Scripture Truth

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Extremists?

Teaching the Bible as it stands, indeed explaining the gospel itself, is increasingly being labelled "extremist". Recently an evangelical agency working in schools to present the historical Christian faith in assemblies and RE lessons – at the invitation of the schools themselves and following the prescribed school policies and syllabuses – was attacked at one school by a noisy campaign labelling them "extremists". It seems likely that the offence triggering it was teaching the concept of sin.

"Extremist" is very handy smear. It spares the opponents the tiresome task of having to think through, and articulate, why they are against what they are against. "Extremism" is also a vogue word: it's in the news, and in people's minds it associates the targeted group with terrorists. Its message is, "These people are dangerous".

Such labelling is therefore a clever part of a general movement to redefine "national identity" (to use another vogue term), in such a way as to represent gospel-Christians not just as cranks, fuddy-duddies, or gloom-mongers (as has been done for many a long day), but as dangerous. It is vital to the programme of positioning the new morality at the core of the "national identity". The new morality concentrates its attack on the statement in Genesis 1:27, "Male and female He created them" (NKJV). Such a programme needs a bogeyman; people are more effectively united against someone or some group than for some cause. Gospel- and Bible-believing Christians are that group. For almost five centuries believers in this country have been sheltered (in large measure) by the very people they were trying to reach with the gospel – "nominal" Christians. Belief in the Biblical Creator and in His laws, was the cement of society. Now no more. For the modern man-in-the street with his (including her) easy personal morality, we are the people who turn their world upside down (cp. Acts 17:6).

This makes them ready listeners to voices lumping us with terrorists. "After all, religion always causes wars", will be many people's response to the "extremist" smear. But it is striking that at the end of the Beatitudes the Lord said of His disciples, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake" (Matthew 5:11).

The only question is: is our testimony to the gospel such that people even know we believe it?

THEO BALDERSTON

The High and Lofty One

Isaiah 57:15

David Hughes

A meditation – that will greatly benefit the reader entering the New Year

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), a leading figure in the American "Great Awakening", once preached a sermon in which he said that what makes Christ glorious was "an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies". In case, like me, that leaves you thinking, "Sorry; what?" a modern American pastor tried to call it "God's paradoxical juxtaposition of seemingly opposite traits." I'm not convinced that's much better. What the two pastors are trying to say is that God's glory is displayed in the perfection of characteristics that might appear to be contradictory.

For example, suppose you know someone deservedly regarded as merciful and forgiving. Not always, but certainly often, they might also be known for turning a bit of a blind eye when it comes to things that are wrong. It's not that they condone wrong, it's just that they overlook it in favour of being merciful. God is not loose or lax with sin. He is glorious because of His righteousness and justice. Yet at the same time He is not hard or callous, as we might think of someone who was a bit of a stickler for the rules. No, He is kind and merciful, "slow to anger and abundant in mercy" (cp. Exodus 34:6). Each of these traits makes the other shine more brightly. His mercy is seen to be even better because it doesn't come at the expense of looseness with regard to what is wrong. His justice is made the more amazing because He shows mercy to us at the same time as upholding justice.

Or consider someone who is very powerful, perhaps a monarch or a president. There is a certain glory and splendour to their person that is admirable. But these people tend not to like being told what to do. They don't like to submit to anyone. The Lord Jesus is more glorious than any king or ruler. He has a glory and a splendour that transcends them all. That is certainly something for us to admire and worship. Yet isn't our worship and admiration the more sweet when we think that such a glorious and splendid Person "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"? (KJV) His glory is made the more wonderful by His submission to His Father, and His submissive nature is made more remarkable because of the type of Person that was being submissive.

Another example comes in Isaiah 57:15. The LORD is described as the "High and Lofty One" who dwells in the "High and Holy place" (NKJV). That's certainly understandable. He is God. The "High and Holy" place seems to be exactly the right place for God to dwell. But did you notice the second part of that sentence? "I dwell… with him who has a contrite and humble spirit". The High and Lofty One wants to dwell with *people*. Isn't it glorious?

As we'll see shortly, Isaiah 6 uses the same Hebrew words translated in chapter 57 as "High and Lofty" when describing the Lord, "High and Lifted up". John 12:41 makes it clear that "the Lord" whom Isaiah here sees in His glory is Christ Himself, preincarnate, in whom the glory of God was displayed. We can see in the "High and Lofty One" of Isaiah 57:15 a description of the Lord Jesus.

We also have a sense of what it means to describe the Lord Jesus as the High and Lofty One in Proverbs 8:30ff, which describes the Lord as One who was established from everlasting, from the beginning, and how He was beside the Father "as a master craftsman" and "daily His delight". In 2 Corinthians 8:9 Paul writes of the Lord Jesus, "though He was rich". Hebrews 1:2-3 expresses some of the exalted positions the Lord holds as He sits now at the Father's right hand. He is the "heir of all things", "the brightness of God's glory", someone whom angels worship and who possesses an everlasting throne. In Philippians 2, Paul writes, "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God". No wonder He is described as the High and Lofty One!

Truly the Lord Jesus is the "High and Lofty" One, whether we think of what He eternally *is* as God, or of what He is now at God's right hand. Isn't it amazing that Isaiah says not only that the vision of this "High and Lofty One" brings to contrition those who behold the glory, but also that the same "High and Lofty One" *dwells* with such people – for their good? He revives the spirit of the humble and the heart of the contrite ones (Isaiah 57:15). Important people often don't have time for ordinary people. The queen has a position of great splendour, but she's not likely to ever ask me to live in her palace. Though she is no doubt a kind person and very generous, she lives in a different world to me, and I can't join hers. There is certain aloofness about great and glorious

There is certain aloofness about great people.
Not so with Christ.
"I dwell… with him who has a contrite heart."

people. Not so with Christ. "I dwell… with him who has a contrite heart and humble spirit."

The word "contrite" is a different form of the same verb as is used in Isaiah 53:10 to mean "bruised", and it also reminds me of Isaiah's words in chapter 42, "A bruised reed He will not break and a smoking flax He will not quench". I'm reminded too of chapter 66:2, "On this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit and who trembles at My word." How encouraging to see what awaits these broken people when they dwell with Him. He revives the spirits of those who are humbled. He revives the bruised and heavy-hearted. He is High and Lofty, yet He dwells with the contrite and humble; more than that, He meets their needs.

We've described the character of the Lord. Who wouldn't want to dwell with a Person like that? We've described how He ministers to those who dwell with Him. Who wouldn't want to experience that? Who are these contrite and humble people who dwell with the High and Lofty One and how can they dwell there? I think we'll find some help if we realise that Isaiah doesn't only use the phrase "high and lofty" in 57:15.

As already mentioned, one of the most formative experiences of Isaiah's life is recorded in Isaiah 6:1-5. He sees *the Lord*, "High and Lifted up". "High and lifted up" is the same phrase as "High and Lofty". What a glorious picture is painted in these verses. He is high and lifted up. His train fills the temple. Angels cry out with such authoritative voice that the doorposts shake and the house was filled with smoke. They proclaim that God is Holy, Holy, Holy! The whole earth is full of His glory. You can sense, even if perhaps dimly, the majesty of this scene as Isaiah catches a glimpse of the Holy God, whom (as already said), John 12:41 declares to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

How does Isaiah react to his vision of the Lord in chapter 6? He says "Woe is me, I am undone" (6:5). He recognises that he is a man of unclean lips. Isaiah's glimpse of the holiness of God breaks and changes him. We might use the language of chapter 57 and say that he was bruised (made contrite) by this glimpse of the glory of the Lord, and humbled by this vision of God's holiness. That's how it should be! As we get a glimpse of how great God is we realise the limits of our own greatness. As we see something of God's holiness we realise our own lack of it.

Interestingly, Isaiah 2 also contains the words "high" and "lofty", although speaking about men rather than God. The words occur separately in both verses 11 and 17 (rather than as a joined phrase) but describe the actions of man in haughtiness and self-exaltation. In contrast, "the LORD alone will be

exalted in that day." The problem was that men were trying to put themselves in God's place. We can be so easily drawn into that kind of thinking in our day, even those of us who are Christians. We would never express it as such, but I can recognise in my own life so many instances in which I lift myself up and want people to look at me, whether the way I work, or the way I am at home, or in the assembly, and want to earn a reputation for myself. The expression might be different for each of us, but perhaps we're more like these people in chapter 2 than we care to admit?

How much we need an experience like Isaiah had in chapter 6, and, like him, to be brought to the point where we say, "Woe is me, I am undone"!

Is it our regular experience that we feel the weight of our sinfulness as we look more closely at Christ's glory and holiness? Every time we think about the holiness of God it should drive us to Him in awareness of our sin.

Of course, I'm not saying we should always be in a state of declaring woe upon ourselves. God graciously transforms us in a variety of ways. Sometimes our daily reading and prayer times might offer us practical instruction about how we work or how we treat our money. Other times, we might be corrected about some shortcoming in our family life. Other days the Lord might see fit to highlight some message of encouragement and uplifting from the verses we read, at just the time we need it. Still another day, we might be permitted to enjoy some fresh appreciation of the person of Christ or the work of salvation. Being a Christian is far from a life of doom and gloom. But, I just ask you, is it a reasonably frequent occurrence in your own walk with the Lord that you glimpse a little of His holiness and are convicted about your sinfulness?

The two passages we've considered in Isaiah – chapter 6 and chapter 57 – leave us with an unanswered question. How is it that in Isaiah 6, his experience of the High and Lifted-up Lord makes him cower away, saying he is undone, but in chapter 57 he writes about the High and Lofty One dwelling with people? Isaiah 6 seems to put up a barrier between people and God, whist Isaiah 57 offers the hope of dwelling with Him. What changes in between? I'll offer the

Is it a reasonably frequent occurrence in your own walk with the Lord that you glimpse a little of His holiness and are convicted about your sinfulness?

answer that chapter 53 comes in between. For the third place in Isaiah where the Lord is described as "High and Lofty" occurs at the end of Isaiah 52.

Although the chapter divisions separate them, what comes at the end of chapter 52 seems to flow naturally into chapter 53. We're introduced to "My servant" (Isaiah's way of describing the Lord Jesus) and we are told that He shall be "exalted and extolled and be very high" (v.13). It's the same phrase as we've been considering throughout this article. Once again, Isaiah presents to us the Lord as the High and Lofty One. But what follows this verse seems to jar with everything we've considered so far. This Person who is exalted and extolled is described as having His face "marred more than any man." He has "no beauty that we should desire Him". He was "despised and rejected". This hardly sounds like the High and Lofty One described in chapter 57! It doesn't sound too much like the glorious image of the Holy, Holy, Holy, God of chapter 6. Reading further, we discover He bore our grief, He carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He was chastised so that we could have peace. Because we had gone astray, the LORD laid our iniquity on Him.

I hope you can grasp with me the depth of these words. These verses, although written by Isaiah hundreds of years before Jesus was born, describe with such clarity the crucifixion of the Lord. The exalted and extolled One was bruised and treated like this for our sakes!

It's because the High and Lofty One was made low in such a terrible way that we can move from Isaiah 6 to Isaiah 57. Because He was wounded for our transgressions, the contrite and humbled people of chapter 6 can move to the place of dwelling with the high and Lofty One of chapter 57.

As we view the holiness of God and are broken, we are led once again to the cross. As we look at the cross as bruised people, people who are humbled by our own sinfulness and robbed of any pride in ourselves, then we see the High and Lofty One bearing our sins. It's as we grasp this that we can dwell with God. It's as we get a clearer view of this picture, that He ministers to us, that He revives the spirit of the humble and the hearts of the contrite.

As we look at the cross
we see the High and Lofty One bearing our sins.
It's as we grasp this that we can dwell with God.

The Believer's Resource: The Spirit of God

1. The presence of the Holy Spirit

Anthony Brett

Moses, when sent by God to speak to Pharaoh, hesitated and said, "I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?" (Exodus 6:30[1]) Gideon, when commissioned by God to overthrow his father's idol, argued, "How can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). And even the great apostle Paul could say, "And who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:16). Most of us are not called upon to attempt a fraction of what these three men achieved and yet we, too, would readily admit to being weak, insufficient, lacking courage, etc. But are we as Christians really without resources? God asked Moses, "What is that in your hand" and Moses replied, "A rod" (Exodus 4:2). Yes, a lifeless branch cut from a tree, but God would use it to teach Moses, the Israelites, and the Egyptians that He is a God of resurrection, life, fruitfulness, and also of consuming judgement. We have been sent out by the Lord Jesus as sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16) but are we entirely without help and resource?

The Lord's own words, as recorded for us in John 14:15-18, are

> "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans".

Christians are the most favoured of all people in all time. Never before have God's people been indwelt by God the Holy Spirit in this way. Many times in the Old Testament we read that "the Spirit of God came upon" men like Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 14:6), Saul (1 Samuel 11:6), Azariah

[1] ESV. This translation and the NKJV are variously used in this article.

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(2 Chronicles 15:1) and king David (1 Samuel 16:13). But it was a temporary thing, and David even prayed in Psalm 51:11, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me." These men and women in the Old Testament were empowered by God's Holy Spirit for particular tasks at particular times. But the Lord Jesus, just before He went back to His Father by way of the cross, said, "I will not leave you orphans" (John 14:18).

Being orphaned at a young age is such a powerful picture of vulnerability and weakness. Is this the situation that the Christian has been left in? Not at all! Jesus said He would not leave us orphans, but God the Holy Spirit would dwell with us and dwell in us, and never leave us. We would in fact have another Helper in addition to the Lord Jesus who intercedes for us in heaven. And this other Helper is none other than God Himself, the Holy Spirit.

Two more passages of Scripture show the immense implications of this truth. First, Romans 8:15-17,

> "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

Next, in Paul's letter to the Galatians,

> "But when the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (4:4-7).

Wow! What an incredible transformation! We were once enemies of God and alienated from Him by our wicked works, but now, through the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ God's Son at Calvary, we have been adopted by God, whom we can now address as "Father", or, as we read in these two Scriptures, "Abba, Father". "Abba", which simply means "Father", would seem to convey to us the childish cry of a toddler, confident of his father's love.

Orphans? Not a bit of it! Rather we are children of God with all the security and provision that that relationship implies. These verses that we have read

Orphans? Not a bit of it!
Rather, we are children of God.

emphasise the fact that the Holy Spirit has this character, "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Galatians 4:6), and again that we have "received the Spirit of adoption" (Romans 8:15). There is a new and close family relationship; God has chosen us, adopted us, and has given us "the Spirit of His Son" (Galatians 4:6) so that we can enjoy and appreciate this wonderful new relationship, unlike anything that had gone before.

This links in very closely with other Scriptures that teach us that the Holy Spirit will help believers to understand the Word of God, in which the mind of God is revealed. "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 14:26). And,

> "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

God has spoken to us; His actual words have been recorded by faithful men, and men and women have died to bring to us the Scriptures in our own language. God has given us His Spirit so that we can understand the Scriptures. We cannot fully comprehend the amazing blessing that God has brought us into, but that is not an excuse for not prayerfully reading the Bible and seeking help to understand it. God has given us His Word, but He has also given us "the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." God has made every provision for us to understand what He has in mind for us, as being blessed in relationship to His delightful Son, Jesus.

Do you struggle to understand the Scriptures? You have the Holy Spirit to help you. Do you, like me, shy away from speaking to others about our Saviour? We

Do you struggle to understand the Scriptures? You have the Holy Spirit to help you. Do you shy away from speaking to others about our Saviour? We have the Holy Spirit, not "the spirit of fear".

have the Holy Spirit, not "the spirit of fear" but "of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). If we were willing we would be helped.

I must just say here that when we speak about the Holy Spirit we are talking about a Person – not a power, or an influence, but a real Person. I want to return to this fact again in a later article, because it is vital. The Holy Spirit is a distinct person in the Godhead, with feelings, character and authority all His own.

Not only does the Holy Spirit help us in relation to the Word of God, He also helps us to pray.

> "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27).

Have you ever been in a situation where you have felt that you just cannot pray? I have. Sometimes, because of sin that we have allowed into our lives, we are not at all comfortable in God's presence; our prayers bounce off the ceiling. I was, however, thinking more of times when we feel overwhelmed by circumstances, by loss or by loneliness. We might have lost someone so very dear to us, or maybe through illness we fear we will lose a close relative or friend. It isn't that we have sinned and so feel cut off from God, but that we hurt so much inside that we just cannot pray. I can't be alone in having these feelings – but God has even made provision for this! "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." How amazing that we have within us God's Spirit who understands our needs and can express those needs to God even when we can't. To borrow a familiar expression from a dear Christian friend, now with the Lord, "What a God we Christians have"!

Sometimes we hurt so much inside
that we just cannot pray.
God has even made provision for this!
The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us.

What's in a genealogy? Matthew 1

Theo Balderston

The OT has many genealogies, the NT only two. The Christian's genealogy is short and leads directly upwards: he or she is "born of God"! Ancestry has no intrinsic spiritual meaning for those who, viewed as risen with Christ, are "neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, nor free" (Colossians 3:1, 11, NKJV).

However the two genealogies of the NT are of the greatest significance: they both belong to our Lord (Matthew 1:1ff; Luke 3:23ff). Though it can be well defended, there is not the space here to do more than assert the opinion that Luke's genealogy is actually Mary's, so that Luke 3:23 & 24 should be read to mean "… being, as was supposed the son of Joseph, [but actually] of Heli". Transmission in an Israelite genealogy always seems to be from male to male.

Luke's genealogy leads backwards to Adam. Thus it emphasises the reality of our Lord's humanity. We know Him now as the risen Man, yet He is the same Son of Mary as once walked the dusty roads of Galilee and Judaea. The fact that of His having participated in our very flesh and blood, sin apart, is essential to His suffering and dying for us on the cross, and to His present intercession for us on the throne (Hebrews 2:14ff; 4:15).

But Matthew's genealogy works forward from Abraham, not backwards to Adam. Christ is the true and final Fulfiller of the promises made to Abraham, and in this genealogy these promises are traced through David's line. However from David onwards Matthew's genealogy gives, not the actual line of our Lord's descent (that's what Luke gives), but the line of legitimate descent of title to the throne. It is through One who was the legitimate King of Israel that the Abrahamic promises are realised.

Ancestry research has become popular in our age following the digitisation of the relevant public records. It enhances people's sense of "family" and "belonging" in an otherwise anonymising epoch. However there is still at least one family to whom ancestry means much more than this. The Queen is one of the few people who can trace their ancestry back, on one line at least, more than a thousand years. The line that matters is not the straightest line of her actual ancestry, but the one that legitimises her title to the throne. At one time monarchs had to be able to prove the legitimacy of their title for centuries past in order to fend off challenges for their crown.

In ancient Judaism priests had to know their ancestry, which alone entitled them to exercise priestly functions (cp. Ezra 2:61-63). And in a nation which was expecting its Messiah (see Matthew 12:23) descendants of the Davidic line would surely have sought to pass down their genealogies from generation to generation. There are people-groups today who can recite their ancestry back many generations – presumably because it has some vital, present-day significance.

There is therefore nothing improbable about our Lord's royal genealogy being recoverable. James the Lord's brother could have disclosed it to the early church.

However, Matthew's royal genealogy has gaps – ones which any reasonably informed Jewish reader would immediately have spotted. The names of Ahaziah the son of Joram (and grandson of Jehoshapat), and of Ahaziah's son and grandson, Joash and Amaziah, are omitted, as also that of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 8:25-27; 11:12; 14:1-2; 23:35ff). Why?

Firstly, Matthew needed to "lose" four names if he were to realise his plan of arranging his genealogy into three "fourteens" (Matthew 1:17). In Hebrew numerics the consonants of "David" add up to fourteen, and Matthew used this arrangement as a way of inscribing the name of "David" into each of the three sections of his genealogy. For the names from Abraham to David this plan presented no problem: there are the three patriarchs plus the eleven names in the line from Judah to David in 1 Chronicles 2:3ff. But there were twenty crowned kings of the Davidic dynasty – whom Matthew grouped into his middle "fourteen". Two were not relevant – Jehoahaz and Zedekiah. But four kings in the actual transmission of the royal title to the Lord Jesus had to be omitted.

But why these four?

Taking Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah first: they were not good kings but they were not more wicked than Ahaz or Amon, whose names *are* included in Matthew's genealogy (see 2 Kings 16:1ff; 21:19ff). The three names are omitted not so much because of their own misdemeanours, as because they were the descendants to the third generation of queen Athaliah, daughter of Ahab (2 Kings 8:26; 11:1-3; 14:1) and queen-consort of Joram. Athaliah attempted to extirpate the entire succession to the Davidic kingship (2 Chronicles 22:10-12)

There is nothing improbable about our Lord's royal genealogy being recoverable.

The survival of the Davidic dynasty for over four hundred years is astonishing.

and thus defeat the promise of God (2 Samuel 7:14-16). Whether she could have achieved this is not certain (what about the line traced by Luke?), but it is her blasphemous intention that matters, and this is why her progeny down to the "third generation" (see Exodus 20:5 and 34:7) is absent from this list.

These three omissions also underline God's providential overruling which protected the line of royal promise in answer to 2 Samuel 7:12-16. If there was a godless woman, God also had in place a godly one – the remarkable Aunt Jehosheba. And indeed the survival of the Davidic dynasty in an unbroken father-to-son transmission for over four hundred years is astonishing, especially when we recollect that for most of the period it ruled over only a tiny statelet, buffeted between huge regional empires to the north and south. No great European dynasty can equal the directness of this succession. However in 587 BC, with the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, the kingship of Israel passed away from the house of David, never yet to return. But God's amazing preservation of it these 400 years or more is in itself an assurance that "[David's] house and [His] kingdom will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

The fourth omission – Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah and father of the Jeconiah of Matthew 1:11,12 – is only a half-omission since he may be alluded to in the phrase, "and his brothers" in verse 11.[1] If there was a reason for omitting his name, it would be that Jehoiakim's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:1) was actually rebellion against God – this was the incessant burden of Jeremiah's prophecy.

What is more interesting is the express mention of Jeconiah (usually Jehoiachin, or Coniah in the OT) in verses 11,12. For God had pronounced *Jeconiah*, in particular, childless, saying that none of his descendants should sit on the throne (Jeremiah 22:30 – called "Coniah" in 22:28). Yet he did have sons, in fact eight, probably natural, though possibly adopted (1 Chronicles 3:17ff). How could this be? Evidently God relented regarding His curse of childlessness; and this could only be if Jeconiah had repented in Babylon, (cp. 2 Kings 25:27ff). It is also most remarkable that Jeconiah has to be counted both as one of the fourteen names that run from Solomon to himself, and also

[1] "Brother" may be a catch-all for "male kin", and refer to Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah. The first of these and probably the last were Jeconiah's uncles.

as one of the fourteen that run from himself to "the Christ". This once-condemned king is the only "double-link" person in the genealogy.

The express mention of Jechoniah vividly shows the grace of God displayed and used in order to ensure the continuance of the royal line.

The mentions of Tamar and Bathsheba are often cited as examples of the grace that runs through the genealogy. But the primary responsibility of the *men* involved is sometimes overlooked. The sordid story of Tamar highlights the deplorable moral state of Judah. True, he was confronted with the possible extinction of the promises to his family as Abraham's seed (Genesis 38); but couldn't he have *prayed*? The very head of the tribe into which our Lord was born was a thoroughly fleshly and ungodly man, – until, long after the birth of Perez, God dealt with him.[2]

The allusion to Bathsheba in verse 6 is even more clearly designed to highlight David's initiative in the terrible sin: it only mentions her allusively as "her of Uriah". This form emphasises David's initiative in transgressing the tenth commandment.

The mentions of both Rahab and Ruth (Matthew 1:5) illustrate the operation of grace in a different sense: the sovereign grace that gave both women a place in the promises to Abraham and in Israel, from which their ethnicity excluded them. This is the grace by which God "calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Romans 4:17), and in this they prefigure every believer of the present time.

However, God will never nullify His own decrees for blessing. Therefore the fact of choosing two women without ancestry in Israel for inclusion in the line of transmission of the royal title did not *nullify* the promises that God had made to David's natural descent. To say that would be to say that the genealogy nullifies itself, whereas Matthew placed it first in his Gospel to underline the importance that, in certain circumstance, God attaches to natural descent! God is sovereign, and just as He chose us, "dead in trespasses and sins", to be seated in heavenly places with His Son and one day to be "the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:20 - 2:6), so He can sovereignly choose one line of natural descent to transmit His blessing.

The great lessons, then, of this genealogy are, firstly, that God, so to speak, consecrated a natural descent to give character to glory with which His Son came into the world – as His Christ, the King of Israel.

[2] On God's dealings with Jacob's ten sons see, "One hundred verses of real grace", *Scripture Truth*, January, 2010, pp. 18ff.

But secondly, that this royal line of natural descent was in itself a failure. Hezekiah and Josiah apart, the godliness of its kings lessened as time went on. The disobedience of Israel that caused the end of the kingdom in 587 BC was mirrored by the ungodliness of its kings. Eight of the twenty-one who reigned from David to Jeconiah – Joram, Ahaziah, Joash, Ahaz, Amon, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah – at least ended their reigns in wickedness. If God used a fleshly line of descent for the transmission of His promises, it was certainly according to His sovereignty but also to show that of itself the flesh cannot please God.

Thirdly, however, the providential overruling that permitted the survival of the kingly line in Judah through so many generations.

And fourthly to display His own grace in it all. Not every king in that royal line will be saved. But the line as a whole was preserved in order that it end in a miracle which took the blessing out of mere natural descent – the miracle promised through Isaiah centuries before. "Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (7:14; cp. Matthew 1:23). God gave this promise in response to the attempt of a coalition between Israel (i.e. the ten tribes) and Syria to replace the house of David with its own puppet (Isaiah 7:1,2,6). The unembodied miracle of the survival of the Davidic dynasty to 587 BC and beyond became the embodied miracle of the Son of God become Son of David in order finally to fulfil 2 Samuel 7:16.

But why the grace? That Immanuel, the last King, be crucified by His own people *in order that* – as the revelation of the very heart of God – that nation should be saved (Matthew 1:21; 27:25, 37; Romans 11:26) – not every member, by any means, but the nation as such, in time to come. Oh the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

And because of this, Christ risen will return as Israel's King (Matthew 23:39): *all* the promises of God are Yes and Amen in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). But God's purpose went beyond that. In Christ risen we are all Abraham's seed (Galatians 3:29). This, implicitly, is where Matthew's Gospel ends (Matthew 28:19). How a Gospel that begins with a genealogy pertinent to a particular, sovereignly chosen, people, gets to a gospel to all nations is the task of all the chapters in between to tell.

Why the grace? That Immanuel be crucified by His own people in order that they should be saved!

Motives for Writing

Yannick Ford

> "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." (Luke 1:1-4, NKJV).

As I started reading through Luke's Gospel, I was struck by this phrase right at the beginning – "it seemed good to me". At first sight, it seemed an odd phrase to set alongside "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God", as we read in 2 Timothy 3:16. I do indeed believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and, interestingly, part of Luke's Gospel is stated to be Scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18. In this verse, we read, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The labourer is worthy of his wages'"; and the two Scriptures referred to are Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7. Thus the apostle Paul certainly believed that Luke's Gospel formed part of Scripture, given by inspiration of God. How then do we fit that in with Luke's apparent motive for writing, which was that "it seemed good" to him to do so?

In thinking about this, I realised that Scripture gives several other instances where the human authors explained why they wrote what they did, and it gives a fascinating insight into how the Holy Spirit moved these men of God. I have listed some examples below:

> "For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease." (2 Peter 1:12-15).

> "Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also." (Romans 1:13-15).

> "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30-31).
>
> "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 1:3).

The Scriptures just quoted outline several motives that constrained the apostles to write what they did:

- Luke felt it was right to put together an orderly account, since he had perfect understanding of what had happened, so that Theophilus could have certainty about the truths of the gospel.
- Peter wanted to make sure that the believers would have a permanent reminder of his teaching after his death.
- Paul felt the burden and responsibility to preach the gospel to the Romans; he had not at that stage been able to go there, so he discharged his responsibility in an epistle.
- John could have written about many things, but he wrote what he did so that his readers would believe that Jesus is the Son of God and so be saved.
- Jude realised that it was necessary to contend earnestly for the faith.

If we believe that Scripture is inspired by God, and that "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21, NKJV), then it may well be that the Scriptures that I have quoted above give us an insight into how the Holy Spirit moved the New-Testament apostles. On the one hand, what they wrote was exactly what God wanted and intended for them to write, such that we would receive a direct communication from God. On the other hand, it seems to me that the Holy Spirit created a burden in their souls, a burden for the needs and for the blessing of the flock that they were writing to. Luke seems to have been concerned that Theophilus would not be led astray by all sorts of erroneous accounts, so it seemed good to him to prepare an orderly, accurate account. Peter felt the burden of the Lord's charge to him in John 21:15-17, "Feed My lambs … Tend My sheep … Feed My sheep", and so he was diligent that they would continue to benefit from his teaching ministry even when he had finished his own pathway on earth. Paul used a letter of commendation for Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2) to give a fulsome account of the gospel to the Romans, and how thankful we are for it! John had a desire for his readers to be

saved. Jude realised that the important task right now was to defend the faith against attacks.

We could also consider many of Paul's epistles, which were written in answer to specific queries, or to deal with false teaching or practice, or even to direct an individual, as we see in the epistle to Philemon. Yet we can see how the value of these letters went far beyond the immediate matter of the moment, as we see how the Holy Spirit used them to instruct us for our blessing and benefit. It underlines the way in which our wonderful God uses our human situations, perplexities and questions to give His Word to us. The Word of God is by definition divine, but it is at the same time so human and so well-adapted to our needs!

Is there a practical lesson for us in this? The canon of Scripture is closed, so of course we would certainly not be thinking of making any additions to the Word of God. However, God is a God of order, and of unchanging character. His dealings with individuals are necessarily tailored to that individual, but we can often discern a pattern in His ways and His approaches. He Himself is the God-in-Three-Persons, in Whom each Divine Person's desires are centred on the glory of the Others, Thus, it is good for us also to be "others-centred", to be burdened with the needs of others when taking up a preaching or teaching responsibility. If "it seems good to us" to present a certain aspect of truth, or if our desire is that those who hear us will be able to remember important things, or if we take an opportunity to discharge a responsibility, or to explain a difficulty, or to present matters with the desire that our readers or hearers may be saved, it may well be that the Holy Spirit Himself is prompting these desires. No doubt there have been, and are, instances where God has spoken directly to someone to do something specific. But it is very encouraging to think that He might work by producing in us a concern for His own, such that He moves us to do something for their benefit. Peter, like the rest of the inspired writers, was "moved by the Holy Spirit" to write the words that he did. The way in which that happened may well have been worked out through Peter's burden to fulfil the Lord's charge to him to feed His sheep.

I pray that I might learn to be receptive to any promptings of the Holy Spirit to bring "food in due season" for others (Matthew 24:45). If I were truly to do so, then those who hear would know that in fact the Lord was meeting their need – "The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season" (Psalm 145:15). Maybe this will be an encouragement for all who read this article too, that you may be prompted by the Holy Spirit to bring blessing to others through the Word.

The Lamb in the midst of the throne

Part 1. The throne and the elders

George Stevens

1. The throne (Revelation 4:1-3).

In this passage, John first observed an unusual sight. A door (or "portal") was opened in heaven. He then heard a voice with the tone and volume of a trumpet. In Old Testament times the trumpet was used as an alarm or to call the people to assemble (Numbers 10:1-10). This particular voice invited John to, "Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter" (KJV).

This call to John was prophetic in character. He was about to be shown things that "must" come after the history of the church on earth.[1]

Overall it was by the Spirit of God that all things prophetic would be revealed (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10). Hence John was said to be "in the spirit". That is to say, he was in a suitable spiritual condition to receive the truths that were about to be presented to him.

The next thing John saw was a throne set up in heaven. *Throne* is the symbol of sovereign rule. It promotes judgment and justice. As Psalm 89:14 states, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face."

Someone sat on the throne. It was the Lord God Almighty (v.8).

In Exodus the name "Lord" showed Him to be the I AM THAT I AM, the self-sustaining, eternal God, who had a particular covenant-relationship with the children of Israel (see 3:14; 6:3-8). As the I AM, He is all-sufficient!

But in Genesis 17:1 the Lord (Yahweh) had already revealed Himself to Abraham as the Almighty God (El Shaddai). So the patriarchs knew Him by this name. Being "Almighty" shows that God is omnipotent – all-powerful! In Job 37:23, "Almighty" occurs by itself and we discover things that characterise Him, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict [or, better, oppress]."

Then the simple Name, "God", reveals the singular Deity who is the great Provider. The name suggests that the things He is about to reveal to John have

[1] This interpretation necessarily follows from the repetition of the "after these things" of 1:19 at the end of 4:1. (The first "after these things" in 4:1 refers to John seeing the door opened, etc., after receiving the text of the seven letters of chapters 2 & 3). [Ed.]

The throne is the place where mercy and truth unite and where righteousness and peace kiss one another.

a specific focus upon His earthly people Israel. Thus there is a fulness of meaning in the Name, "Lord God Almighty".

Daniel had a similar vision of the eternal God as "the Ancient of days" upon His throne (Daniel 7:9-22). The Son of man came before Him in order to receive His everlasting kingdom. It is a vision where the enemies of Israel are judged and destroyed. "The saints" (believers) were involved in this judgment (7:18). This vision parallels the future time spoken of in the book of Revelation, and helps us identify the Agents in the scene currently under consideration.

In Revelation 4:3 the appearance of the Person on the throne is expressed in His likeness both to a jasper and a sardine stone. The characteristics of the jasper are given in Revelation 21:11 as "most precious," and "like crystal…" In the heavenly city it is identified as the "light of the glory of God". The city itself is marked by holiness, and expresses the fact that "God is light".

The sardine (or sardius) was a red stone of outstanding brilliance. Elsewhere we read of the shields of mighty men being made red (Nahum 2:3). In Psalm 75:8 red is the colour that speaks of God's wrath. In Revelation 6:4 we find a red horse depicting war. Therefore "red" speaks of the glory of God in His mighty acts, especially in judgment. Hence the two stones reflect the light of God as both holy and mighty.

Round about the throne there was a rainbow, "in sight like unto an emerald". The rainbow represents the covenant of God made with the people of the world. Genesis 9:13 states, "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." God has promised not to destroy the earth again using a global flood. This suggests that the emerald speaks of the glory of God's mercy. Hence the throne is the place where mercy and truth unite and where righteousness and peace kiss one another (Psalm 85:10). In the Scriptures the green colour of the emerald often relates to life both sustained and flourishing.

2. The elders (Revelation 4:4)

In verse 4 John sees twenty-four seats round about the throne. But these seats are themselves "thrones" (see Darby Trans.). Upon them he sees "four and twenty elders." The number twelve speaks of administration in the Scriptures

(e.g. twelve patriarchs, tribes of Israel, apostles). Therefore, twenty-four (being two twelves) relates to administration over the heavens and the earth. Some commentators believe that "twenty-four elders" relates to the number of the heads of the courses with ecclesiastical and civil duties in 1 Chronicles 24:5ff; 20ff. There the leading priests and Levites of the day are listed. As the order appointed by God for service on earth was after the pattern of that in the heavens (cp. Hebrews 8:5) we should not be surprised to find twenty-four elders above.

But what do we know about the noun "elder"? It generally signifies a maturity of person with dignity in civil or sacred matters. It is used in a variety of ways in Scripture. For example, in Numbers 11 elders were to assist Moses in the government of Israel. In Luke 7:3 we find that they were men in a responsible position among the Jews. In the Christian church, elders were both overseers and shepherds (Acts 20:28). They were persons who shared in the government of God in the churches.

These elders in Revelation were clothed in white raiment. The symbolism of white in Scripture depends upon its context. For example in Daniel 7:9 the white garment of the Ancient of Days portrays His purity – His righteousness; while the white hair speaks of his dignity and wisdom. Again, white in Daniel 12:10 is used to describe people who have been purified – they have been cleansed from sin. Yet again, the kind of fine linen used in the clothing of the priests of old was white and lustrous, and set forth the glory and beauty of the sanctity that accompanies the priestly role (Exodus 28:39-40).

The elders wore crowns of gold. These showed they shared the glory of the righteous rule of God. They exercised a regal role. Note that faithful elders in the church age will receive "a crown of glory" when Christ presents His rewards in a future day (1 Peter 5:4). Therefore, at this point, it seems best to simply say that the elders are purified beings who are chosen or delegated to aid God in the execution of both His sacred and governmental will. More will be deduced about them in the discussion of chapter 5 in a future article, God willing.

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Furthermore, we can say with certainty that they are a worshipping company (Revelation 4:10; 5:14; 11:16;19:4). And that they are an intelligent company, knowing the will of heaven (5:5; 7:13-17).

Their worship (also found in Revelation 7:12) takes a simple form which begins and ends with "Amen": "Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

In Revelation 11:17-18 we find another prayer on their lips,

> "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth."

This shows that they, along with the four living creatures, worship God in a way characteristic of the Old Testament.

And in Revelation 19:4 they say "Amen" to the words of a heavenly company that expressed "Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand" (verses 1-2). Again, this character of praise runs along Old Testament lines.

In Revelation 5:8 the elders fall before the Lord having harps (i.e., lyres) and golden vials (i.e., bowls), full of fragrances, which are the prayers of saints. Such a role is also taken by an angel in Revelation 8.3-4. As to these harps and fragrances Hamilton Smith, the Bible commentator, writes,

> "The harps speak of the praises of the saints and the bowls of their prayers. The time has come when all the praise that has gone up from all the saints throughout the ages will be publicly justified, and all their prayers will have a glorious answer. Many of these saints went out of the world as martyrs praising a God who did not intervene to deliver them from their enemies; and their prayers, at times, appeared to be unanswered and even unheard. At last their praise will be justified and their prayers answered".[2]

[2] Hamilton Smith, *The Revelation. An Expository Outline* (Edited by Wm.C.Reid; Edinburgh, n.d., but c. 1950), p.40.

Speaking in the assembly:

1 Corinthians 14:34 and Galatians 3:28

T. Balderston

The meaning of "speak" in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is more precisely defined than almost any other word in the New Testament

The meaning of "speak" in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is more precisely defined than almost any other word in the New Testament because it has already occurred twenty-one times in this very chapter. These occurrences all denote some aspect of speaking in meetings of the church, particularly praying audibly and prophesying, whether in "tongues" or in plain Greek. The entire chapter is about "speaking in the assembly"! The first listeners to the letter would therefore have concluded that by "speak" in verse 34 Paul certainly meant audible prayer and prophesying, asking questions (v.35), and all the other types of speech during meetings of the assembly (e.g., v.26).[1] Various attempts to evade this conclusion, whether by arguing that verses 34-5 are a later interpolation, or a Corinthian opinion, or "culturally specific"; or by seeking to wrest the meaning of "speak" round to some very narrow definition, were examined in the first article in this series,[2] and found to fail.

Behind all these attempts is the claim that to read "speak" in verse 34 to include praying and prophesying brings the verse into fatal contradiction with 1 Corinthians 11:5, "But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head…" (NKJV). This claim was examined in a second article in this series,[3] and shown to depend on disregard of an elementary rule for interpreting texts, namely, that one should try to "hear" them as the original readers would have heard them, and in the context of what they knew concerning the writer's own beliefs. Do this, and the alleged

[1] But excluding communal singing, for reasons a subsequent article will argue, God willing.

[2] "Speaking in the assembly: the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34", *Scripture Truth*, July 2017, pp. 191ff.

[3] "Speaking in the assembly: 1 Corinthians 14:34 and other Scriptures (1)", *Scripture Truth*, October 2017, pp. 219ff.

The alleged difficulty between 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34 dissolves.

difficulty between 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34 dissolves. The attempts to wrest 1 Timothy 2:8-15 round to a meaning that contradicts 1 Corinthians 14:34 were also examined.

Another key Scripture in this connection is Galatians 3:28. This verse is treated, one might say, as the charter of Christian feminism. It is best to reproduce it in its context.

> "[26]For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. [27]For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28]There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29]And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29).

In verse 28 Paul's purpose is to explain how it comes to pass that we all, Gentile as well as Jew, are sons of God, through faith (v.26). It is because "we are all one in Christ Jesus." This is deduced from our all having equally "put on" Christ in baptism (v.27). Here, in my view, the reasoning regarding baptism is that of Romans 6:3-5, namely, that baptism sets forth the fact that we are already, virtually, "dead in Christ", buried with Him, and "united together in the likeness of his death". In fact Paul goes a shade further in Galatians 3:27 than in Romans 6:5-11, when he writes, "…have put on Christ." The emphasis in Galatians is very much on our crucifixion with Christ and on new creation (especially 2:19f: 5:24f; 6:14f).

Therefore in Galatians 3:28 the saints are all viewed before God as Christ, the risen Man, is viewed. Notice that Paul wrote "neither male nor female", rather than "both male and female": he has in view a state in which the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free disappear (see Matthew 22:30). As new creations in Christ risen, the Galatian saints should not be listening to those who are trying to impose circumcision upon them – make them Jews in order that they can be saved. That status belonged to a worldly order that we have been taken out of in Christ (see 3:23,25; 4:9).

This is unquestionably the most important perspective from which to view the Christian. But it needs to be tempered by other perspectives. And a basic

principle in understanding the Scriptures is to "interpret Scripture by Scripture". Consider Colossians 3:9-12, for example.

> "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all."

Here the reasoning is very similar to that of Galatians 3:28; here it is also a case of "neither… nor" rather than of "both… and". But there is a significant difference; the clause, "neither male nor female" is not found. Paul could write, "neither slave nor free", because he is about to show slaves that they have an inheritance, and masters that they have a Master (3:24; 4:1). But he is also about to exhort husbands and wives; and he cannot say that husbands are as wives and wives are as husbands. So to bring the "neither male nor female" into the present Adamic life, still governed by the words, "male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27), would upset the order which God once created, which will obtain until the resurrection, and which Paul was about to regulate. We are new creations in Christ; God does view us as He views His Son in His resurrection glory; but we are still in our mortal bodies, and we have to respect the distinctions that God built into these "old-creation" bodies. Husbands are husbands; wives are wives. Men are men, women are women, as Genesis 1:27 asserts – a point much under attack at this present time.[4]

Men are men, women are women, as Genesis 1:27 asserts.

Some Christian feminists might perfectly concede that as regards everyday life the old-creation's gender relations and obligations must be honoured, but also maintain that these should not be allowed to intrude into the meetings and government of the church. They might grant my explanation of the absence of "male or female" in Colossians 3:11, but regard this as irrelevant to the proper behaviour of men and women in church meetings. So we must turn to 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

> "[12]For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. [13]For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made into one Spirit."

[4] Some now teach that Genesis 1:27 with 2:21 means that humanity was created androgynous. But this – in itself very arbitrary – reading contradicts how the Lord interpreted it in Matthew 19:4-5. Note "at the beginning."

Paul must be read in the round. Galatians 3:28 cannot be read without reading Colossians 3:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

This verse, too, omits the phrase "male or female". Why? Of course the "all" of "we were all baptised" guarantees that women have been "made to drink of one Spirit" exactly as the men have. But the verse is part of a long passage concerning the exercise of spiritual gifts. Whilst it is true to say that the exercise of such gift by Jews follows exactly the same course as its exercise by Greeks; and of slaves exactly the same as its exercise by free, 14:34 tells us that it is not true to say that the exercise of gift by women follows exactly the same course as its exercise by men. Perhaps because of the resistance he anticipated in the Corinthian assembly to 14:34 Paul decided that, though men and women are indeed identical in the reception of the Spirit, he would not emphasise this in the present context.

Galatians 3:28 is the primary Scripture and gives the eternal reality. One day we shall be entirely resurrection people, and then there will be "neither male nor female". In that sense we shall be "like the angels" (Matthew 22:30). But until then those who are "virtually" raised with Christ yet still actually men and women in the bodies of the old creation must glorify God by honouring His creatorial ordinances – including in assembly meetings. Paul must be read in the round. Galatians 3:28 cannot be read without reading Colossians 3:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, and seeking reasons for the differences. The Holy Spirit did not cause the similarities, yet the differences, between these three texts without meaning something by it.

The "Christian feminist" interpretation of Galatians 3:28 is quite plainly incompatible with 1 Corinthians 14:34 as it stands. Many "Christian feminists" reconcile the two by arguing

- Either that 1 Corinthians 14:34 is later interpolation into the text of the chapter;
- Or that it embodies the opinion of the Corinthians, one that Paul indignantly repudiates in verse 36;
- Or that Paul spoke only to the culture of that time; his words must be re-interpreted to address the culture of our time;
- Or that "speak" in 1 Corinthians 14:34 means merely "chat", or "prattle".

The first article in this series showed the flaws in each of these arguments. The only proper conclusion for those who pit Galatians 3:28 against 1 Corinthians 14:34 would be that Paul spoke the word of God in the former text but not in the latter. Many Christian feminists are indeed quite willing to assert that not all that is in the Bible is inerrant and carrying divine authority. Only the bits that suit them – or suit those voices in "the church" that they are pleased to listen to – are credited with this authority. They may dress this up in grander language. Some even claim that the Bible propounds no absolutes regarding conduct, but only deep principles such as "truth", "faithfulness", "love", "justice", to be worked out in a manner sensitive to the culture of the time. Others flatly state that the morality of our times exceeds that of the Bible.

The great issue here was involved in the first question in the Bible – "Has God said?" This question was put by the devil himself, in order to call in question the veracity of God's word. Can one deduce the prohibition, "[B]ut of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:17) from such general principles as those instanced above? No; it was a prohibition that Adam was not given the reason for. Reasons are indeed given for Paul's prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 – see 1 Timothy 2:13,14. Nonetheless the basic issue is as simple as in the case of Genesis 3:1: has God said?

The great issue here was involved in the first question in the Bible – "Has God said?"

I conclude this two-part study of the compatibility of other Bible passages with a plain-sense interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34 by briefly considering Old-Testament mentions of women speaking in relation to the things of God.

Huldah prophesied in her own home (2 Kings 22:14). We are not told where Isaiah's wife prophesied (Isaiah 8:3). In Exodus 15:21 the nearest antecedent to the "them" of Miriam's "answered them" (RV) is the tambourine-playing women who accompanied her. That is, she "prophesied" to the women, exhorting them in song to play their instruments. Many, however, take the meaning to be that the women, led by Miriam "answered" the men antiphonally at the end of each verse of Moses' song.[5] This seems to be the meaning of the

[5] Micah 6:4 most naturally refers to this event, as evidence of Miriam's leadership of the women.

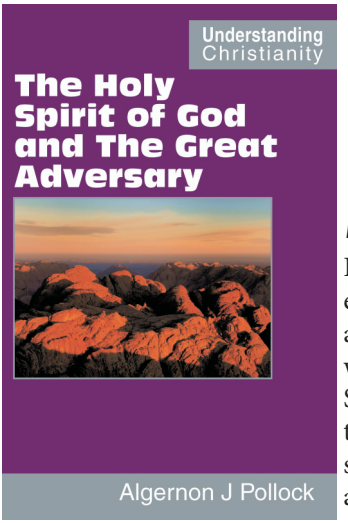
Septuagint translation, and would reinforce the exemption of communal singing from the prohibition of 1 Corinthians 14:34; including antiphonal singing. (But this interpretation doesn't explain "prophetess" very well).

The *ESV Study Bible* on Psalm 68:11 says that, "The women who announce the news are probably groups like those in Exodus 15:20-21 and 1 Samuel 18:6-7 who declare from village to village the exciting news of the victory of Israel's army." If this is so, each individual in these groups presumably told the news to small groups of villagers, in line with what happened on the day of Pentecost. The text doesn't read as if in each village one woman addressed a public meeting and the others formed a platform party. Deborah is an exception that proves the rule. We are specifically told that she judged from just outside her own home, and in the narrative she evidently prophesied from the same location (Judges 4:4f). But even this was an anomaly. The fact she had to be judge at all was anomalous, and due to the failure of the men, for this is the chief point of the narrative in which she was the main actor.

But the OT contains no mention of women commanding the attention of the entire congregation of the people, whether by prayer, prophesy, or otherwise; and presumably Paul would have regarded such "congregations" as the OT counterparts of the local gatherings-together of the believers as "church" in his day.

I think the major claims alleging the incompatibility of a plain-sense meaning of "speak" in 1 Corinthians 14:34 with other Scriptures have now been refuted.

The Old Testament contains no mention of women commanding the attention of the entire congregation of the people, whether by prayer, prophesy, or otherwise.



Recent Books from STP

The Holy Spirit of God and The Great Adversary by A J Pollock (edited by John Rice)

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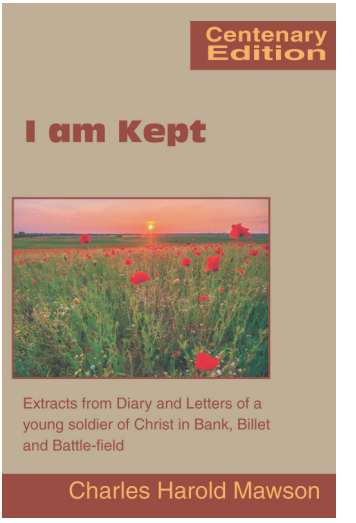
As the author concludes his section on the Adversary, "Scripture throws light on these things, and it is well for us to gain what help we can from it. Not all subjects in Scripture are pleasant, but all are profitable, and for our learning."

Centenary edition of "I am Kept" by Charles Mawson

Paperback; 46 pages; TP retail price: £3.25 + p&p

Charlie Mawson started work in a bank, and began to keep a diary in which he mused on his desire to be a totally committed follower of Jesus Christ. On October 25th 1916 he was called up for military service. The extracts from his letters home show that the aspirations expressed in his diary were fulfilled at his training camp, where he took every opportunity to talk about his Saviour. Posted to Flanders, his letters reveal a triumphant faith, joyful in the most dangerous of situations. In October 2017 a shell exploded nearby and he went to be for ever with his Lord and Saviour. He was 19 years and 8 months old. His witness to his comrades in arms is clear from the letters they wrote to share memories of him with his family.



These extracts from his diary and letters form a fitting memorial. 100 years later, his story challenges us: do we face our problems with the same cheerful faith as Charlie faced his?

Once again

Oh brother will you tell how the Lord can save?
– let us hear you tell it over once again!
How the Father His most dearly Belovèd gave,
to requite the dreadful sins of fallen men.
How the Son saw true, our mean souls right through,
Yet He hung on that hateful cross in pain;
How His perfect love pursued to the point of blood
– let us hear you tell it over once again.

Oh tell us of the Lord who forgiveness said,
and how far His grace and mercy did extend:
how the palsied man, forgiv'n, gathered up his bed,
how to publicans and sinners Christ was Friend.
To repentant thief, how He spoke relief;
for His slayers, oh, how touchingly He prayed!
how to woman in the town, as the tears ran down,
He the words of full forgiveness freely said.

Oh brother will you tell how the Lord can keep?
Let us hear you tell it over once again!
how the shepherd combed the hills to retrieve his sheep,
and restored her to the safety of the pen;
of the prayer it took, and the kindest look,
to convert Peter's bluster into tears;
of the unrecorded talk and the lakeside walk
that delivered that poor man from all his fears.

Oh brother can you tell of that love again?
It's the secret that brought Jesus near to me,
why the infinite I AM trod an urban lane
to convèrse with blind-born beggar, make him see;
why through storm Christ pressed to meet man possessed;
why He lingered, from Beth'ny three apart;
why disciple could abide at the very side
of the One whose dwelling is the Father's heart.

After J.M. Whyte (1850 – 1927).