even marrying a person, though believer, from a different circle of fellowship can cause breakdown and more often than not leads to a parting of the ways with the local church.

*The result of these unscriptural marriages was seen even more in the children than the parents*

As the chapter closes, we read (13:28) that one of the grandsons of Eliashib the high priest (cp.12:10) had even married the daughter of Sanballat, whose power, so ineffectual in open attack (cp.4:7), therefore now affected the centre of the daily government and worship of the people of God. How sad it is, when those who seek to destroy the testimony of God can influence it through human relationships! Little wonder that Nehemiah drove the man out.

Surely we too can learn the lesson given in this chapter, not to condone what is contrary to God's word. The influence of the world is making huge inroads into the life and practice of the church today. Nehemiah in his day took the necessary steps to put a stop to it all. Are we condoning the drift into decline, or are we making efforts, with the Lord's help, to stop

wrongful practices? Nehemiah was able to conclude that he had "cleansed them of everything pagan" (13:30). He had previously re-established the temple duties of the priests and Levites. The fire of testimony had again been kindled. The smoke of the daily offerings was once again seen in Jerusalem. Is our witness visible to the people round about our place of worship, or are we to them some "odd folk" who arrive from time to time at the meeting room or church, though what goes on there is a mystery?

The book closes with the prayer, "Remember me, O my God, for good!" We too, like Nehemiah, should pray for God's help in promoting and maintaining His testimony. Sadly the effects of his work did not last long. We only have to turn to the book of Malachi, probably written a few decades later, to read the question, "Will a man rob God?" and find, sadly, that man would (Malachi 3:8ff).

Four times in this chapter Nehemiah's prayer included the word "remember" (13:14, 22, 29, 31). Throughout the book we see Nehemiah as a man of prayer. As a footnote to the comments already made, it should be said that a further study of his prayers would be profitable.

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# John 1:1-34

## A quick sketch

Theo Balderston

*The opening verses of John's Gospel are simple to the point of bafflement. However they are central to Christian revelation. Here is a doubtless defective guide to their meaning.*

### “The Word was”

“In the beginning was the Word” (verse 1). Words disclose what is in the mind. This majestic opening sentence tells us that from all eternity the purpose of God was to make Himself known. When unbelievers imagine God they imagine Him as unknowable. However, in reality the infinite, unimaginable God makes Himself known in “the Word” to the little child who believes (1 John 2:13)! Just as the small child of a world-famous mathematician can know its father, we *know* the God whose infinite thoughts are eternally beyond us. The opening of John's Gospel is about *how* God has made Himself *fully* known. This opening, or “prologue,” comprises the first eighteen verses. And its last verse (v.18) explains the first, as we shall see.

“In the beginning” echoes Genesis 1:1, but draws a contrast. For “in the beginning” the universe was *created*, and even “in the beginning” wisdom was *brought forth* (Proverbs 8:24-5); but “in the beginning” the Word already *was*. This simple verb recalls Exodus 3:14 – the Word is Jehovah, the I AM (cp. John 8:58). But how can the Word be the “I AM”? The rest of verse 1 clarifies this.

By writing “the Word” and not “the Word of God,” John sets Christ forth not as some subordinate Agent of God but co-equal in glory with God. The next phrase – “And the Word was with God” – emphasises that as long as God was, the Word was in co-eternal relationship with Him. (Verse 18 will disclose what this relationship is.) Therefore the Word is a Person, in relationship with the Personal God. So the revelation of God is Himself a Person – a vital fact for the meaning of what follows. But does this mean that the Word is not God? On the contrary: “And the Word was God.” In fact the order in the original is emphatic: something like, “God is verily who the Word was.” This tells us something more about the nature of revelation. Only God can reveal God: how could *the person* of a time-bound creature reveal the eternal, self-existent God? But there is only One God, and the Person who reveals God is One Being with God. In John 10:30 the Lord said, “I and my Father are one” (NKJV). God eternally is One Being in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All this guards against interpreting the next statement, “All things were made through [lit.] Him,” as if the Word were an inferior Agent through whom the Creator worked.<sup>1</sup> In order to create, God firstly *spoke* (Genesis 1:3). That is, creation through the Word both disclosed the imperious mind of God in creating, and made it happen. “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:6,9). This is why even godless science, to a certain limit, can decipher the structures of the universe: they are not a baffling chaos. However God would not be *fully* revealed until the Word was revealed as a *Person* in relationship with Him.

In verse 3, the positive (“All things were made through Him”) says something about *the Word*, and His greatness. The negative (“without him nothing was made...”) says something about creation, and excludes the possibility of anything in God’s good<sup>2</sup> universe being independent of the Word.

### “In Him was life”

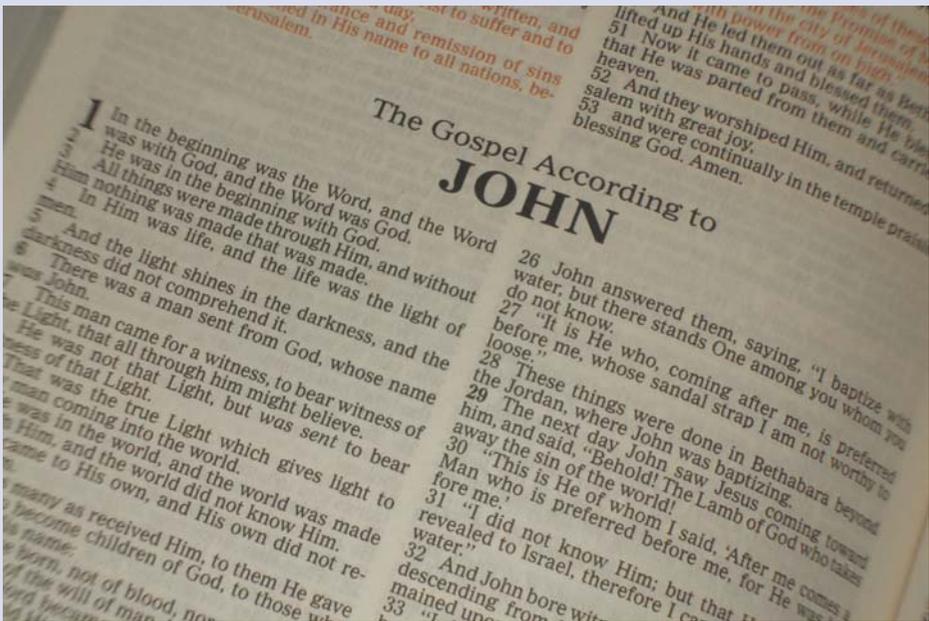
Verse 4 is perplexing. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, I suggest that the light-giving “life in Him” was the relationship between the Father and the Son that was seen in His life in this world. This implies that the “was” of this verse is the “was” of incarnation, as generally in verses 6-18, and not the “was” of eternity as in verses 1-3. The justification for this view is the fact that the theme of “light” binds verses 4-9 together, and verses 6ff (and probably 5) relate to the incarnation. Of the many meanings suggested for verse 4, this seems the only one probable; it is explained by verses close to hand (14 and 18), and adopts the invariable meaning of “light” throughout the Gospel as relating to the Lord’s eternal life as seen in this world. It is also consistent with its close parallels – John 5:26 and 1 John 1:1-2.

On this view, then, verse 4 is a preview of verses 14 and 18. The life of the incarnate Word was the “light” of the revelation of God; which revelation was supremely “the light of men,” and either drove them into darkness, or brought them to salvation (cp. John 3:19-21; 12:46). But (verse 5) this light was not understood by the world. However, neither did the world overcome it. Both meanings are given for this verb in different versions: so I assume both are intended.

Verse 5 is further explained in verses 6-13. For the connection between verses 5 and 6 one must also note the allusion in this idea of “light” to Isaiah 60:1-3. That

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 2:10 says that all things are made “through” God.

<sup>2</sup> The reference to Genesis 1 rules the question, “Did God create evil?” out of order here. For when God saw all that He had made, it was very good (Genesis 1:31). There is not space to go further into this question here.



passage speaks of Jehovah as the light of Israel, and, through Israel, of the world. Therefore John the evangelist here introduces John the Baptist whose mission was specially to Israel as a witness that the Light had come (vv. 7-8; cp. v.31). John was nothing more than that witness. In this chapter his witness was on the one hand to the greatness of who Christ is (vv.7,15,29-34), and on the other to what he himself was *not* (vv.8, 20-21).

With this prior witness and in answer to Isaiah 60:1-3 Christ came to Israel so that “all through him might believe” (v.7). But this did not happen in that way at that time (vv.9-11). All did *not* believe (cp. John 12:46-7). By coming into the world as *Man*, the Light brings to *every human being* the revelation of God (vv.4, 9); but humanity did not recognize Him and, more forcefully, Israel refused Him (vv. 10-11; cp. John 19:15). And yet there *were* exceptions: some did receive Him (v.12). However those exceptions, to whom God gave the right to become His children, received the Light not because of the race they came from (“of blood” in v.13 should read “of bloods”), or because of any natural human inclination (“the will of the flesh”) or of any nobler human choice or philosophy (“the will of man”), but entirely and only because they were “born of God.”

### “The Word became flesh”

Therefore the greatness of the Light that came into the world was beheld only by His disciples. Verse 14 says “we beheld”. What they saw was “shekinah glory” such

as had filled the tabernacle<sup>3</sup> on the day of its dedication (Exodus 40:34ff). But they saw it as “the glory of the Only One from the Father.” That is to say, the glory that they saw consisted in what they glimpsed in His life of His relationship with His unseen Father. This is central to John’s Gospel. Sometimes this was seen in visible wonders, as in the Father’s declarations at the waters of baptism and on the mount of transfiguration. But the disciples witnessed it all the time as they heard our Lord speak of His heavenly Father with such intimacy and personal knowledge; as they overheard His prayers, and as they witnessed His continual dependence on His Father and saw in His works the Father’s love.

The relationship between the Father and the Son was something specially seen by the disciples (cp. 1 John 1:1-2); however John the Baptist also bore witness to His Godhead glory. Although “become flesh,” Christ “...was before me” (v.15). Here the “was” is the “was” of eternity as in v.1. “Before me” is literally “first of me.” A scholar has remarked that this is an absolute, not a comparative: Christ is incomparable. “He who comes from heaven is above all” (John 3:31).

Unlike the terrifying glory of God at Sinai, *this* Godhead glory was “full of grace and truth” (v.14). “Truth” was the revelation of who God is; “grace” was the Son’s self-abasement in becoming Man at all, in the manner of His Manhood, and in His death. However, despite its lowliness, this was not an incomplete revelation of God: but rather the *fulness* of it (v.16). That we should have received the revelation of God in fulness in “Jesus Christ” was indeed “grace [lit.] instead of grace.” The Law had been the fulness of neither grace nor truth (v.17). True, there was grace in the giving of the Law, most notably in the second giving of it (Exodus 33:16 – 34:9), which prefigured the patience of God with His erring people throughout the Old Testament. But that grace was now replaced; it was as nothing compared with the grace that shone forth as shekinah glory “in Jesus Christ” i.e. in God Himself “humbled here.”<sup>4</sup>

### “He has declared Him”

These statements regarding His *greatness* and His *grace* prepare the way for revelation of the fulness of *truth* that was in Him (vv.17-18). Verse 18 balances and explains verse 1, and thus marks the end of John’s “prologue.” It explains *why* John introduced our Lord as “the Word” at the start of His Gospel. He was indeed the Word at creation, but far more so in incarnation. Why? Because *in His Person* He has “declared God.” How has He done this? Because His *Person* as “Son” displays His *relationship* with the Father. When the disciples beheld “the only-One from

<sup>3</sup> The word “dwelt” in v. 14 is literally “tented.”

<sup>4</sup> The original says that “Grace and truth became through Jesus Christ,” echoing “the Word became flesh” in v.14.

the Father,” the Word was declaring God in all His love (v.14). We hide our secret family relations from others: *God revealed His*. “In the bosom of the Father” denotes the love that the Father had for the Son from all eternity (cp. 3:35): the original says, “who *being* in<sup>5</sup> the bosom.” Only from an eternal relationship can the eternal God be made known. The disciples *saw that love*, and in this, the unseen God is declared. See too John 17:26.

The word translated “declared” literally means “narrated.” In His life here the Son “narrated” God: God was “told out” in all the ways in which the disciples beheld in His life “the glory of the Only-One from the Father.” We read John’s Gospel and the other Gospels to see this lovely “telling out” of the Father. Thus the verb “narrate” in verse 18 finally explains what “the Word” does.

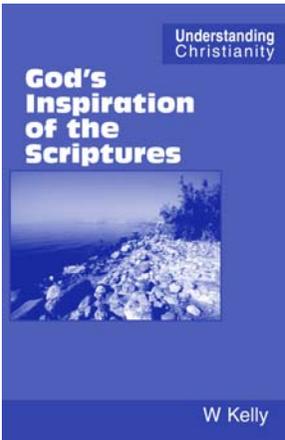
### “This is the Son of God”

Verses 19-28 continue the report of John the Baptist’s witness to what he was not. This negative witness is more emphatic in John than in the other three Gospels: the allusion in v.23 to Isaiah 40:3 is largely negative – “nothing more than a voice” (cp.3:27-30). Although the Lord called him “Elijah” (Matthew 11:14), John himself refused even this name of honour (1:21; cp.Malachi 4:5). For “prophet,” see Deuteronomy 18:18 with Acts 3:22.

There is a complementarity in verses 29 and 34 between the Baptist’s testimony to the Lord as “Lamb of God” and as “Son of God.” “The sin of the world” (v.29) views the totality of sins as one huge mass-sin that disfigures the holiness and glory of God. “Takes away” means that Christ removed that disfigurement by being God’s very own Son offering *Himself* as a Passover Lamb for it. The sacrifice of any less than the Son would not have been the sacrifice than which there can be no greater, which alone can effect this. This sense of the supremacy of Christ, and the necessity of it for sin-bearing, are what underlay John’s total self-deprecation: so he repeats here that Christ was indeed “First of him” (v.30; see above on v.15). But here he specifies “*a man* who is First of me,” because only as Man could the Son of God die for sin. But how did John know that Jesus was great enough to be the Lamb of God? Verses 32-4 explain: God had revealed to the Baptist that the One who came *incognito* to be baptized with water was the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit. But only God can give men the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36:27). Therefore this One must be very God – God the Son (cp. John 5:23; Zechariah 13:7).

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<sup>5</sup> In classical Greek the word “in” in v.18 meant “into.” But scholars say that by New Testament times it often meant simply “in.” However its use here perhaps matches the “with” of v.1 (lit. “towards”), and underlines the infinite closeness of the Son’s relationship with the Father (cp. F.Godet).



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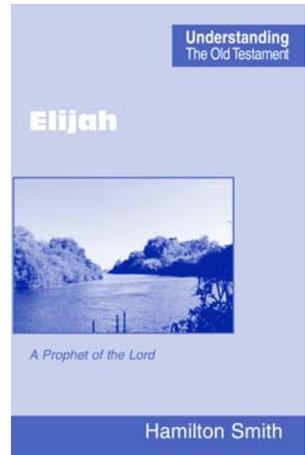
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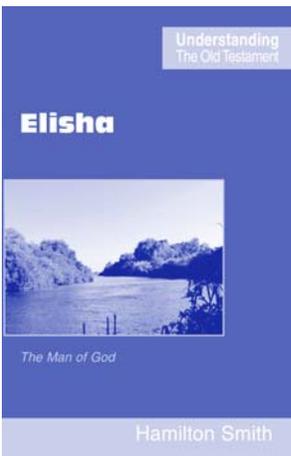


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# The Father Revealed

Thy strength is seen, blest Father,  
In Thy beloved Son,  
Creator of the heavens –  
By Him the ages run.

Thy righteousness, blest Father,  
His attitude displayed:  
Abused by men, He blessed them –  
His prayer to Thee was made.

Thy love is seen, blest Father,  
In His devoted path –  
Bearing men's griefs and sorrows,  
Dying on our behalf.

Thy gracious heart, blest Father,  
Th' accursed tree has told;  
Where, smitten and afflicted,  
On Him sin's judgment rolled.

Thy word is heard, blest Father,  
From His most faithful heart;  
Eternal life is given,  
And we with Him have part.

Thy holiness, blest Father,  
His humble will expressed;  
The word of truth declared Thee,  
And set us with the blessed.

**G.E. Stevens**  
**May, 2006**

*Possible tunes: Angel's Story; Aurelia; Confidence; Dedekam; Ellacombe;  
Ewing; Hankey; Petition; Sovereign Grace; Webb Work.*