

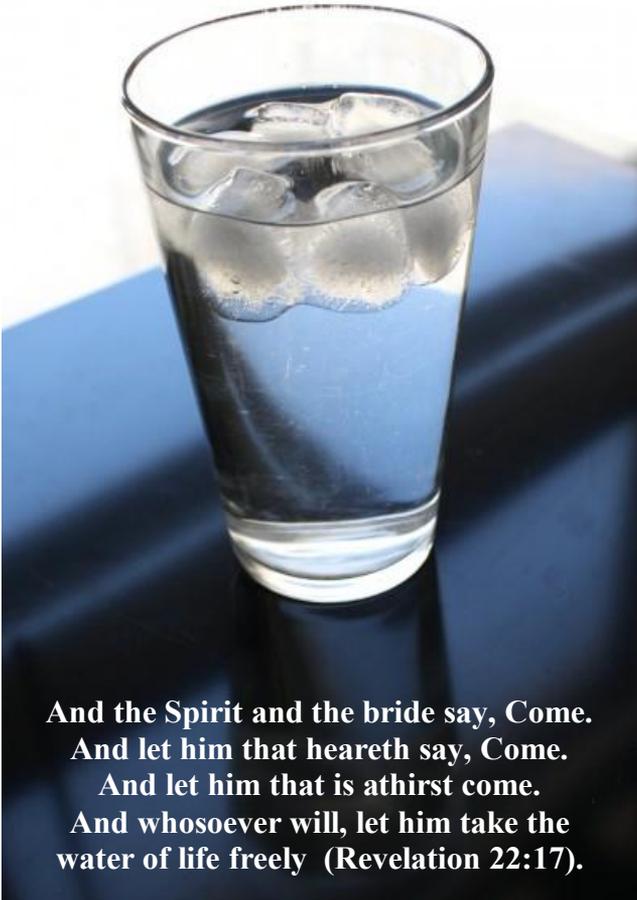
**SPECIAL
ISSUE**

**JANUARY
2013**

The
Christadelphian
Advocate

The Call To Come

Come Unto Me



**And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.
And let him that heareth say, Come.
And let him that is athirst come.
And whosoever will, let him take the
water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).**

Come, My People

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The Christadelphian Advocate

He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.

Jeremiah 23:28

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Introduction

The Call To Come

This issue is dedicated to those who, having once had contact with Christadelphians, have chosen to suspend or end that association... We need to say from the depths of our heart: We care that you left. We miss you. We want you to come back.

For many reading these words, your first contact with the Christadelphians was a result of circumstances outside of your own choosing. It may be that you were born into a Christadelphian family: your parents took you to Sunday School from an early age and you travelled to Bible Schools and gatherings in your adolescent years. You may have decided at some point to put on Christ in baptism and “join the Christadelphians” yourself. Maybe you were introduced to Christadelphians at a later stage in your life by a coworker, a friend, family member or your spouse. If you are male, you may have prayed in our assemblies, read the Scriptures from our platforms, and spoken to the congregation. If you are female, you may have taken the young ones under your wing and taught them stories and lessons from the Bible. This issue is dedicated to those who, having once had contact with Christadelphians, have chosen to suspend or end that association.

We may never know why you left or never embraced the truth as we understand it. You may not fully know the reason yourself. In one sense it does not matter. The fact is that you are not with us now. Maybe you were disillusioned, maybe you were bored, maybe you were “turned off” by something that happened; maybe you just didn’t believe “it” anymore. Maybe it was somewhere in your teenage years when you decided to stop coming around, before you were baptized, and go your own way. Maybe it was at a later point in your life, when your needs and interests changed. No matter the reason, we say from the depths of our heart: We care that you left. We miss you. We want you to come back.

Returning is not easy. It can raise questions like, what will *they* think; will *they* ask me too many questions; or will *they* accept me? Frankly, it does not

matter what we think. Your coming back is not to please members of the ecclesia or make Christadelphians happy – believe us, it will have that result, but that should not be your motivation. What matters is your relationship to the Father and the Son. That’s what we care about for your sake. As the Psalmist says, *in his favour is life* (Psalm 30:5).

In this issue six different writers – each one having experience with a close loved one that left the faith they once held – discuss some of the factors that make the decision to live for Christ in this world the right choice. We ask you read them thoughtfully and prayerfully. Each of the writers has provided his personal email address and is willing to be contacted by you in confidence. The appeals are intentionally structured in the form of letters. You can imagine writing your name as the intended recipient: as the one to whom the salutation is extended.

Should you make the decision to come back, we don’t want you to think about it as “joining the Christadelphians” as if you were becoming a member in some club. The Christadelphians, as you know us to be, are simply a group of sincere Bible students seeking to understand the will of God and practice it. We are far from perfect. We believe that God sent our *Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* We would consider it a great blessing if we could be the means of connecting or reconnecting you with the Saviour who loved us and gave himself for us. We believe that he will soon return to the earth again to undertake the great work given him by his Father, to restore peace on earth through which his Father’s glory may abound – to administer the blessings promised to Abraham and his seed in the Kingdom of God. May you make those choices for truth and righteousness in the time that remains so that you may find His grace and favor for evermore in the day of Christ’s appearing. We hope that you will find this issue stirring and helpful in that regard.

The Christadelphian Advocate Publishing Committee

Editorial Note – Translations Used In This Issue

It is the policy of *The Advocate* to use the King James Version (KJV) as the main reference version when Scripture is cited. Where alternate versions are used, they are generally identified by commonly used abbreviations. In this issue, versions used in addition to the KJV include:

ESV – English Standard Version

GWV – God’s Word Version

NIV – New International Version

Alternative versions are used at the discretion of the authors where they believe the language may be clearer or more easily understood.

Book Review

You Lost Me:

Why Young Christians Are Leaving The Church ... and Rethinking Faith

D. Kinnaman. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, MI. 2011



Drawing on data collected through surveys and interviews in the US, the author, David Kinnaman, explores the fundamental question of why young people leave the faith in which they were raised. The author is a senior researcher at a private company, the Barna Group, which specializes in studying faith issues and trends. The author stresses that each case of an individual leaving the faith – what he calls “the dropout problem” – is unique and that attempts to generalize or categorize overmuch can be a mistake. Young people leave for different reasons and may end up abandoning their faith or choosing a completely new faith. However, despite the highly individualized reasons for “dropouts,” the author contends there are broad generational and societal trends that encourage “dropouts” and which can divide communities. For example, the author repeatedly refers to what he calls “seismic shifts” in our culture – his way of characterizing the new way of thinking that pervades American society.

In a nutshell, the author attributes the primary change driver to advances in information access and enabling technologies: “That reality is facilitating new patterns of learning, relating and influencing the world, as well as changing the way they think about church and Christianity. Technological access allows them to experience and examine content originating from non-Biblical worldviews, giving them ample reasons to question the nature of truth. It generates extraordinary distractions and invites them to be less linear and logical in their thought processes. It empowers them to think as participants, and not just as consumers, of media. And it makes them both more connected and more isolated than generations before them (p. 42).” Furthermore, it goes without saying that these changes are not supportive of the tenets of Christianity as previous generations understand them. The author argues that the coming generation is “discontinuously different” from the Baby Boomers’ generation: “I doubt many previous generations have lived through as compounded and complicated a set of cultural changes as have today’s Christians in the West.”

It would be unwise for us to suppose that the Christadelphian community is immune from “the dropout problem.” We don’t have statistics on how pervasive it is, but there is no one among us who cannot relate to cases of individuals who once actively participated but over time

dropped out. Almost every Christadelphian family can relate firsthand to the sadness that comes when one turns away. Just as the apostle John wrote that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in the truth (3 John 4), the converse is also true: there is no greater sadness than to learn that our children have forsaken the way of truth and righteousness.

In addressing how beliefs and attitudes that impact the dropout problem progress, the author observes:

“A person sets his or her moral and spiritual foundation early in life, usually before age thirteen, yet the teen and young adult years are a significant period of experimentation, of testing the limits and reality of those foundations. In other words, even though the childhood and adolescent years are the time during which spiritual and moral compasses are calibrated, the experimental and experiential decade from high school to the late twenties is the time when a young person’s spiritual trajectory is confirmed and clarified (p. 31).”

The great danger is that once dropping out occurs, the likelihood of recovering and returning is not high, as new relationships form, new ideas are adopted, and the things we learned in our youth – Christadelphian ways of thinking – recede to the margins of the mind.

While trying to find some commonality in reasons for the “dropout” phenomenon, the author summarized six factors, based on the research, in this way: ¹

1. A few of the defining characteristics of today's teens and young adults are their unprecedented access to ideas and worldviews as well as their prodigious consumption of popular culture. As Christians, they express the desire for their faith in Christ to connect to the world they live in. However, much of their experience of Christianity feels stifling, fear-based and risk-averse. One-quarter of 18 to 29 year-olds said, “Christians demonize everything outside of the church” (23% indicated this “completely” or “mostly” describes their experience). Other perceptions in this category include “church ignoring the problems of the real world” (22%) and “my church is too concerned that movies, music, and video games are harmful.”
2. Young people leave their faith as young adults because something is lacking in their experience of “church.” One-third said “church is boring” (31%). One-quarter of these young adults said that “faith is not relevant to my career or interests” (24%) or that “the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough” (23%). Sadly, one-fifth of these young adults who attended a “church” as a teenager said that “God seems missing from my experience of church” (20%).

3. Young adults feel disconnected from faith due to the tension they feel between Christianity and science. The most common of the perceptions in this arena is “Christians are too confident they know all the answers” (35%). Three out of ten young adults with a Christian background feel that “churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in” (29%). Another one-quarter embrace the perception that “Christianity is anti-science” (25%). And nearly the same proportion (23%) said they have “been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate.” Furthermore, the research shows that many science-minded young Christians are struggling to find ways of staying faithful to their beliefs and to their professional calling in science-related industries.
4. With unfettered access to digital pornography and immersed in a culture that values hyper-sexuality over wholeness, teen and twenty something Christians are struggling with how to live meaningful lives in terms of sex and sexuality. One of the significant tensions for many young believers is how to live up to the church’s expectations of chastity and sexual purity in this culture, especially as the age of first marriage is now commonly delayed to the late twenties. Research indicates that most young Christians are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers, even though they are more conservative in their attitudes about sexuality. One-sixth of young Christians (17%) said they “have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them.” The issue of sexuality is particularly salient among 18 to 29 year-old Catholics, among whom two out of five (40%) said the church’s “teachings on sexuality and birth control are out of date.”
5. Younger Americans have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance. Today’s youth and young adults also are the most eclectic generation in American history in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, technological tools and sources of authority. Most young adults want to find areas of common ground with each other, sometimes even if that means glossing over real differences. Three out of ten young Christians (29%) said “churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths” and an identical proportion felt they are “forced to choose between my faith and my friends.” One-fifth of young adults with a Christian background said “church is like a country club, only for insiders” (22%).
6. Young adults with Christian experience say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. They do not feel safe admitting that sometimes Christianity does not make sense. In addition, many feel that the church’s response to doubt is trivial. Some of the perceptions in this regard include not being able “to ask my most pressing life questions in church” (36%) and having “significant intellectual doubts about my

faith” (23%). In a related theme of how churches struggle to help young adults who feel marginalized, about one out of every six young adults with a Christian background said their faith “does not help with depression or other emotional problems” they experience (18%).

All of the writers of this issue have considered the findings of the book, each taking one of the six factors above into consideration, while not necessarily trying to address every point mentioned. Each presents the case why we as Christadelphians should not drop out – and why, if we have dropped out, we should consider coming back. (Both allusions to and direct quotations from the book are made.) The book itself is worthwhile reading by any Christadelphian who is concerned about the dropout problem and who wishes to engage in remedial work, both among those who remain in the most vulnerable age group (thirteen to thirty) and those who have left and might be disposed to returning.

All of the writers who contributed to this issue acknowledged the difficulty of their assignments. None found it easy. *You Lost Me* does not provide solutions to the problems it identifies that most of us would expect to be acceptable to our Heavenly Father. The problem is much easier to characterize than the solution is to prescribe because the pull of the world, with all its devices, is very strong in this generation. However, acknowledging the dropout problem and seeking to understand it are good places to start. *You Lost Me* can help us begin but only the word of God and the strength that comes through Christ will enable us to finish.

Considering the consequences for individuals, families, and our community, we cannot help but ask, if one who has dropped out was disposed to come back, what kind of people would they find us to be? Would they find us to be a people working cooperatively together to preserve the things we hold precious – in order to welcome dropouts back with love and goodwill? Would they find us willing to listen, to understand, to help? We may plant and water but it is in God’s hand to grant the increase to our labors. Let us take great care how we plant and water, that we nurture the tender plants that remain among us, that they might grow and bring forth fruit unto God.

¹ These six points are a direct quote of the Barna group’s summary. The author, David Kinnaman, uses the word “church” and “Christian” to encompass all those denominations that were included within his survey. The point is not that every observation he makes, every finding he documents, is relevant in a Christadelphian context. We need to read his points with discretion but not with complacency.

Come; for all things are now ready (Luke 14:17).

In the parable, a certain man set a great feast and directed his servant to call the guests to the meal. To the host's dismay, the guests made excuses why they could not accept his invitation. One had just bought a new property; another had just married; and a third had just purchased a yoke of oxen and needed to try them out. The guests were not at odds with the host – they were just too busy for him. That does



not reflect well on the esteem with which the host was held. So it is with God's call to come. We may set it aside for another day and get on with other things right now. The parable is to the point: we each have a decision to make about "the call to come" that God has given. Are we guests that come with joy and gladness, anticipating the things He has prepared for them that love Him?...or ones that make excuses why we cannot come now?



(1) Putting the Will of God First

Dear _____,

I am writing down my thoughts to you in response to various discussions we have had in the past about your level of discomfort with what you call the "Christadelphian culture." You have told me that you turned away because we put too much emphasis on Christadelphian sources to guide our social and lifestyle choices. That emphasis is a hard charge to deny as people **who believe the Bible is the Word of God generally have what might be termed a Biblical "world view."** That is, they relate to the prevailing culture in terms of how consistent they perceive it to be with what the Bible teaches.

That said, they are also influenced in their thinking by the cultural norms of the society in which they live. For centuries past, Christianity in all its forms had a significant influence on the prevailing cultural norms, but that influence has virtually disappeared in the last twenty-five years. The prevailing culture is now dominated by what could be called a strictly secular perspective. This secular culture makes little room for religious convictions. Religious convictions are something that are now to be kept out of the public sphere and remain a strictly private matter. There is an

increasingly militant feeling today that religious convictions or influences should not intrude into one's life outside the privacy of one's home or religious center, and should not take precedence over things such as the prevailing curriculum in public education, even for one's own children.

For any believer in the message of the Bible, this approach creates a problem because it is nigh impossible to "compartmentalize" one's thinking in this way. The public sphere and the private sphere are one and the same for the dedicated believer in Christ.

There has always been a tension between trying to remain true to one's beliefs, and simply accommodating oneself to the demands of the popular culture in order to "fit in." This tension was meant to be an ongoing test of a believer's commitment to Christ. Nowhere does the Bible instruct believers to remove themselves to locations where the culture would be less pervasive. For example, Paul did not tell believers to leave Corinth, a seaport notorious for being what today we might call "sin city." The message instead is to remain steadfast in the faith, to be a light in a dark place, to be "in the world" but not "of the world." In any event, it would be virtually impossible to flee from the influence of "the world" today given the pervasiveness of modern communication devices.

However, one thing has been clear all down through history based on what is taught in the Bible: the culture embraced by a believer in Christ is not to be the same as the culture embraced by the world at large. These two cultures are in conflict with one another on many levels and any follower of Christ must accept this conflict as a given fact.

The question then becomes, "to what degree should a believer in Christ be a supporter and participant in the activities and belief system of the popular culture?" Books have been written and sermons given all down through time trying to answer this question by providing guidelines. One hundred years ago, the answer might have involved things like no consumption of alcohol, no dancing, and no work activities on Sunday, etc. The emphasis was clearly on what you shouldn't be involved with.

Because of the dominance today of instant communications, younger people are very tuned in and attracted to the popular culture with its emphasis on the excitement provided by modern technology. We have experienced more rapid change in the society and the culture in the last forty years than in probably the previous four hundred years. **The author of the book, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church*, has identified three dominant influences that have become challenges resulting from this cultural change:**

1. **Access to Technology:** We live in a knowledge economy, in a creative age, powered by science-fiction-like technologies. Masses of information are instantly accessible on a universal basis.
2. **New Sources of Authority:** As a result, there is less reliance on traditional sources of authority and more reliance on new sources based on access to the Internet. For every possible topic, you can access information that is both “pro” and “con.” This choice is true of Bible-related topics whether relating to doctrines or conduct. Traditional sources of authority, such as books authored by stalwarts of the faith from the 19th century or earlier, are no longer regarded by the generation exposed to this plethora of information as necessarily authoritative, and hence they are not accorded the same deference or respect. What appears today in a short Internet article by an unknown author or the opinion of someone on Facebook may have much more immediate influence. Another symptom of this trend is that hard copy books and even newspapers are having less and less influence. Twitter is now regarded as a better source of up-to-date information than tomorrow’s newspaper.
3. **New Social Relationships:** An outgrowth of the explosion of readily available information and social media has been the changes in society. Our society is conducting what the authors call “a real-time experiment with relationships, family bonds, and institutional reinventions (like traditional marriage).” The emphasis is no longer on what worked in the past but rather – “Does this make things fairer, more equal, and more practical?” – as opposed to, “is this consistent with what the Bible teaches.”

The First Hurdle: The Authority of the Bible as God’s Revelation

The key issue is ultimately whether we think the message of the Bible is still our primary authority for interpreting the culture around us and for making choices in our life, or whether the voices of the secular culture should be **the** basis for our choices. If the Bible is well down our list of authoritative sources, then it is very unlikely it will have much influence on our thinking or choices, and as a result, we are unlikely to have much interest in putting God first in our life. The influence of the Bible will just fade from our daily life and be regarded as no more than a warm, fuzzy influence from our childhood.

What it ultimately comes down to is whether or not we regard the Bible as God’s message to human beings, a message that was “God-breathed” through a number of authors over the course of periods of human history. The answer to this question, in turn, determines how seriously we take its message and how willing we are to let it influence our choices in life.

The Second Hurdle: Conflicting Interpretations

However, even if a person is willing to get to the point of accepting that God has communicated to man and has preserved that communication so that it conveys what He intended it to convey, the next hurdle is one of interpretation. How do we interpret the text and what does it mean to us? The ongoing existence of a large number of Christian denominations with diverse theological opinions is a testimony to the lack of agreement in interpreting the Bible according to a common framework, including moral or lifestyle issues. Again, the Internet can offer up a range of interpretations on nearly any Biblical topic.

However, one thing we can say for sure: searching the Scriptures for answers is both desirable and necessary. Jesus our Lord endorsed this viewpoint. He said, *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me* (John 5:39). The fact that there may end up being differences of opinion should not be a reason for abandoning the search for truth in God's Word! The believers at Berea were commended by Paul for searching the Scriptures. We read, *Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.** Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men* (Acts 17:11-12 ESV).

God, in His wisdom, organized His Word in a way that required searching and examining to see if a given interpretation is supported by the message in the whole text of Scripture.

The Third Hurdle: The “Hard Sayings” of Scripture

Once a person gets over this second hurdle, there is a third hurdle he or she faces, namely dealing with things in the Biblical text that make him or her uncomfortable or things he or she may intuitively disagree with. Since we are all products of our culture and therefore have cultural biases, this hurdle is where the conflict between the text and our cultural beliefs comes to the fore.

There is nothing really new in this area of discomfort. Jesus said many things that even those claiming to be believing Christians have difficulty with. For example, people have been trying for over two thousand years to figure out a way around Christ's command to “love our enemies.” In fact there is a whole collection of the words of Christ that are called “The Hard Sayings of Christ.” Even during the ministry of our Lord, his closest followers had trouble accepting some of the things he said, for we read, *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.*

*So Jesus said to the Twelve, Do you want to go away as well? (John 6:66-67 ESV) Fortunately, Peter turned things around by making the following declaration: **Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God** (John 6:68-69 ESV).*

These remain good words to read over whenever we have doubts about our Lord or the message that he taught – *Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.* What is the alternative? Is what the ever-changing secular culture offers really a fulfilling alternative?

This rejection on the basis of what goes against the grain of human intuition may also explain why the teaching of the apostle Paul had marginal appeal to the intellectual elite on Mars Hill. Paul himself was a highly educated intellectual man and he appreciated intellectual discourse. Yet, what he taught on matters like the resurrection was largely dismissed by the cultural elite of Athens whom he addressed. This experience may also explain why he wrote what he did in his first letter to the believers in Corinth, *Brothers and sisters, consider what you were when God called you to be Christians. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view. You were not in powerful positions or in the upper social classes. But God chose what the world considers nonsense to put wise people to shame. God chose what the world considers weak to put what is strong to shame. God chose what the world considers ordinary and what it despises – what it considers to be nothing – in order to destroy what it considers to be something. As a result, no one can brag in God’s presence (1 Corinthians 1:26-29 GWV).*

Do we instead regard experts with multiple degrees from leading universities as being far more objective and authoritative, and hence give their perspective much higher priority than what the Bible says?

Do we accept these words of Paul at face value? Or do we regard this message of the apostle Paul as simply reflecting his own biases, or even his desire to exert control over others? Do we instead regard experts with multiple degrees from leading universities as being far more objective and authoritative, and hence give their perspective much higher priority than what the Bible says?

Paul was not anti-intellectual nor should we be. We should not fear the results of scholarly research or scientific inquiry. But neither should we be automatically “wowed” by the academic credentials and thinking of the

intellectual leaders or scientists of our day. The conclusions of scholarly or scientific research are constantly being refined or replaced by new ideas, ideas that often differ radically from what was the accepted wisdom a generation earlier.

We should recognize that there is really no such thing as purely objective thinking. We all have biases and world views that influence our thinking that we wish to promote. The best we can do is to recognize our biases and attempt to manage them. This bias is apparent in the intellectual and scientific leaders of our day. Perhaps this is what Peter meant in part when he said, *But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you* (1 Peter 1:25). The ideas and views of human beings change, but God's Word remains like a fixed beacon on a dark sea.

We should also be wary of attempts to rationalize the words of the Bible so that they conform more closely with the popular culture. The Bible itself teaches that since the fall of Adam, human beings have an inherited tendency towards evil in their thinking and actions. This tendency does not mean that evil thinking or actions are inevitable, only that human beings have a pre-disposition in this direction. I know you are aware of what the apostle John wrote on the matter regarding "love of the world." He stated it this way, *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever* (1 John 2:15-17 ESV).

The term "the world" here represents the world's thinking or the thinking of the popular culture. What John is clearly stating here is that the world's thinking is not compatible with the Father's thinking as communicated in His Word. Do we believe this? Does the world's thinking intuitively seem more appealing to us than the teaching of the Bible?

Paul was even more direct when he wrote these words to the believers in Rome, *Those who live by the corrupt nature have the corrupt nature's attitude. But those who live by the spiritual nature have the spiritual nature's attitude. The corrupt nature's attitude leads to death. But the spiritual nature's attitude leads to life and peace. This is so because the corrupt nature has a hostile attitude toward God. It refuses to place itself under the authority of God's standards because it can't. Those who are under the control of the corrupt nature can't please God* (Romans 8:5-8 GWV).

The Bible teaches that the thinking of the “corrupt nature” is usually the way that comes naturally to us. The “spiritual nature” is not what comes naturally but instead requires education (from a young age), good examples, ongoing reminders, and effort, before it can have much of an influence on us.

I know you are aware of all these things from your family upbringing. My appeal to you is that you reflect anew upon the Biblical perspective that you were taught and which I have tried to summarize and contrast with the message of the popular culture. The emphasis should be on seeking out the proper Biblical perspective rather than a Christadelphian perspective (although hopefully these two things will be consistent). And it is good to recognize that both Christ himself and the apostle Paul warned that a dominant characteristic of the culture just prior to our Lord’s return would be its ability to deceive – even believers!

The follower of Christ will typically not be free of doubts and will not have all his questions answered to his satisfaction. It ultimately comes down to the question Peter asked in reply to Jesus’ question – *Do you want to leave me too?* Peter responded by asking, *Lord, to what person could we go?* Is there a better risk-free option that offers hope? I do not know of one and I hope you will mull over anew the answer to this question.

With love and in our common desire to follow that which is true, honest, just and pure...

Rick

Richard Farrar, Drumbo, Ontario – rfarrar48@gmail.com



(2) The Relevance of Our Faith

Dear _____,

It is intriguing to ask those of advanced years which changes over the course of their life-times were most remarkable. Their generation has seen many of the greatest advances in technology in all of human history. For those who grew up in the 1920s, as children they experienced the Great Depression and they share associated memories of hardship. Likewise, in their early adult years, they experienced the Second World War, brought to its close by the first military use of an atomic bomb with its deadly destructive power.

For most of us born after the Second World War, life has had a familiar continuity – there have been economic ups and downs and wars in distant

places but for the most part they have not touched us. Life has been good to us – we have had material prosperity and witnessed technological advances in many fields that have contributed to our quality of life (such as health and dental care, communications, travel and transportation). In addition, culturally there have been changes that most of us would recognize as having positive results. For example, racial discrimination and the bigotry to which it gives rise, while not completely stamped out, is widely deplored across our society – in government, in education, in business.¹ In such times of prosperity, progress and positive change, the faith that comes from hearing the Word of God may seem dull and boring – if not out of touch – with the fast moving exciting world of the twenty-first century. Our purpose, then, is to ask you to consider this essential question: **Of what relevance today is the faith that comes from hearing the word of God?**

In such times of prosperity, progress and positive change, the faith that comes from hearing the Word of God may seem dull and boring – if not out of touch – with the fast moving exciting world of the twenty-first century.

Fundamental Questions That Define Faith

The answer to the above question hinges on a series of more fundamental questions. Is there a personal God that brought us into being? Did He reveal a moral code – His law – for the instruction and well-being of the people He created? Did He send His only begotten Son to be a sacrificial offering to bear away our sin? Does His Son, resurrected from the dead, live now at His right hand in the heavens? Can the Father and the Son hear us when we pray to them? Does the Father have a purpose for the things He has made? Has He revealed that purpose in the Bible? Will He send His Son again to earth? How will the world be changed by his coming? Do Christadelphians believe in a kind of dream (Psalm 126:1) called the Kingdom of God that will always be in the future and out of reach? Does the manner in which we live and act today determine our standing before God in relation to that future? Is God the Judge of right and wrong? Will His judgment determine whether we live or whether we die – forever?

I have often reflected on the last words in one of the “faithful sayings” recorded in the first letter that Paul wrote to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. *The saying is trustworthy, for:*

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

If we endure, we will also reign with him;

If we deny him, he also will deny us;

If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself

(2 Timothy 2:11-13 ESV). The striking thing about these if/then statements is the conclusion. Regardless of the position we take, whether faithful or faithless, whether we are one who stands for Christ or one who denies him, the Lord Jesus is faithful and the outcome is sure. The reality of our living Lord is not changed regardless of how we view it.

The Relevance of Faith in Christ at the Graveside

Since our Lord Jesus Christ is at the center of our faith, whether he exists now as a living being, resurrected from the dead, is fundamental to the relevance of our faith. As the apostle Paul stated, *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied* (1 Corinthians 15:19 ESV). It is the fact that Christ lives for evermore, as the first one to come back from the dead and gain an endless life, that makes our faith full of relevance today! *The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them* (Hebrews 7:24-25 ESV).

I expect that we all have stood at the graveside as the coffin of a loved one was lowered into the ground, bringing closure to a life lived and now ended. We can call a funeral service “a celebration of life” and try to make the best of the memories we hold, but it does not mitigate the cold silence of the grave. It is at that moment of burial that the question of whether Jesus rose from the dead has particular relevance. If he did not rise, then the people standing there taking comfort from that conviction are truly “most to be pitied,” for they are duped. On the other hand, if he did rise from the dead and ascend to the heavens, then they do well to take comfort that those who are dead in Christ have not come to the final end, but have a sure and glorious hope.

It is possible to go on the Internet and find various sources that allege that the resurrection story is a myth. That kind of allegation, while easy to make, does not agree with the facts. Among the compelling evidence is the conversion of frightened and doubting disciples, who after seeing and speaking with him, then put their lives on the line for their sure conviction that their Lord was risen. Jesus asked, *Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* (John 20:29 ESV).

Technology and Death

In 2011, one among those regarded as the greatest and most brilliant of this generation died. I am mindful of his death because he and I were born in the same year. I am referring to Steven Jobs, the founder of Apple Computer. He left behind the highest value company in the world. His tombstone epitaph states, “Fatal Error Occurred.” What did his wealth and fame bring him at the end? Many of us use iPads, iPods, iPhones and other products of his legacy but they did not save him and they will not save us. There is a saying in this world that construes life to be a game of acquiring things and fun experiences – “He who has the most toys wins.” Most of us can see through the vanity of gadgets (however cool the technology may be), and recognize that they will not be accessible to us in the grave.



Recently this generation coined the term *yolo*: you only live once. The implication is that the “one life” should be used for indulgent experiences; eating, drinking and being merry – “for tomorrow we die.” God’s way is a better way, not only because of the promise of future glory to which it leads, but because of the comfort and peace that following God’s law brings in the present, as Paul states, *for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come* (1 Timothy 4:8 ESV).

As I have grown older and gained a greater share of experience in this world, I am increasingly convinced that the moral superiority (and I would say also, originality) of the Bible is one of the strongest evidences that it is true. I do not believe that cunning men could have devised the stories of the Bible nor that they could have propounded the consistent system of morality which it upholds. The history of the human race has been one of resisting the moral code of the Bible as that instinctually lies within the heart of man. Who, apart from a Supreme Being not of this flesh, could have established the high standard in the first place? In our time in history, there are many forces at work to take down the high moral standard of the Bible,² to dispute if not mock its value, and in so doing implicitly call into question the relevance of its message. If the Bible’s standard was merely the work of men, why do we mortals find it so difficult to attain to? Our society is currently living out a great social experiment in which it has rejected much of the Bible’s moral code. The jury is still out on the results of that experiment. Is it not far too early for those who champion it to boast about the results?³

Idealism to Change the World

Many youth are very idealistic and driven by a desire to positively change the world. There is something commendable about their sense of mission, yet many young idealists do not retain their zeal into their later years. They burn out. They realize that the task was greater than the resources and time available. They may be able to point to progress in small things, but for each step taken forward, there are often more steps setting back that which was gained. Discouragement can set in among those who have noble worldly missions as they also have to deal with the failure and weakness of this fallen flesh in the work in which they are engaged. They have no solution for the underlying problem – human nature.

We who believe also have a desire to positively change the world. We believe that God has revealed a plan for the world's transformation and has invited us to be part of it. We do not believe that human effort, however sincere and intensive, can sufficiently address the inequities and challenges that afflict our world to make a permanent difference. In God's program, the ultimate solution will be the elimination of fallen human nature and its elevation to a nature that is glorious and incorruptible. Scripture tells us that God is seeking men and women to participate in His plan and that He is preparing us now for the great work ahead. He has given us each free will to make the choice to serve Him or not. He desires to elevate to His nature those men and women who voluntarily choose to align their lives with Him and His purpose: **that is the relevance of our faith in Christ**. We are being readied to administer the greatest government in the history of the world according to the unassailably high Divine standard of righteousness. We believe that our risen Lord will return as King and Priest, to lead that government and bless the world. Our task now is to study the will of God and to prepare for the great work that lies ahead by practicing those principles that reflect the mind of the Lord as best as this fallen flesh is able. We give God glory by obeying His voice; we honour Him by believing what He has caused to be written.

Is our faith relevant today? After Christ's second coming, that question will never need to be asked again – the tens of thousands of men and women risen from the dead and endowed with the Divine nature will be living witnesses to the answer. The glory of the Lord enthroned in Zion will radiate throughout the earth. As the Christadelphian hymn asks, "Will we be with him in that day? We make the answer now."

With a desire that all would heed the call of the Spirit and the Bride *to come*,

James

James Farrar, Grimsby, Ontario – jamesfarrar@bellnet.ca

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- ¹ Although beyond the scope of this article to consider, the incidence of anti-Semitism is on the rise in many parts of the world, even where racial discrimination is viewed as socially unacceptable.
 - ² It is increasingly common to challenge whether the Bible represents a high moral standard. The usual example given is the commandment to utterly slay the inhabitants of Canaan during its conquest by Joshua. The issue is whether the Creator has power over the clay, as the master potter, to determine when this flesh is corrupted and therefore designated as *vessels of wrath fitted to destruction* (Romans 9:20-23).
 - ³ The Bible causes us to expect that God will demonstrate the superiority of His moral code and show the futility of the current social experiment to break away from it. Many in this generation resist what they call “scare tactics” in warning about God’s future judgment, but as the Scriptures say, *God is not mocked* (Galatians 6:7).
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***Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest*** (Matthew 11:28).



We may think that we are the masters of technology but are we more often than not its slaves? Technology has ramped up the speed of life’s treadmill and made it harder to step off. In such a frenetically paced, time-stressed world, it is easy to be overwhelmed by “the cares of this life.” The pleasures of sin offer relief from the rat race – escape, change, even exhilaration, but there is a better solution. Jesus provides it for us. True peace comes when our

relationship with God is set right through Jesus Christ. There is calm serenity that coming unto Jesus provides us – joy that our sins can be forgiven by the Lord who is just and faithful; comfort that all things are in his hands to work together for good.

(3) The Intellectual Challenge from Science

Dear fellow-student of the Word and of nature,

The tension which clearly exists between the account of creation in the Bible and the unified belief system of (almost) all practicing scientists around the world is obvious to any thinking person who lives in our information-saturated culture. **The current view presented in the name of science is that the Big Bang occurred 13.75 billion years ago following which the universe unfolded according to strictly natural processes. The Earth then formed 4.54 billion years ago by accretion from the solar nebula without any Divine involvement, and natural processes thereafter led to the appearance of the first primitive life forms approximately 3.8 billion years ago. Evolution by natural selection has since resulted in the near-endless diversity of living organisms which we now witness living around us or find fossilized in the rock strata of the Earth. This worldview is the ‘touchstone’ by which the countless peer-reviewed journal articles, emanating from research laboratories around the world on a regular basis, are measured. Data and analyses presented which deal with the subject of origins *must* be shown to conform to this standard model; if anomalies are uncovered which appear to be inconsistent with it, suggestions are expected in the article outlining future research to “clarify” how the data might ultimately be seen to fit the generally-accepted model. There are simply too many textbooks, reputations, grants and indeed entire institutions based on this worldview to allow it to be publicly questioned from within the Academy of Scholars!**

Given this current intellectual environment, it is not surprising that the following scenario unfolds over and over again: A young person is raised in a Bible-respecting religious environment. Until about age 18, he or she attends youth groups, summer church camps and may have seen, in passing, the occasional DVD developed by a creationist group. The local minister has a degree (typically) from a small Bible college, and is genuinely committed to his congregation; musical praise figures *prominently* in services while actual study of the Bible along with related subjects by members is neither encouraged nor expected. What the scientific community thinks about the subject of origins is far from the agendas of these churches.

How the College Experience Can Affect Young Faith

A young person with this background leaves home to attend college, and is first overwhelmed by the corrupt climate in today’s student dormitories. Coupled with this moral challenge, he or she is confronted by aggressive teaching of the accepted atheistic worldview in many courses of study. The faith presented in the community church is shredded and mocked as juvenile

and outdated. Within a year this intense pressure can create a new personality which neither the young person's parents nor former associates may recognize. The faith and former conduct of the young person are gone, not likely to ever to re-emerge. Such an individual may comment that the "scientific facts" have now replaced the "Bible stories" on which he or she was raised.

Those who do attempt to stay with their religious faith have had the following experiences (the page number references are from the book *You Lost Me*):

"Kathryn has a PhD in computational cell biology... She is actively involved in both the scientific community and in her church. She laments, "Many people I talk to think it's impossible to embrace both mainstream science (especially evolutionary biology) and traditional Christian faith. Scientists tend to scoff at faith as being anti-intellectual, while Christians tend to reject scientific conclusions out of hand if they don't fit with their view of the world. This should not be! Christians, of all people, should pursue truth with a spirit of confidence, and the church should take a more active role in encouraging that pursuit" (p. 81).

"Rather than being encouraged by the Christian community to investigate God's good creation with wonder and reverence, too many young science geeks... have been told that their curiosity is dangerous. I recently heard a pastor declare that intellectual questions are a defense mechanism used by those who don't want to accept Christ" (p. 142).

"I have come to recognize that students need a place to ask questions about science, that we cannot expect them to ignore the issues of science all around us" (p. 144).

"Let's begin with the doubters we expect: those who struggle with evidentiary forms of doubt, who are not satisfied with rational proofs that God exists or that Jesus was resurrected. Most Christian teenagers and young adults are not wracking their brains... in an effort to bring logical consistency to their faith claims. However, these types of concerns do affect millions of younger (and older) Americans and should not be minimized. We learned in our interviews with eighteen to twenty-nine year-olds who have a Christian background that one-quarter (23 percent) have 'significant intellectual doubts about their faith'" (p. 188).

"I've watched with a heavy heart as many of my peers have left the faith because they thought it required checking their brains at the door. We are losing some of the brightest young minds in Christendom to a false

dichotomy: presenting faith and science as a choice. I am not asking that evangelical leaders change their positions on origins. I am simply asking that they give young people a little more time to think, to study, to ask questions, and to maybe even change their minds without facing an impossible ultimatum” (p. 239).

On top of all of this, the most rapidly increasing “faith” in the United States is atheism, with it now being the choice of nearly 20% of respondents in recent polls. This has caused the media to give advocates of this viewpoint a much more prominent platform than in times past:

“Another dimension of our scientific culture is the many scientists today who enjoy rock star status. Well-known scientists who promote atheism, such as Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Stephen Hawking, are front and center in our culture today. They have gained popular attention not only because of the post-Christian zeitgeist, but also because the Internet amplifies provocative voices, enabling them to reach devoted niche audiences and leverage their powers of persuasion to generate mainstream attention” (p. 134).

How then can the Christadelphian community respond to this tsunami of unbelief promoted aggressively with the intimidating credentials of materialistic science? The realistic answer is: with serious study, determined effort, and honest engagement with the evidence and the Scriptures.

The Bible teaching is that this planet was specifically brought into existence with the stated purpose of it ultimately becoming the site where the Creator of the universe will tabernacle forever with the redeemed of this creation. This purpose is not at all reconcilable with the understanding that the Earth, and all that is in it including man, resulted from the outworking of natural

processes over billions of years, and is heading towards a final destiny of annihilation when the sun engulfs it during the latter’s final death throes billions of years from now. Even the *theistic* Big Bang model relegates the Creator to an almost ‘bystander’ status as the universe unfolds of itself, based solely on the outworking of the physical principles inherent in matter.



Limitations of the Scientific Method

The Scientific Method: Neither the Big Bang nor the ‘Creation by fiat’ model can be

demonstrated using the scientific method. The reason for this lies in the 4th step: “Develop a procedure (i.e. an experiment) to test the hypothesis.” The Big Bang, the formation of stars, the formation of the Earth, features on the Earth’s surface, the origin of life, etc. *cannot be repeated by performing an experiment*. Therefore, one is left to examine and make inferences from *historical* data, which cannot be duplicated in a laboratory. The overall framework with which one starts (i.e., creationist or materialist) will end up “colouring” the *interpretation* of, in many cases, identical facts, resulting in diametrically *opposite conclusions as to what the data means*.

Therefore, the real issue confronting the serious Bible student is this: A massive body of evidence, from remains of alleged ‘early man’ to the redshift of galaxies, has to be *re-interpreted to fit a ‘model’ of the history of the Earth* consistent with the Genesis account. Questions requiring answers include ones such as this: Were the fossils now found in rock strata laid down gradually over hundreds of millions of years, or by one (or more) quick-acting, violent catastrophes?¹ Depending on one’s initial framework with respect to origins, different aspects of the *same* evidence are *emphasized* and dramatically different inferences are then drawn. Development and evaluation of different models are huge undertakings – this has certainly been attempted by some thoughtful individuals with varying degrees of success (meaning that some hypotheses more easily integrate a literal reading of Genesis with the external physical data better than do others), but a discussion of such models is beyond the scope of this article. **Whatever view one takes of origins, no position (atheistic or theistic) can be verified by the scientific method** – past events cannot now be repeated in a laboratory to demonstrate that “this is how it happened.”

Extensive and Valuable Resources Are Available

Many resources are available which can be helpful in developing an understanding of this complex subject area. However, unless one has the energy, background and inclination to devote the considerable time necessary to extensively review the vast quantity of data available (including some history of the discussion), then material which is readily understandable and deals with only the key points is preferable. While in no manner giving a ‘full endorsement’ to all positions taken in the book, *God’s Undertaker*, by John Lennox of Oxford University, it does contain a useful summary of the issues under discussion today (see the many reviews of this book on www.amazon.com; the prejudices pro and con of individual reviewers who have read this book are clearly evident in the comments posted). *Creation* magazine, published quarterly, has useful articles and notices of current findings from peer-reviewed science journals relating to the creation vs. evolution discussion which are informative and written in

non-technical language. While this writer cannot endorse this periodical's theological positions, the material otherwise contained in it can be quite useful. Further information can be obtained at their website: <http://creation.com/creation-magazine>.

In conclusion, this writer remains of the view that the first chapter of Genesis is literally true, and that a model of the origin and history of the cosmos can be conceptualized which accounts for many of the features of the universe and the Earth consistent with this position. But he also clearly recognizes that demonstrating this to the next generation is a demanding and complex project, given the all-pervading non-theistic view of origins which now permeates our society. There is much hard slogging to be done in this subject area by those with the interest and energy to pursue it, but the prize to be gained is worth any effort.

In the firm conviction that the God of Israel is the Creator of heaven and earth,

Bill

William Farrar, Hamilton, Ontario – whf@sympatico.ca

¹Because present processes acting incrementally cannot explain the fossil record, the explanation of catastrophism is much more in keeping with the evidence. The action of one or more past violent catastrophes gives rise to the question why all life forms that breathe were not eliminated. The Bible answers this dilemma explaining how life was preserved in the provision God made in the ark, which serves as a pattern for His great salvation (1 Peter 3:20-22) – *Advocate Committee*.



Come Thou and all Thy House into the Ark



The ark that God directed Noah to build served as a refuge to preserve life. Ten generations after Adam, civilization had corrupted its way, violence filled the earth, and God acted to overthrow the world by water and start anew. Though Noah preached to them, his contemporaries *knew not* until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came. Though Noah heard God's call to come, he still had to make the final decision to enter into the ark, *And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark. Noah's decision to choose refuge in the ark led to saving seven other family members – life and death decisions impact more than ourselves.* Jesus said, *But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

(4) Putting Our Trust in God's Way

Dear _____,

Thank you for granting me this opportunity to address you on a matter that is very important to both of us. It is a matter that concerns life and death – our attitudes and actions in terms of sex and sexuality.

There is no question that western society in the twenty-first century is embracing many values that are far removed from those set forward in the Bible. Biblically-derived values served as the moral anchor for many preceding generations and society disapproved of deviations from the Biblical moral code. Because the values of our contemporary society do not

“Is our society better off now that it has largely discarded its previous commitment to the sexual morality of the Bible?”

impose the same level of personal discipline and restraint on human behaviour as Judeo-Christian morality has done in the past, contemporary values are very appealing. To swim against the current of permissiveness in our society today, one has to be persuaded that the morality of the Bible expresses the will of the living God and was given to promote the betterment of the human condition. The Bible encourages us to *train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as **it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance* (1 Timothy 4:7-9, ESV).

Where belief in God and His revelation is not held with conviction, the idea that each generation can make its own choices as it thinks best seems plausible. Therefore, in order for each of us to sort out our own stance as to what personal moral choices we will make, our belief system in God and the Bible will be a determining factor. If there is no God, or if the Bible is not held as the revelation of His will, following the moral code of the Bible may seem completely out of touch. It may even seem punitive in causing us to forego experiences that can bring pleasure, or tie us down into relationships that are not working the way we expected.

Let's explore some of the changes that have occurred in my life-time, since I was a teenager, and ask the question, “Is our society better off now that it has largely discarded its previous commitment to the sexual morality of the Bible?”

The 60's generation exploded with sex, drugs and rock-n-roll as no single generation before it has. Its philosophy was embraced by much of the

western world as epitomized by “The Free Love Generation” and the “Woodstock Generation.” The legacy that this generation left can be defined by such sweeping social changes as access to abortion, rebellion against authority, the breakdown of family values reflected in many relationships structured without marriage, societal sanction for unions of homosexual partners, and high rates of divorce. Subsequent generations have written new chapters or, should we say reprinted some old ones, on immorality, “as in the days of Noah and Sodom.” The educational system is used to introduce children at a young age to acceptance of the new way of thinking about sexuality and moral choices. What previous generations condemned as deviant, ours has accepted as the new normal.

Each generation faces the same issues of morality, but the boiling pot of lust that challenges each generation can be heated differently. Every new generation seems to think that it is being constrained by “archaic” rules and regulations. If one allows oneself to think like that with regard to God’s laws, then one removes all barriers to restrained behavior.

These considerations are an attempt to be helpful to the servants of God in overcoming the temptations of sexual immorality in as direct and precise a manner as possible. In order to address this theme we need to understand that there are absolutes:

1. God has never and does not presently condone fornication, adultery, homosexuality or the like (Romans 1:24-26). From the beginning, these sexual practices have been contrary to the marriage model set forward as the life-long union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24).
2. God has clearly declared that those who are guilty of practicing such behaviour and who remain unrepentant will not be in His kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
3. A truly repentant heart can and will be forgiven even though a sin may be repeated (Proverbs 24:16, 28:13).
4. Such mercy and grace should not be relied upon as a rationale to excuse our sin (Romans 6:1-2).
5. God has never and never will require more of anyone than they can withstand (1 Corinthians 10:13).
6. God’s commandments have not and will not change. They are not archaic, irrelevant or unnecessary (Malachi 3:6).
7. God’s commandments were “given for our good always” – to enable us to lead happy and fulfilling lives (Deuteronomy 6:24).

Young believers who choose baptism before being married are to be commended for their commitment and action. When each believer is baptized he or she demonstrates their trust in the Lord and agrees to do all that the Lord requires. They demonstrate by their action what is most important in their lives – serving God and choosing life over death. It is of critical importance to recognize and not rationalize sin in our lives, for if we fail to choose the Lord, we choose death.

The first step in overcoming sin is to recognize it and the second is to truly desire to overcome it. If we cannot embrace these realities we have not begun to repent. In fact, we are reinforcing rather than breaking down the barrier (sin) that separates us from our Heavenly Father. What is it that keeps us from repenting? Is it that we don't want to stop? We think the rules are just not fair? Are we too proud or too ashamed? Do we believe we have gone too far and there is no going back?

As a practical matter the Scriptures teach us that we must do everything we can to separate ourselves from temptation. *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you* (James 4:7). This is what we need to do and in Hebrews we find how to do it, *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:15-16).

We can help ourselves by avoiding temptation and poor life choices:

- If we drink too much or use drugs
- If we hang out in the wrong places
- If we visit porn sites on the Internet
- If we choose for our close friends individuals that are not interested in the Kingdom of God and who do not share our values.

These are poor choices that may seem insignificant to some, but in reality are deadly. They diminish our capacity to resist temptation and are in and of themselves giving in to the flesh. More than just avoiding these bad choices we need to fill our lives with good ones, *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them* (Ephesians 5:11). If we think we are alone or that no one else has ever faced such a temptation or that our sin is too great to be forgiven, we must rethink the matter and approach our Heavenly Father believing that He is faithful and just, letting Him be our Rock.

With the undeniable nearness of Christ's coming, what a shame it would be to have him find us enjoying "the pleasures of sin for a season" and ignoring our promise to do all He has commanded. The time is short and the decision

is ours. Will we choose a self-centered life that leads to death, or a God-centered life that leads to eternal life?

There is another great resource in time of need that we often ignore or almost always underutilize ... and that is the help we can get from our brothers and sisters. We are commanded to bear each other's burdens. Most of the time all we have to do is ask for help: we should not be afraid to ask. *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much* (James 5:16). *Who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God* (2 Corinthians 1:4 ESV). *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it* (1 Corinthians 10:13). *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened* (Matthew 7:7-8 ESV).

If these things concerning God's care and desire for our well-being are true, than there can be no excuse for our failure. The Bible has many passages that leave no doubt as to what God expects of His servants with regard to sexual and moral behavior. We will fail if we choose the "pleasures of sin for a season" over an eternal place in God's Kingdom where the Scriptures state *is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore* (Psalm 16:11).

We all recognize that keeping God's commandments is easier said than done, but the sincere attempt at overcoming is key. We all long for the day when fleshly temptation becomes a thing of the past, when "death is swallowed up in victory." Don't give up, redouble your efforts, use every resource available, put pride aside ... for the time is short. *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* (Revelation 2:7).

Through the grace and mercy of our Heavenly Father, may we all overcome and eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God.

As one who desires to live forever with you by the grace of God,

Sam

Sam Swift, Cataumet, Massachusetts – samuelswift958@comcast.net

(5) The Truth Still Matters!

My Dear Son¹ _____,

Son, we write this appeal with loving concern and a heavy heart, knowing that you no longer share our wonderful hope. We are inspired by the example of Solomon who, in circumstances that may at times mirror our own, tried his best to influence his son to seek after wisdom. He had a great deal of wisdom himself, but often failed to follow his own good advice. In spite of his own weaknesses, he still tried to encourage his son to avoid the advice and actions of sinners, to stay clear of temptation, and to apply his heart to understanding.

Solomon actually tried all of the pleasures of sin for a season, perhaps with the justification that having experienced these fleshly things, he could rightly proclaim that they were *all vanity and vexation of spirit*. In the closing days of his life, as he faced what he called the *evil days*, he apparently looked back with regret and exhorted his son not to follow his example but to *remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*. His conclusion was that the truth still matters and that to *fear God and keep His commandments was the whole duty of man*. Solomon appealed to his son not to have the same regrets at the end of his life as he did at his own: *and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed, and you say, "How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation* (Proverbs 2:11-14 ESV).

With these thoughts in mind, we encourage you to look at Solomon and his words of wisdom; consider his experience and then take another close look at your own life. We sincerely hope that you will be convinced to examine again *the Truth* that you once embraced with zeal. We may well have failed in our effort to impress you with the real importance of truth, and our own inadequate example and flaws may have been stumbling blocks to you at times in your life when you needed us.

We look back now and can understand why there were times when you became discouraged. We talked about *the Truth* as if it were some kind of commodity; we took pride in being *in the Truth* and we encouraged you to *take hold of the Truth*. But as we taught you, our primary emphasis was on doctrinal integrity, with less discussion about *worshipping in spirit and in truth*. We attempted to show by our example the need to be *doers of the word, not hearers only*. We emphasized the need to be intellectually qualified for the examination of your understanding of the doctrines of the Bible so that you could be baptized. We should have been equally attentive to character qualifications, that we all might be transformed to become

humble as little children. True conversion of our hearts and ongoing reformation of our minds are lifetime processes. Yes, the teaching of *Bible Truth* still matters, but it is so much more than the right amount of book learning and going to meeting. I wish we had impressed on you more of an understanding of the need to *deny yourself and take up the cross daily and follow him*.

Perhaps we failed to adequately prepare you for the distractions, fleshly temptations of this present evil world and the doubts that would be cast on your faith and understanding. Life was much simpler when we were young. Perhaps too we failed to appreciate the rapid changes that were coming in the world and the impact they might have on you. We may have sheltered you too much from the reality of this world. We took you to Bible Schools and youth weekends in the hope that your association with other believers and their children would help to train you up in the way. Though these activities also served as social events, their purpose was to instill an understanding and interest in the Word of God, providing lasting impressions that would impact your life choices.

On another point, we look back at the emphasis on the traditional understanding of Bible prophecy and the application of prophetic time periods. Many of us were looking intently for the return of Christ by the end of the twentieth century. It all seemed so clear. Creation occurred, based on a widely accepted chronology, around 4004 BC. According to the seven thousand year plan model, after six thousand years of human toil, the millennial age would begin. When this expectation was not met, it opened us to scoffing, *where is the promise of his coming....all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*. We understand the disappointment and the question to which it inevitably gave rise: if we were wrong about this expectation, was anything that we said credible? Was the very concept of Christ's return and his millennial reign to be doubted? Our Lord was clear: *No man knows the day or the hour of his coming*. We have been humbled by this experience. The truth is, however, that just as surely as those who waited for his birth, sacrifice and resurrection were rewarded for their patience, he *will not tarry*. When that appointed day is here, he will return as promised, and that day will forever change the world!

You tell me that your turning away was related to more than our miscalculation of prophetic times: we also failed to portray what we professed to be *the Truth* in the way we respond to other believers. I remember how you felt when you learned that there was another whole group of Christadelphians that we could not enter into fellowship with. Yes, we all knew they were out there, but we did not talk about it as openly as we ought to have done. To add to that disappointment, you began to see that we

Weaknesses and failures in our ecclesias speak to this fallen flesh of which we are made. As long as men and women are in this flesh, there will be times when it shows itself. It makes us long for the Kingdom of God when those who are accepted by the Lord will be freed from the burden of sin.

did not even treat all of our own brethren – those who we were in fellowship with – as we should. The Bible teaches us to love our brethren, and that *by this all men will know that you are my disciples*. Yes, there was a façade of love, but behind our brother's back there was also judging, whispering, and condemning. There was strife and divisions; it seemed at times to you that the only thing we were good at was debate and discord. I remember my own uncle, who never did get baptized, telling me that this contentious spirit was the main reason that he wanted nothing to do with *the Truth*. The fact is it matters very little whether we were right or wrong if our example was out of step with our profession. Our example may not have been what you and others were looking for and needed to find. I can empathize with your disappointment at some of the things you saw among us brethren, but I ask you to think very carefully about whether they justify your response in turning away. *The Truth* is not about us, and whether we pass or fail in living the mind of Christ: truth still matters. You need to continue searching for *the Truth* that will free you from the *vanity and vexation* of an existence that will leave you *having no hope and without God in the world*.

In the pages of the New Testament, in which we gain glimpses of life in the first century ecclesias under the direct care of the Lord's apostles, there were human shortcomings. For example, the apostle Paul pleaded with the believers in Corinth to set aside their divisions over their aligning themselves with this or that leading brother. Weaknesses and failures in our ecclesias speak to this fallen flesh of which we are made. As long as men and women are in this flesh, there will be times when it shows itself. It makes us long for the Kingdom of God when those who are accepted by the Lord will be freed from the burden of sin. You can help to show a better example yourself and be a leader who reflects the virtues of our Lord. **It really comes down to this simple choice: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:21 ESV).** We need you. We need exemplary men and women, brothers and sisters of conscience and principle, who are committed to doing the right thing for our Lord. Do not

let the negativity and the mistakes made by others overwhelm or discourage you. Show, by your example, a more excellent way and in so doing, give glory to God.

Saving truth still matters, and those of us who profess *the Truth*, inadequate as we may be, do not change the facts. God is and His word is true to all generations. His Word holds the power of life and death – it is the source of information in this world that can make us *wise unto salvation*. The truth was given by God as something for us to delight in and rejoice in, to ennoble us and enrich us in our whole being: *Thus says the LORD: Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD* (Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV). There is nothing else on earth that can transform us than the saving truth God has revealed in His Word!

There is one great Bible truth that I need to raise before I close. When we make our decisions about life, the most important Bible teaching that we must consider is **the mortality of man**. We are dying creatures; we turn again to dust! Look at the obituaries. Sometimes we see death among our relatives when they are old and worn out – sometimes it comes upon those who are young in tragic circumstances. But one thing is certain – it will come to us all unless our Lord returns beforehand. Many people in this world, if they think at all about life and death, have a vague idea that those who die are passing to some better place where God will look after them. You know from the Scriptures that is not true! The lie of the serpent is false. There is no life after death outside of the hope of the resurrection as revealed in *the Truth* of God's word. As long as we live, we have the opportunity to follow the wisdom of the Word. *I call heaven and earth to record against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore **choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live* (Deuteronomy 30:19). How I wish that you might choose life over death. As this Scripture states, your choice affects not only you, but your offspring and their future.

Your friends in this world have managed to sway you away from the teachings of the Bible, but do they really have any real answers? There are those who are expert in criticizing defined faith and avoiding formal worship. Do their alternatives provide any more than an excuse to *eat and drink for tomorrow we die*? They are not saddled, as they may perceive it, with the responsibilities associated with keeping *the Truth*; finding their satisfaction in fun and games. Is the answer to life to be found in wine, women and song? Is it in indulgence through dining, travel and

entertainment? Is it to be found by being absorbed in following professional sports or hunting or fishing? All of these things which pertain to this life serve as a distraction from the reality of our mortality and they provide no cure for it. Yes, the world will always seem attractive and our basic instincts will lead us into lust and sin; but we need to always remember another undeniable truth; the broad way still leads to destruction!

The Truth is this: no matter how long you live, no matter what the quality of that life is, no matter how successful or popular you may be; no matter how much fun you have, no matter how many times you survive the odds and avoid *suffering, sorrow, sickness, pain* and tragedy, *the Truth* is still the same...you are mortal and subject to death and you will die! There is no discharge in that war. You can avoid visiting the hospitals and the nursing homes, you can choose not to attend the family funerals, but that denial only temporarily blurs the inevitable. One day, perhaps sooner than you had hoped, you will go the way of all flesh like *the beasts that perish*. Someone will stand over your grave saying a few nice words to describe your life and accomplishments in the best light possible. There is still an opportunity to redeem the time but when that day (or Day of Judgment) arrives, there is nothing we can do to change the outcome.

Solomon concluded that *God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing whether it be good or evil*. Please remember this: if there is any possibility that the Bible Truth that we shared with you is in fact true, at the Lord's coming, his household (whether still alive or sleeping in the dust) will all be called to stand before him to give account for what we have done with the precious opportunity we were given. We pray we will be forgiven for the stumbling-blocks any of us have put in your way. We appeal to you, before it is too late, to re-examine *the Truth*, learn to number your days and apply your heart to God's wisdom. We love you and we hope that *Truth* still matters to you as it does to us!

Your father in the faith,

Jim

Jim Millay, Springfield, Vermont – jimillay@vermontel.net

¹The appeal to "our son" is imaginary. While based on personal experience and observation, it should not be considered as an accurate description of the actions or words of any one person, friend or relative.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD.
(Isaiah 1:18)



The invitation of the Creator is that we use our minds to reason. Reason, in turn, requires careful consideration of evidence, drawn from God’s written Word – the Bible, and from the book of nature. Two gifted minds can examine the same evidence and draw opposite conclusions. Why this divergence? Because each mind is conditioned to examine the evidence from its worldview. Our contention is that the worldview which has as its foundation that God is the supreme Mind behind the Universe is the best explanation for the evidence. The example of the late British philosopher, Antony Flew, is worth citing. An ardent atheist for most of his academic career, he came to believe in God near the end of his life. Why? To be intellectually honest, he was obliged to follow the evidence where it led. “Integrated complexity” led him to believe in a Supreme Being, an Intelligent Designer, who conceived and ordered life. *Paley’s watch is still ticking.*

(6) *Help Thou Mine Unbelief*

Dear _____,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You tell me you no longer are motivated to come to meeting or other ecclesial activities. You say it is an accumulation of things. Sometimes you doubt the tenets of our Christadelphian faith, sometimes you doubt your ability to walk worthy of those tenets, and sometimes you doubt your resoluteness to unite with many who profess virtues they themselves do not practice. In the end, you say it is just less stressful not to come; “I avoid tying myself up in a knot and wondering why I am even here.” Angry, maybe feeling guilt, maybe feeling just not good enough, you say, “I tried, but it seemed there was no one to help.”

Let us together consider the three concerns you have:

- (1) unbelief;
- (2) fidelity to your own beliefs, and
- (3) the integrity of our Christadelphian community.

There are two likely outcomes of doubt. One, it will become a powerful motivator to a more complete and genuine spiritual life, or two, it will result in a disengagement from the Christadelphian community. I hope to convince you that the outcome of option one is the only course to pursue. So let us begin.

Tenets of Faith

My answer to you regarding any doubts you have about tenets of our faith is to come and sit with me in an open and unfettered free-form dialogue and challenge those tenets – let's work them hard and see whether they be so. Let us find evidence-based and logic oriented answers.

As a 21st century young person, you have learned to expect evidence and rational proofs. Our Christadelphian tenets can stand up to such inspection. You have what might be called **Intellectual Doubt**. The way I learned and became convinced of the Truth as it is in Jesus is only slightly different from your experience. Ours has been like the exchange between Philip and the Ethiopian, *Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?* We have both relied on this approach; and perhaps it is just that you have a little further to go in your journey. Please be patient.

Through the writings of John and Paul, we are told to *believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God*, and to *search the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*. Again, *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter*. We have permission from the Father to question!

Earlier forms of apologetics, such as resolving our doubts through reading our pioneer writers with their grasp of Scripture, are not as fully effective for the broad spectrum of your younger generation. We must also develop meaningful face-to-face relationships through open question-and-answer sessions or forums, free from ridicule or embarrassment. It is clear to me that the social media phenomenon has resulted in instant communication and gratification on a personal level, and we, as a Christadelphian community, must not ignore this reality. You must be quick to ask and I must be quick to answer. We must formalize such a process. Let us do so!

Walking Worthy

This inner-feeling and very **Personal Doubt**, one of questioning your ability to walk worthy of your high and holy calling can be subtly limiting and ultimately fatal. With regard to your capacity to walk worthy of these tenets, I can only say I have not witnessed any weaknesses in you that are not common to me or, for that matter, to all of humanity. What are all the Bible

stories you have heard from your youth but lessons on the weakness of man and how God favored those who overcame their troubles? Look for a cross-generational role model within our community and ask the brother or sister if they would consent to be a mentor – one to unite with for encouragement and strength – a partnership of generations.

We are all unworthy!
Feeling so should not isolate you. You are stronger and more able than you think... Transform that doubt to humility...

We are all unworthy! Feeling so should not isolate you. You are stronger and more able than you think. By expressing your doubt, you show me an understanding of how frail human character is before God. Transform that doubt to humility; *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up* (James 4:10). Accept the outreach of God's grace and favor, be yoked with Christ, and together (you, Christ, and your mentor) overcome those feelings of unworthiness.

If your sense of unworthiness is really unwillingness, then that is another matter. Clinging to those things that are not edifying is a challenge placed before us all. Our gratification derived from serving God must be stronger than the gratification we get from serving the world. Doing the Word, actively working in the Lord's vineyard and seeing its rewards will be the medicine needed to offset your unwillingness. Doing the Word is not a one-time event, it must be a habit (James 1:22).

Resoluteness to Unite

The hypocrisy of brethren professing virtues they themselves do not practice is a difficult one. None of us is perfect; we are all trying to work out our own salvation. You must understand and accept that we are each being tried and tested in this life not only from within but from without. You must take strength from such examples as how David responded to the hypocrisy of Saul. While hoping for high expectations of others, you must learn to deal with less than high performance. The answer is to first focus on our self and then, following God's principles, cope with the perceived hypocrite.

The hesitation to commit to a lifelong relationship with those you see as professing virtues they themselves do not practice (and others who seemingly ignoring such behavior) is a form of **Institutional Doubt** and **Relational Doubt** – doubt surrounding ecclesial management and ecclesial practices resulting in a negative view of the ecclesia and its respective membership. Members show through their relationships with each other their fidelity to the principles of the faith or lack thereof. You say your

vision of the right practices of our faith are not found in the Christadelphian household. You want to follow the ways of Jesus but the household is in turmoil. It is all very conflicting.

To sit on the sidelines and criticize is not helpful. Participation in resolving conflict can be as simple as asking a question such as “Why are we doing this?” or “Where do we see a like example in the Scripture?” Seeing the root cause of a conflict is the responsibility of each of us before a scriptural resolution is embarked upon. Not everything will be resolved but we have the great hope that when *he come(s) whose right it is* all thing will be *set in order*.

Final Thoughts

Unexpressed Doubt and doubt that is inadequately responded to are powerful destroyers of faith. This lack of resolution results in isolation. If one feels the ecclesia is not a safe place to be honest, one feels compelled to pretend – showing faith to be skin deep. Doubt is toxic. When it never finds a place for expression and discussion, it festers until it is fatal. God is not afraid of doubts. God builds from doubts; consider the Apostle Thomas or Job’s doubts or the many Psalms of David in which he expressed doubts about God’s provision for him.

You ask, “How can I follow Jesus in a way that connects with the world I live in?” You have challenged me, as a shepherd of the flock, to establish practices that “connect” with the present-day young adults. Your generation of believers or would-be believers has grown up being accustomed to “having a say” in everything related to their lives. Communication, fueled by technology, is moving from passive to interactive. For me, passive came first, such as being guided to read *Elpis Israel*; whereas, today’s interactive youth rely on Internet threads and texting to exchange ideas and passions, learning from peers or unvetted writers and sometimes bypassing the pioneer writings.

I will work with you and the ecclesia to build a house where it is safe to talk about doubts. Transparency is the norm in your young adult generation; generally going “public” with almost everything. I must provide a way for you to transparently process doubts while at the same time ensuring a safe environment for admitting such doubt. Responses cannot be trivial or leave you feeling marginalized. Resolving uncertainty is a relational task.

Here is what I must do... Make myself available for a regularly scheduled discussion either one-on-one or as a group to answer any questions, doubts or otherwise; a discussion where there is no reprisal, recrimination, aloofness, or condescension. No question or doubt will be too trivial or too threatening to consider. All topics will be considered honestly and openly.

Maybe in time such discussions can come to be approached through a QTA forum (Quick To Ask/Quick To Answer) that will facilitate two-way dialogue on important faith-based issues.

Here is what you must do...

1. Seek out a Christadelphian elder brother or sister, one who is kind-hearted and at peace with his or her faith and let him or her help you to overcome your unbelief. You have a part in this regardless of your prior hurt; you must save yourself. *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith* (1 John 5:4).
2. Put your faith into action by doing! Stop fixating on your unbelief and get busy for the sake of others. Become a doer of the faith and witness personally the strength and benefit that can come from helping others (overcome your own doubts of embracing brethren of like precious faith). If we adapt and reword a phrase made popular in the early 1960s, we could ask ourselves, “Ask not what has The Faith done for me, but rather, what can I do within The Faith.”

Affectionately and in the love shown us by Jesus,

Scott

Scott Cram, Richmond, Virginia – bscinternet@verizon.net



The Perception of Exclusivity

Dear _____,

My father made his living by selling men’s clothes in a shop he inherited from his father. In the original store, the second floor was the “clothing department” where suits and topcoats were sold. One of the salesmen who worked for him for many years was an affable gentleman named Jack, always well groomed and dressed to the nines as they say. Jack once asked, “Do the Christadelphians think they are the only ones that are right?” Regardless of the care taken in providing a response, Jack sensed that the answer was affirmative. He then replied, “That’s all I need to know about them.” That perception, that we are an exclusive sect, was the end of his brief interest. Exclusivity does not sit well with most people – it connotes arrogance and narrow-minded thinking, if nothing else, and therefore causes many people to turn away. If that reaction was common a generation ago, how much more today, when our culture conditions us to be inclusive and non-judgmental in our thinking, extending tolerance to all points of view.

Therefore, I understand your need to pose this question: **How can a narrow view of the Bible with an exclusive sense of being right (as taken by Christadelphians), possibly be a reasonable one worthy of pursuing?**

Calling Balls and Strikes

In thinking about how to answer Jack's question today, it is important to shift the focus from what "the Christadelphians think" to what "the word of God says." This basis for an answer forms a very important principle. The best way I can explain it is by reference to a sporting event, let's say, a major league baseball game. Each time the pitcher hurls the ball across home plate and it is not hit, the umpire has to make a call – either the pitch is a ball or it is a strike. We know from experience that some of the fans do not always appreciate the umpire's call, especially when it goes against the team they are cheering for. Nevertheless, the umpire makes the call as best he can, according to the rules of the game and what he saw from his close-at-hand view. Our role is not unlike that of the umpire. We call it as we see it. It is not our game. We did not write the rules. If our call is not according to what the spectators want it to be, that is a fact deeply to be regretted, but if we are to be people of integrity, we cannot represent it otherwise than as we see it. The rules, in this analogy, were written by the Creator; the rule book is the Bible; the game is this life we all have been given to live; and the call is life and death forever. It is God that makes the judgment as to who will live and who will die. But inasmuch as He has revealed the terms under which He has offered His great salvation to us, it is our duty to study them, to seek to understand them, to live by them and to teach them to others.

The Wedding Invitation List Dilemma

If we approach this discussion with any smugness or arrogance, it is wrong-minded. Self-conceit leads to self-deceit. One of the circumstances in life where many families have to make difficult decisions about either including or excluding guests arises at the time of a family wedding. The banquet facilities can only accommodate a limited number of celebrants. Who should they include on the invitation list? Sometimes those who thought that they should have been included feel snubbed if they were not invited. Their hurt can last for many years. But there would be no cause for ill feeling among those who did not know the bride or the groom or their families: we do not expect to be included at things to which we have no relation. If we have no relation to divine things, we cannot be indignant at recognizing that we will not be included in the marriage supper of the Lamb. The sad thing in Jack's case is that, while he held the same kind of hurt feelings that come from rejection at not being invited to a wedding, it needed not to have been so. The great news is that the invitation to come to this divinely appointed

marriage has been extended to you and to me – to all of us – in the call of the Spirit and the Bride “to come.”

How we handle a wedding invitation extended to us but not to others says much about our character. There are two ways to report receiving the invitation to others if they ask. One can boast about the fact of receiving an invitation and rub it in their face. Or one can report accepting the invitation with discretion, with sincere humility and genuine gratitude, rejoicing in the honour to have been included but in no sense despising or putting down any who were not invited. It is in the latter spirit that we write, as any that reflect the former spirit have not learned Christ. The wonderful thing about this wedding invitation, issued by the Spirit of God, is that we can lead others to an understanding from the Bible that enables them also to respond to the invitation “to come.”

“God Shows No Partiality”

There is then a paradox when it comes to exclusivity as it relates to our calling in Christ. The invitation to be part of Christ’s redeemed multitude is open to all. It is inclusive. The invitation has certain criteria attached to it that are in our hands, as you and I exercise our free will, to satisfy or not. But no one is intrinsically excluded. *Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him* (Acts 10:34 ESV).

There have been times in history when a small number of people held an idea about the world that they believed in on the basis of the evidence before them, while the vast majority of their contemporaries rejected it, some even vehemently. In subsequent generations, the evidence became so convincing that everyone came to believe it. Thus we learn that the prevailing majority view is not always the right view – there may be strong biases in human thinking that make accepting what is true very difficult to receive despite good evidence in its favour. That is why much emphasis in the Scripture is placed on the attitude with which we receive the word of God. In the parable of the sower, in which the seed fell on four types of soil, the best soil where it took root and bore fruit was described, *As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it* (Matthew 13:23 ESV), and again, *As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience* (Luke 8:15 ESV). One of the key words in this description is the word “honest” – an honest person is committed to finding out the truth and does not easily yield to prejudices. Another key attitude needed for receptivity is expressed by the prophet Isaiah, *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word* (Isaiah 66:2 ESV). Human pride is the great barrier to accepting the ideas set

forward in the Bible as true. The Bible confounds our pride by exalting God and telling our fallen race the way it is. Instinctively, mankind doesn't like that direct approach.

“There is Salvation in No One Else”

Christadelphian understanding stands apart from the vast majority of religious thinking on the question of our fallen nature. We believe that man is under the reign of death as a result of the condemnation that came by Adam's sin and that, in the natural course of things, he will inevitably succumb to death. We believe that death is a state of nothingness, without conscious existence, where there is no mind, no perception, no thinking, and no feeling. We believe that perishing in this manner is endless. We believe in this understanding of death because it is set out in the word of God from Genesis to Revelation. We also understand why this view of death is so difficult to accept – the finality of it all. We believe that God, in His love for this world, sent His Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish – that God provided a solution to this otherwise certain finality and centered it in His Son. Once we acknowledge that believing in Jesus is essential to salvation, **we have substantially narrowed our understanding of those included in God's program. We have introduced the principle of exclusivity into our worldview** – those who are Christ's and those who are not his are in very different positions with respect to their future destiny. It is necessary to emphasize again that this dividing line is not our determination – it is God's. You and I both read it clearly in His Word: *This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4:11-12 ESV).

Heirs of the Covenant

Once we accept that God has established two classes within the human race, those who will be saved and those who will perish, and that the dividing line between them depends on believing in Jesus, it then becomes a question of further investigating and understanding that dividing line *according to the Scriptures*. One of the ways God has given to help us understand His purpose is to establish His blessings through an everlasting covenant within which the terms for inheritance are given. Although the analogy to a human testator¹ writing a will and bequeathing his or her estate to heirs is not exact, it is sufficiently close to convey the idea. First, everyone recognizes that it is the testator's exclusive prerogative to allocate the estate to whomsoever he or she chooses. While the presumed recipients may not perceive it was fairly done, they have no power to change it. Second, it would not be expected by anyone who had no relationship to the testator, while he or she lived, to be

named in the will and participate in the distribution of the estate. God, in His merciful purpose, determined that the inheritance would be conveyed by covenant to Abraham and to Abraham's seed. Furthermore, according to the custom of ancient covenants, the covenant needed to be confirmed by offering a sacrifice in which there was shedding of blood. The core of the New Testament writings were given to explain how those of us who were not Abraham's seed by reason of our natural birth could nevertheless come to be named in the covenant as heirs of the promises. How the Gentiles could be fellow-heirs with the Jews was explained by the apostle by reference to faith in *the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (Ephesians 3:6), and again, *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:29).²

Which Son Inherits Abraham's Promise?

Recently, one of Canada's national newspapers published an excerpt from a chapter in a new book entitled *Three Religions, Three Abrahams*. Near the end of the chapter, the author asked a perceptive question:

"Even though all three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) have sometimes found ways to deny the full humanity of outsiders, they also have rich resources through which to affirm that all human beings are brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of the one God. As the Mishnah, an early rabbinic law code puts it, God created only one man in the beginning precisely so that no one could say to anybody else, 'My father is greater than your father!' But that is not the end of the story. A question central to the Abraham story in Genesis itself thus remains very much alive: Which son inherits Abraham's promise?"³

While one might dismiss the present striving among nations as simply an historical coincidence, the fact remains that the three world religions that sprang from Abraham are still disputing the question, **Which son inherits Abraham's promise?** The dispute is not benign: it could plunge the Middle East, if not the world, into war. Thus it is that the things you know from your childhood that Christadelphians believe concerning the promises made to Abraham are not remote and abstract but "very much alive" in the future direction of this world. If God brought the Jewish people, the natural seed of Abraham, back to their own land by His hand – as the Bible testifies that He did – then you must allow the possibility that the Christadelphian understanding of the Bible is based on evidence. And if it is based on evidence, it is reasonable and at least worth looking into, to see if it explains many things about this world in which we live and where it is going. That is my appeal to you. Join with me in seeking the evidence with an open Bible.

What more can I say to you? God has set before us in His word a sure and steadfast hope. It is called *the hope of glory* because it invites you and me to be partakers of a world in which God's glory fills the earth as the waters cover the sea. God has said that the things He has prepared for those who love Him go beyond human understanding and imagination. So much of the gospel of John is concerned with the evidence for believing in Jesus and responding to that evidence. I am reminded particularly of the words of Jesus when he said, *or else believe me for the very works' sake* (John 14:11). There is at this time in history "the very works' sake" of the Father's preparing the nations of the world for His Son's return. They give you and me both sufficient reason to believe. I pray that your eyes might be opened to see the great future that God has in store for those who love him and that you might come to Him with all your heart.

With fraternal affection,

James

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¹ The testator is the person who makes out the will which becomes effective after their death.

² The foundational exposition of the Bible that Christadelphians find helpful was the first book written by John Thomas called *Elpis Israel* (the Hope of Israel). In the first part of the book, he showed how the Scriptures teach the mortality of man; in the second part, how the covenant made with Abraham is the means God is using to save this perishing race; and in the third part, how the flow of history has shaped the world for the outcome God has determined, in sending Jesus to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

³ *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* by Jon D. Levenson. 2012 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted in the *National Post*, October 18, 2012 available at <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2012/10/18/book-excerpt-three-religions-three-abrahams/>



A Final Appeal

“But What If You’re Wrong?”

Professor Richard Dawkins made a college tour in 2006 promoting his recently published book, *The God Delusion*. One of his stops was at Randolph College in Virginia where the final question asked from the audience, following his talk, was from a young female student. “This is going to be the simplest one for you to answer: but what if you’re wrong?”

Richard Dawkins gave a scathing reply. Presuming that his questioner had been brought up in the Judeo-Christian faith, he launched into a rant that her faith was simply an accident of her birth circumstances into a particular family. Implicitly he compared the Judeo-Christian faith to primitive

mythologies of the early Danes and central African tribes. While that bombastic retort brought laughter and applause, it did not represent any serious attempt to answer her question.

If Richard Dawkins is wrong, he forfeits the opportunity to live forever in fellowship with the infinite Being that made all things. The apostle Paul spoke regarding the Creator, *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse* (Romans 1:19, 20 ESV). Richard Dawkins, through his position in advanced sciences, has had ample opportunity to perceive God's eternal power "in the things that have been made." The apostle Paul stated that the evidence for the Creator was so compelling it left the witnesses "without excuse." Borrowing from the language of the Lord Jesus, who used it in relation to the rabbinical scholars with whom he disputed during the days of his flesh, *Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering* (Luke 11:52 ESV). Richard Dawkins is one of the scholars of this age who would take away the key of knowledge, not only not entering into the way of the Kingdom of God himself, but by his outspoken denial of God's existence, hindering those who would. The question he was asked is valid. There are life-and-death consequences to the beliefs we hold and the actions we take as a result.

What If Christadelphians Are Wrong?

The student's question is one that we all need to ponder intently. What if we Christadelphians are wrong? It is a fair question and we need sufficient humility to allow the possibility. Our answer is very different from the reply of Richard Dawkins. We do not berate individuals who ask the question. We appreciate their raising it for honest discussion. In the content of this issue, there is acknowledgment that Christadelphians have been wrong. We were wrong in expecting the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth before the end of the twentieth century. The message from the prophet is, *For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay* (Habakkuk 2:3 ESV, cf. Hebrews 10:36-39).

How can we know whether we are right or wrong? Literally, an agnostic is one "without knowledge," whose position is that we cannot know the answer. For many in this generation, this "non-judgmental" position is a comfortable one to hold. It could be chosen on account of being overwhelmed by the vast range of viewpoints extant; or it may be the easiest option rather than choosing a way of life that goes against the flow of the

thinking of this world. To those in this undecided position, we ask, **What kind of evidence would you require to make up your mind?** We believe that the evidence is there if you are prepared to search it out.

Until the day comes when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth and the dead are resurrected, we cannot know whether we are right or wrong in our expectations with absolute certainty – that is why faith is needed. But faith is not blind: it is based on *the evidence of things not seen*. The faith of Christadelphians is an evidence-based faith. The evidence from the Scriptures on the one hand and from external sources such as history and nature on the other hand, is open and accessible to everyone. Evidence from these sources, taken together, provides satisfying support for our faith in the Scriptures. The Christadelphian faith is testable in this sense also: the evidence drawn from Scripture leads to specific expectations that will either happen or they will not. That is, all prophetic expectations are proven true or false in time; fulfilled prophecy provides a track record of confirmation.

The Heart of the Matter

The foregoing points about evidence may seem very clinical and legal in their analysis, but there is a personal dimension that goes right to the heart. We are not talking about a Creator as an invisible, remote, impersonal force. We are speaking about the living Creator who has character and purpose. In order for us to understand the richness and depth of His character, He sent us His Son: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...* So that the Son was able to say to Philip, *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father* (John 1:14; 14:9 ESV). When we make a decision about our relationship to the Father and the Son, it constitutes our response to the call to partake of the glory and the excellence of that Divine character forever. *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire* (2 Peter 1:3-4 ESV). While it is difficult for us who are of this flesh to fully grasp this call to God's own eternal glory and excellence, that is the call the Creator has graciously extended to us.

Paradoxically, to be undecided is, in one sense, to have made a decision. If an individual receives a wedding invitation RSVP and does not reply, it is unlikely the host will reserve a place for that person at the banquet. The appeal of all that is written here is to make your decision for Christ and his righteousness while there is still time.

continued from Back Cover – (The Spiritual Analogy of The Light of Life)

Once we recognize how special and precise is the nature of the light that sustains life on earth – a phenomenon that is a powerful testimony to the wisdom of the Creator – is it not plausible to allow that a similarly narrow band of true light, sent from heaven among the great spectrum of human ideas and information that abound in the earth, is the only means of life for evermore?

Consider the first recorded words spoken by God: *Let there be light*. As John's gospel explains, the same pattern used to separate light from darkness for the natural creation was used for the new creation in Christ. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not...John...came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe...That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world* (John 1:4-9). It is the Word that God has spoken by the prophets and by His Son that is able to give life. *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6). Just as life-sustaining visible light is only a minute part of the spectrum, so do the words written by holy men inspired by God represent a tiny fraction of all of the words and thoughts penned in mankind's history. Yet what a difference each makes to life. *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life* (John 8:12).



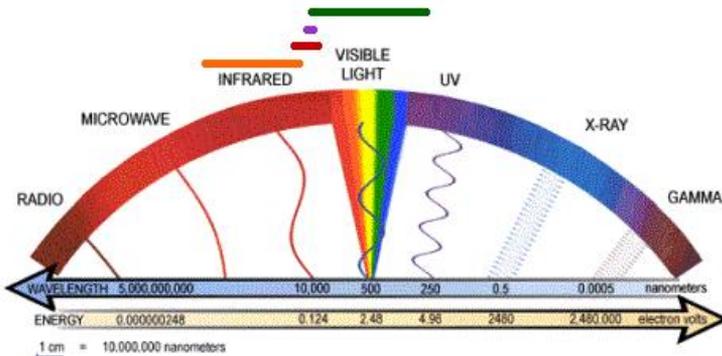
About the Front Cover: A Cup of Cold Water

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward (Matthew 10:42 ESV). There is nothing more refreshing than a glass of cold, pure water on a hot day when one is thirsty. When Jesus spoke of giving a cup of cold water to one of the little ones, his words went beyond a strictly natural application. At the well of Samaria, our Lord compared the literal well water the woman was drawing with the water he could provide, *Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again* (John 4:13-14 ESV). When Jesus called those who thirst to “come,” he was calling those who were thirsting for this water that he could give them: the water of life. It is the desire of *The Advocate* Publishing Committee that this issue will direct attention to “the call to come” so that those who are thirsty may find in its contents a cup of cold water to refresh them and contribute to reviving their faith and hope.

The Spiritual Analogy of *The Light of Life*

Is there life elsewhere in the universe? Many research dollars are invested each year in search of a decisive answer to this question. A yes answer is sought by all those who believe that life arose on this earth by natural means, without any supernatural agent.

One way of demonstrating how unique the Earth is in the Universe relates to the special characteristics of sunlight in interaction with plants to sustain life. The energy furnaces that power stars give off radiation across the entire electromagnetic spectrum. This spectrum is summarized by the chart below.



About the middle of the spectrum is the narrow band of visible light. It is composed of different colors of light, corresponding to different wavelengths, as seen when refracted in a rainbow. The colors we see are those wavelengths that are not absorbed by the objects which they strike. To appreciate what a tiny slice of the total electromagnetic spectrum visible light occupies, consider a reel of film unwound from California to Alaska, a distance of 2,500 miles, as representing the entire electromagnetic spectrum. The entire **visible** spectrum would be represented by the width of **one** 35 mm frame of that total length.

Light from the sun in a very narrow wavelength band is precisely the kind of energy that chlorophyll molecules and their associated light collection pigments in plants utilize in the process of photosynthesis. The sun's visible spectrum is finely tuned to the wavelengths of the photosynthetic receivers here on Earth. The visible light emitted by most stars does not comprise the right combination of wavelengths. Earth is precisely and finely tuned for sustaining life from sunlight. No other planets have been discovered that have the very rare conditions found on earth that sustain life – the right light wavelengths for photosynthesis and free oxygen in the atmosphere which photosynthesis generates.

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