

Defender

“I am set for the defense of the gospel”

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Preface to the Epistles

Alexander Campbell

Epistolary communications are not so easily understood as historic writings. The historian writes upon the hypothesis that his reader is ignorant of the facts and information which he communicates; and therefore explains himself as he proceeds. The letter-writer proceeds upon the hypothesis that the person or community addressed, is already in possession of such information as will explain the things to which he only alludes, or simply mentions. This is more especially the fact, when the writer of a letter addresses a people with whom he is personally acquainted, amongst whom he has been, and with whom he has already conversed, upon most of the subjects on which he writes. A letter to persons who have read the writer before, who know his peculiarity; and above all, who are perfectly acquainted with their own circumstances, questions, debates, difficulties, conduct, etc., may be every way plain, and of easy apprehension to them, when it may be very difficult, and, in some places, unintelligible, to persons altogether strangers to these things. It is a saying, to which little exception can be made, that every man

best understands the letters addressed to himself. It is true, if another person were made minutely acquainted with all the business, from first to last, with all the peculiarities of the writer, and circumstances of the persons addressed, and with all the items of correspondence, he might as fully and as clearly understand the letter, as those to whom it was addressed.

There is no doubt but that the apostolic letters were plain, and of easy apprehension, as respected the style and sentiment, to the persons who first received them, though some of *the things* contained in them, might be difficult to be comprehended, or fully understood, even by them. The difficulties that lie in our way of perfectly understanding them, though much greater than those in the way of the persons to whom they were first sent, are not at all insurmountable. The golden key of interpretation, is very similar to the golden rule of morality. To ascertain what we ought to do to others, on moral principle, we must place ourselves in their circumstances; and to ascertain the meaning of the apostolic epistles, we must place

ourselves in the circumstances of the persons to whom they were written. So far, a resemblance exists between the golden key and the golden rule. But to develop this principle, and to exhibit its practical use, we shall lay before the reader a few considerations, which will embrace the chief difficulties in our way, and the best means of surmounting them. What we advance on this subject, may be considered as an answer to the question, *How shall we place ourselves in the circumstances of the persons addressed?*

In the first place, then, *we are to remember, that these letters were written nearly eighteen centuries ago.* This fact has much meaning in it: for it follows from it that, excepting the prophetic part of these writings, not a word or sentence in them, can be explained or understood by all that has happened in the world for eighteen hundred years. We might as well expect to find the meaning of Cicero's orations, or Horace's epistles, from reading the debates of the British Parliament, or the American Congress of the last year, as to expect to find the meaning of these epistles

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Notes From The Editor

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David's Army

As we come to the conclusion of this series of lessons based on David's army, after giving a list of each of the tribes and the characteristics of the soldiers in that tribe, the author gives a summary of all the soldiers from all the tribes. "All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king" (1 Chr. 12:38). There are two things I would like us to notice regarding what it says about all the men of war.

They were of one heart. All the soldiers were united; they had unity. They did not simply have union (what unity in diversity is), they had true unity. When Jesus prayed what has been described as His High Priestly prayer just prior to His crucifixion, after praying first for Himself, then His apostles, He then prays for all Christians. His prayer was "that they all may be one" (John 17:21). As the apostle Paul addressed the divisions in the church of God at Corinth, he specifically stated to them, "there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together" (1 Cor. 1:10). The unity Christ expects from His soldiers was exhibited in the early church when Luke said of them, "And they,

continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). Later, he wrote of the Jerusalem church, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (4:32).

The Head of our army, our Lord Jesus Christ, informs us how that unity is to be achieved in that prayer recorded in John 17. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (17:20-21). The way those who believe in Him, Christ, is "through their word." The pronoun *their* refers back to those He had just been praying for, the apostles (17:6-19). This is the exact same word the Father had given to Christ, who then gives it to the apostles by inspiration of the Spirit (14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-14). The Word of God produces the unity Christ prayed for; however, man's word only produces division. Only as the early church "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine [or teaching]" (Acts 2:42) could they be of "one accord" and have that "singleness of heart" so they were "of one heart and of one soul."

Paul in the midst of division, strife, and contention (1 Cor. 1:11-12) commanded them to have no divisions but to be perfectly joined together (1:10), and he informed them how this would be accomplished. He gives three principles to accomplish this unity: they were all to speak the same thing, they were to all have the same mind, and they

were to have the same judgment (which probably has reference to our actions; "it is discernment which determines conduct"—Zodhiates).

That mind, speech, judgment is not based upon any one man or group of men. As Solomon said, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12). Jeremiah gives the reasoning behind this: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Yet, this is exactly what denominational groups do; they attempt to unify their denomination (and others) upon what a man or group of men say. Yet, when it is based upon man's say so, one man or group of men's say so is just as good and authoritative as another man or group of men. It becomes much like Israel of old when there was "no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25). The type of unity Christ prayed for and Paul commanded the Corinthians and us, will never be achieved through man's word. If it cannot be achieved through man's word, the only way to achieve that unity is through God's Word. The only way we can say the same thing and be joined together in the same mind

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Michael Hatcher, Editor

and judgment is by the Scriptures. Man's words divides; God's Word unifies.

Sadly, it seems some go to an extreme and as Paul warns the Galatian brethren, "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:15). H. D. M. Spence wrote in *The Pulpit Commentary* regarding *consumed*, "is here employed in its more literal sense, in order to furnish a figure describing that intense desire to vex and damage an antagonist, which but too often disgraces the so-called religious controversialist or partisan." They need to learn what Paul taught to "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phi. 2:3). While calling for the brethren to be likeminded and of one accord and mind, he reminds them to have the same love one for another and not do things through strife or contentiousness. Nor should this be done through vainglory or as BDAG also defines the word, "vain or worthless opinion, illusion, delusion." As Christians, we must guard ourselves against unwarranted division and be sure we always "seek peace and ensue it" (1 Pet. 3:11).

There is one other attribute which needs to be mentioned here: they had their heart in it. Christians must have this attribute. When Jesus was asked, "which is the great commandment in the law?" (Mat. 22:36), He responded by saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (22:37). All of our being, our energy, our powers must be engaged for God. It is a total love and

devotion for Him. Jesus was quoting Moses from Deuteronomy 6:5.

One of the great problems of old Israel is called Religious Externalism and is being seen more often in the Lord's church today. With Israel it was when the externals of the Jewish religion took the place of the heart. Moses, in Deuteronomy 6, had commanded them to **do** all that God had commanded. They were to "keep all his statutes and his commandments...observe to do it" (6:2-3). However, simply going through the motions was not sufficient. They needed to have a love for God first and foremost, with their entire being. However, through the years, Israel fell into the trap of thinking that simply going through the motions was all that was needed. Thus, we see prophets telling them, "Rend your heart, and not your garments" (Joel 2:13) and David's statement, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psa. 51:16-17). Many through the years mistakenly thought that all that would be needed are the sacrifices and burnt offerings. They put no feelings, no heart in what they were doing, just going through the actions.

I fear that many in the Lord's church today are simply going through the motions. They have lost their zeal for God and spiritual things if they ever had any. One of the seven congregations Jesus, through John, wrote to was a congregation that was neither cold nor hot; they were lukewarm (Rev. 3:14-22). Because of that lukewarmness, Jesus told them, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chas-

ten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Zeal is essential to Christianity. Jesus redeemed us and purified a peculiar people to be "zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14).

Without our heart in it, we cannot properly obey the Gospel. Paul wrote, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17). Proper attitude of heart is necessary to worship God acceptably. Jesus said to the woman of Samaria: "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). Paul sums it up by saying, "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good *thing*, and not only when I am present with you" (Gal. 4:18). Likewise, we need to always be zealous in what is right.

In speaking of the physical nation of Israel in Paul's day, he would state, "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). My fear is that we have the knowledge they lacked, but we lack the zeal they possessed. We come to worship services and engage in all the aspects God has authorized in worship to Him, but we just go through the motions. We sing songs (it appears some only because they must) but do not pay attention to the words; when we pray it is not the outpouring of our emotions to the Father and true thanksgiving to Him; the Lord's Supper is just a ritual without our meditating upon the death of our Lord and Savior; giving is

not done with an attitude of cheerfulness and liberality; the preaching is often a time to nap for some, others play games on their phones, along with a thousand and one other things. We go through the actions, but our heart is no longer in it.

While I am obviously speaking in generalities regarding the church today, it is true for far too many. Jesus' words to the church of Ephesus is apropos to so many Christians and congregations today: "Never-

theless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:4-5). Let us be like the soldiers who came "to make David king over all Israel" (1 Chr. 12:38) and have that "perfect [whole, undivided] heart" as soldiers of Christ.

As we conclude this series of articles, if the Lord's army (every Christian) possessed the characteristics of these "men of war" who came to David and made up his army, think of all the spiritual battles that would be won for the cause of Christ. The devil and all his forces would be on the run. Contrary to the thinking of many, the Lord's church is not an audience to be entertained, but it is an army to be empowered.

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from the debates and decisions of the Council of Nice, or of Trent, or of Westminster—from the ecclesiastic history, the moral philosophy, or the scholastic divinity of any age, since John the Apostle resigned his spirit.

From the above fact, it follows, that the most accurate acquaintance with all those questions of the different sects, with all their creeds and controversies, which have engrossed so much of the public attention, if it does not impede, most certainly does not facilitate, our progress in the knowledge of the apostolic epistles. As the Apostles did not write with any of our questions before their minds, or with a reference to any of our systems, it is presumptuous in the extreme to apply what they have said on other questions, to those which have originated since. And as they did not write with any design of making out a system of doctrine, it is preposterous to attempt to make out a system for them, and oblige them to approve it.

In the second place, as the Apostles wrote these letters with a

reference to their own times, to the character and circumstances of the people with whom they were conversant, a knowledge of the character and circumstances of these people, is of essential importance, in order to understand the letters addressed to them.

By the *character* of the people, we mean not only their character, at the time the letter was written, but also their previous character—what sort of persons they were before their conversion, as respected religion and morality—what their peculiar views and prejudices—and what their attainments in the learning and science of their age and country. By the *circumstances* of the people, we mean not merely their political and commercial standing, but as regards unity of views and co-operation—whether they were living in peace and harmony among themselves—whether they were persecuted by those of different sentiments—or whether they were enjoying tranquility unmolested from without.

In the third place, a knowledge of the character and circumstances of the writer of an epistle, is of essential importance in understand-

ing it. His character as respects style and method—what his peculiar art of reasoning and modes of expression—what relation he bears to the persons addressed—whether personally acquainted with them, or by report—whether their father or brother in the faith—whether his letter is the first or second to them, or one of a series not extant—whether it was solicited on their part, an answer to one from them, or written of his own accord—whether he addresses them alone, or others in conjunction with them—and whether he writes in his own name, or associated with others—and what their character and standing.

In the next place, great attention must be paid to his *design* in writing to them, at that time. It must be ascertained whether he writes with a reference to their whole circumstances, or to some more urgent consideration; whether that consideration was one that respected themselves merely, or others equally with them; whether he aimed at the full accomplishment of his design in one letter, or in more; or whether he reserved some

things to a special interview, or to some persons soon to visit them.

In the fifth place, the reader must recollect that no one sentence, in the argumentative part of the letter, is to be explained as a proposition, theorem, proverb, or maxim, detached from the drift and scope of the passage. Indeed, neither words nor sentences in any argumentative composition, have any meaning, but what the scope, connection, and design of the writer give them. Inattention to this most obvious fact, has beclouded the apostolic epistles, has introduced more errors into the views, and unmeaning ceremonies into the practice of professing Christians, than any other cause in the world. Added to this, the cutting up the sacred texts into morsels, called *verses*, has greatly contributed. Many passages, otherwise plain and forcible, have been weakened and obscured by this absurd interference.

The difficulties in the way of our understanding these epistles, may be easily gathered from the preceding items. We must place ourselves in Judea, in Rome, or in Corinth, and not in those places in the present day; but we must live in them nearly two thousand years, before we lived at all. We must mingle with the Jews in their temple and synagogues. We must visit the temples and altars of the Pagan Gentiles. We must converse with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers—with Pharisees and Sadducees—with priests and people that died centuries before we were born. We must place before us manuscript copies of these epistles, written without a break, a chapter, or a verse. We must remember what the writers *spoke* to the people, before

they *wrote* to them. We must not only attend to what they said and wrote, but to what they did. And we must always bear in mind the numerous and diversified enemies, in and out of authority, with whom they had to conflict. Now all these are apparently great difficulties, and, at first view, would seem to put the golden key of interpretation out of the reach of all.

They are not, however, insurmountable. In reading any epistle, on any subject, written by any person, we are accustomed to attend to all these things, in substance, if not in form. Indeed, these are but the dictates of common sense, regarded by every person in the common occurrences of every day. Who is there that reads a letter from any correspondent, without placing before his mind the character, views, and all the circumstances of the writer? Who is it that reads a letter addressed to himself, or any other person, that does not attend to his own circumstances, or those of the person addressed, with a reference to the items of correspondence? Does he not regard the date, the place, the occasion, and the apparent design of the communication? Does he divide the letter into chapters and verses, and make every period or semicolon in it a proverb, like one of Solomon's; a theorem, like one of Euclid's; an axiom, like one of Newton's? Does he not rather read the whole of it together, and view every sentence in it in the light of the whole, and with a reference to the main design? Most certainly he does. All that is contended for in these remarks, is, that the same common sense should be applied to the apostolic epistles, which we apply

to all other epistolary communications.

We have said, that the above-mentioned difficulties are not insurmountable; and in proof that they are not, and that we may place ourselves in the circumstances of those addressed in the epistles, with more ease than at first sight appears, we would call the reader's attention to the documents which the New Testament itself furnishes, to aid us in an effort of so much importance.

In the first place, then, the historical and epistolary books of the New Covenant afford us the necessary documents to place ourselves in the circumstances of the persons addressed, in all those points essential to an accurate apprehension of what is written to them. It presupposes, that the reader is in possession of the ancient oracles; or that he has, or may have the information contained in them. As much is recorded of the peculiar character and views of the Jews and Gentiles, in the apostolic age, of the sects and parties of both people, as is necessary to understand the allusions to them in these writings; and in proportion to the important bearings that any historic facts have upon the apostolic epistles, is the amount of information afforded. For example—there is no historic fact which explains so much of Paul's epistles, as the opposition which the Jewish brethren made to the reception of the Gentile converts into the Christian congregations, on the same footing with themselves; and there is no historic fact in the history of the lives and labors of the Apostles, so frequently and fully presented to the view of the reader, as this one.

Indeed, the number of facts necessary to be known, in order to our associating around ourselves the circumstances of those addressed, in most of the apostolic epistles, is by no means great. It is rather the *importance* than the *number* of them, which illustrates these writings. A few facts belonging to the apostolic commission, explain a large proportion of the writings of the Apostles. For instance, they were to announce and proclaim to Pharisees, Sadducees, Samaritans, and men of all nations, that JESUS THE NAZARENE WAS THE SON OF GOD, AND THE SAVIOUR OF MEN. When this was done, and some of all these people were persuaded of the truth of this proposition, the next work of the Apostles was, to associate them in one religious community, by opening to their apprehension the import and design of the facts which they already believed. In making one new religious body, or associa-

tion of persons, whose former views, prejudices, partialities, and antipathies, were so discordant, lay the chief difficulty, and constituted the most arduous part of the apostolic labors. The Jew, with great reluctance, abandoned his prejudices against the Gentile; and the Gentile, with no less difficulty, was reconciled to the Jew. The Jew conceited that it would be an improvement upon the Christian religion, to incorporate with it a few of the essentials of Judaism; and the Gentile fancied, that some of his former much-loved philosophy, would be a great acquisition to a Christian congregation. The Infidel, or unbelieving Jews, attacked their brethren, who associated with the Apostles—first by arguments, and lastly by political power; and the Gentile philosophers and magistrates alternately ridiculed and persecuted such of their brethren as united with this sect, everywhere spoken against. The Apostles la-

bored to keep the doctrine of the Messiah pure from any mixture with Judaism and Gentile philosophy, and to fortify the minds of the disciples with arguments, to maintain their controversy against their opponents, and with patience and resolution to persevere amidst all sufferings and persecutions. Now these few facts, so frequently and fully stated in these writings, go a great way in explaining some entire epistles, and many passages in others.

But in a preface to one of the epistles, we can illustrate and apply these principles to much better advantage, than in such general remarks; and, for this purpose, we shall present the reader with a short preface to the epistle to the Romans, which has generally (both by the ancients and moderns) been considered the most obscure and difficult of all the epistles.

Deceased

“Alcoholism is a Disease”

Don Tarbet

In defense of the consequences of drinking alcohol to the point of its being defended when it reaches the point of *alcoholism* is absurd. William Shakespeare is quoted as saying, “I will not put into my mouth that which destroys my brain.” Social drinkers do not pay any attention to this, neither do they believe it. By the time their brains are partially destroyed, they either do not have the capacity to believe it, do not care, or they are so addicted that they can do nothing about it. They are helpless alcoholics.

Years ago, Dr. Frederick Lemere, a psychiatrist and neurologist of Seattle, Washington, wrote that alcohol is a habit-forming drug, and should be classified with narcotics and barbiturates. He also stated that drinking whittles away at the brain cells of an individual, killing brain cells that can never be replaced. Every time one goes on a drinking binge, many brain cells are destroyed—some of which are necessary for good mental and physical health. Is this good?

In today’s society, many are sympathetic to alcoholism and

are as sympathetic toward the alcoholic as they are to a man dying of cancer. They state, “alcoholism is a disease, and one cannot help it.” The only way it can be helped is to stop drinking entirely. An alcoholic should never touch alcohol again if he wants to live a better life. Solomon wrote, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; And whosoever erreth thereby is not wise” (Pro. 20:1—ASV). The apostle Peter states that we are to “abstain” from those things that war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11). He did not say “be moderate,” but “abstain”—

leave it alone entirely. CVS is to be commended for no longer selling tobacco products, but consistency should move them to also stop selling alcohol which does far more damage to man and society. Seldom does anyone advise against drinking, but usually advise “drinking in moderation,” which is most difficult do, and gets harder all the time.

I recently came across a paragraph in *Studies In The Book Of Proverbs* by Maurice Meredith that was published many years ago by Lambert’s Book House in Shreveport, LA, that needs our honest attention. Bro. Meredith wrote the following:

If alcoholism is as disease, it is the only disease that is contracted by an act of the will; it is the only disease that requires a license to propagate it; it is the only disease that is bottled and sold; it is the only disease that requires outlets to spread it; it is the only disease that produces a revenue for the government; it is the only disease that provokes crime; it is the only disease that is habit-forming; it is the only disease that is spread by advertising; it is the only disease that has no germ or virus cause, and for which there is no human corrective medicine; and it is the only disease that will bar the patient from heaven (31).

It is scientifically stated that one who died of alcohol poisoning left his sad record behind. Facts show that 47% of the alcohol was in the brain; 33% was in the blood, and 20% was in the liver. This indicates what when one is arrested, and the blood is examined, showing a high level of 33%, that at that moment the brain and liver contain a huge amount of alcohol at the same

time. No wonder their judgment is impaired. No wonder judges and police officers are sometimes found victims of their own poor judgment when they are arrested for rape or other crimes after a drinking spree.

There is a chain of events that bring shame and ruin to the drunkard: (1) dumb decisions, (2) deteriorated minds, and (3) diseased bodies. Even God reveals that wine (intoxicated drink from grapes) is a mocker, and strong drink (any intoxicating drink made from other products) is a rage, and anyone who is deceived by such is “not wise” (is a fool). Intoxicants are personified by those who use them, as they become boisterous and unruly and bring shame and ruin upon them. Intoxicants promise pleasure but give pain and expose the user to shame and disgrace and ruined health. They disturb the brain from the very first time they are used. They bring wounds and sorrow (Pro. 23:29). They find a home in the bodies of their users, for “they seek it again” (23:35). Their users are no longer masters of themselves, but become addicted to it, as they are no longer restrained by the laws of morality and decency. The users are mocked by strong drink, and they in turn mock all that is good. They often exhibit hallucinations and delusions, that can often remain in their minds for life.

The more one drinks, the more the physical health is destroyed, and the weaker the resistance becomes to that which destroys the body. Many experts agree that such poison that destroys certain organs of the body also poison and destroy parts of the brain as it

comes to and passes through the brain in its mission to destroy the complete person. It does not take a genius to figure this out, however. Alcohol runs rough-shod over the brain of its user, while on the way to the liver and other organs and functions of the body. Yes, in a sense “alcoholism is a disease,” but it is a self-inflicted disease that one brings on himself. There is no medical cure for this disease, and its symptoms never go away. If an alcoholic is forced to stop drinking, the desire and obsession for it never goes away.

Brethren, we need to continually warn the unruly, and remind them that we, as God’s people, are to remember the words of inspiration from God, when they read “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are” (1 Cor. 3:17). Though this passage was describing the church or body of Christ as that temple, its message should be remembered when we consider the physical body as a temple. In the same book, Paul penned these words:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s (6:19-20).

Our bodies are merely houses for the soul that God has made possible for us to have while we are pilgrims on earth, living in preparation for eternity. Let us not abuse our bodies and lose our souls.

Deceased

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