



SKYWORLD

Internet Bible Material

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"Sure and Steadfast"



by Martin Girard

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Hebrews 6:19 KJV).

The writer to the Hebrews presents the believer's "hope" as "an anchor of the soul" which is described as being "sure and steadfast" (Heb.6:19). An anchor is an integral part of a ship's equipment. Obviously the anchor is stowed while the ship is sailing, but when it docks it is cast into the water to make the ship secure.



You may have watched a ship entering the harbour and berthing. Members of its crew deftly cast a rope to the quayside where a waiting dock worker catches it and ties it securely to a bollard on the pier. Until this work has been done passengers are not permitted to disembark – for reasons of safety.

Our lives resemble a ship on an ocean crossing with a destination ahead of us. We are familiar with the word "hope" which relates to the future. Although in everyday use it often refers to something vague and uncertain, biblical hope is an



entirely different concept. Rather than being a sincere but unfounded wish for something better, biblical hope is as reliable as an anchor is to a ship. The verse above likens our "hope" to a ship's anchor which, when grounded correctly, guarantees the safety of the ship and all on board.

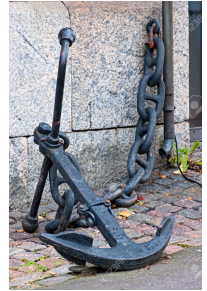
CHRIST-CENTRED

The believer's hope is centred in Christ and in what He has done. On the cross Jesus cried with a loud voice, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). We can add nothing to that work. It saves a believer for time and eternity. Christ, our "hope," has risen from the dead and has gone "within the veil" into heaven itself. His presence in

that holy place guarantees the safe arrival of all His believing people in His own good time. Our hope in Christ is “both sure and steadfast”. “Sure” means it is safe and certain, while “steadfast” indicates that it is firm and secure. The phrase “it cannot slip and it cannot break down” in the Amplified Bible helpfully explains the nature of this hope.

A HYMN WRITER

Priscilla Jane Owens was born in 1829 and died in 1907. She spent much of her life in Baltimore, U.S.A. where she worked as a teacher. She was very interested in Sunday School work and wrote a number of hymns which were intended for children. One of these was the majestic hymn “Will your anchor hold?” which develops the illustration found in Hebrews 6:19. Inspired by this nautical theme, Miss Owens produced a hymn that is both challenging and reassuring. It is good to see that the hymn is still included in a number of newer hymn books, even though it was written in a very different age.



The very fitting tune was composed by William J. Kirkpatrick (1838-1921) who was a carpenter and furniture-maker by trade and lived in Pennsylvania. At the age of 40 he dedicated the remainder of his life to music and compiled a number of gospel song collections. It has been suggested that the hymn was written in 1882. Although fewer people in the twenty-first century may travel by sea, this evocative hymn still contains a powerful message which we will consider.

“WILL YOUR ANCHOR HOLD?”

Four different situations are described in the four stanzas of the hymn, with nautical analogies being applied to human life. The refrain following each stanza seeks to answer the questions raised with a bold, clear response.

**1. Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife;
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift or firm remain?**



*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*

“The storms of life” are described graphically in this first stanza. We can picture dark clouds scudding across the sky as strong tides lift the ancient steamer, and

we can hear the cables straining after the ship's anchor has been cast. The challenge is this: In "the storms of life ... will your anchor drift or firm remain?" Do we have stability when we encounter situations which threaten to overwhelm us? The answer in the refrain leaves no room for doubt. "We have an anchor" which will remain secure, whatever the circumstances.



**2. Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear?
When the breakers roar and the reef is near;
While the surges rave and the wild winds blow,
Shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow?**

The second stanza takes us to "the straits of fear" as we picture the storm-tossed ship driven in the raging tempest towards the reef. Danger faces all on board the vessel. In times of fear, will we find "the angry waves" engulfing our frail lives, or will we know peace in the midst of the storm?



**3. Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
When the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
While your anchor holds within the veil.**

In the third stanza we enter yet more dangerous waters with the chilling "floods of death" threatening to take our "latest breath" away. The "rising tide" may present fresh challenges, but the believer in Jesus need never fear. He is in the presence of God, and one day we will be with Him – beyond life's storms.



**4. Will your eyes behold through the morning light
The city of gold, and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
When life's storms are past for evermore?**

The final stanza takes us *beyond* death's darkness to "the morning light" and to the dawn of eternity. Can we look forward to anchoring our souls "safe by the heavenly shore, when life's storms are past for evermore?"

Miss Owens was certainly familiar with sailing the high seas and could have enthralled her classes of children with her vivid descriptions. But she also knew the eternal value of having Christ as her Saviour and of being *fastened to the Rock which cannot move* – absolutely secure "in the Saviour's love" which is both "firm" and also "deep". Yes, if Christ is truly our Saviour it matters little what this old world can hurl at us. We have "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb.6:19): blessed be the Name of the Lord!

LAMENTATIONS

The cry of a broken heart

by Martin Girard

Lamentations may be one of the less appealing books in the Bible. The very title of the book indicates that it will not provide “happy” reading material. However, there are valid reasons for us to seek to understand this little-known book. Life is not spent on the mountain-top all the while, free from troubles. The Bible informs us that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (Eccl.3:4 KJV). Although we might choose to avoid the valley of tears, we must not forget that our Lord Jesus is known to us as the “Man of Sorrows” (cf. Isa.53:3). Times of weeping are painful but necessary. They enable us to develop compassion for others.

The prophet Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations and is often referred to as “the weeping prophet”. His ministry began about 627 BC during the reign of Josiah, and he lived to see four further kings (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah) occupy the throne of Judah. His father was Hilkiah, one of “the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin” (Jer.1:1). The first chapter of the book bearing his name describes his call to be a prophet and his feelings of inadequacy. Before looking at Lamentations itself, it might be helpful to view the book in its context by providing a few background details.

JEREMIAH’S DAY

Jeremiah ministered after the ten tribes of Israel (the northern kingdom) had been taken captive by the Assyrians. The people of the southern kingdom, comprising the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, still occupied their land, but spiritually were far from God. The word of the Lord had been rejected, and the people were

performing religious acts without any heart reality. Jeremiah repeatedly appealed to them to return to their God, but they remained deaf to his pleadings. He warned them of imminent captivity – not from the Assyrians but from the Babylonians. He told them plainly that they would face exile in Babylon for seventy years (Jer.25:11,12) because they had refused to hear God’s words (Jer.25:8). Jeremiah

refused to hearken

was not the only prophet to be despised, for “all” God’s servants had received similar treatment (Jer.25:4). In spite of many appeals the people refused to hearken and closed their ears to the tender warnings which were given.

The prophetic book of Jeremiah not only foretells coming judgment but also supplies a historic framework. In it we can read of the fall of Jerusalem after the Babylonian siege. Jeremiah had pleaded with the leaders to submit to the



Babylonians, but they thought they knew best and refused to surrender. Jeremiah was accused of being a traitor. When the city fell cruel treatment was meted out on many by the Babylonians, but Jeremiah was treated kindly and was not taken into exile. Later, he warned the remnant left in the land not to

escape to Egypt (Jer.42) but they refused to listen and took Jeremiah with them. Although we are not told so in as many words, presumably he died in Egypt.

It is interesting to compare Jeremiah with the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus was here on earth, some actually believed that He was Jeremiah (Mt.16:14). Although Jeremiah had lived centuries before, his character was evidently known. Like Jeremiah, Jesus wept over Jerusalem and lamented that the people refused to heed His warnings (Mt.23:37,38; Lk.19:41). Jeremiah felt his own sorrow was unique as he cried, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,”

"my sorrow"

(Lam.1:12). This one verse surely reminds us of our Saviour. Was “any sorrow” like His? We can never understand how He was weighed down as He faced the cross where God “made Him to be sin for us,” (2 Cor.5:21). Surely we can hear His voice in these heart-rending words as He asks us “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow ... wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger” (Lam.1:12). The heart of each believer should be touched in thinking of what He endured for us.

We can understand how Jeremiah must have felt heartbroken. His people refused to heed the warnings he had given them for their own good. As a consequence, disaster lay before them. Sometimes it can help to pour out our own grief. This is exactly what Jeremiah did as he penned Lamentations, having witnessed the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

LAMENTATIONS

The book's structure is interesting, for it is written in poetic form. The Old Testament Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 of Lamentations each contain 22 verses and are written as an acrostic – each verse beginning with a different letter – in alphabetical order. Chapter 3 has 66 verses and is also written in the form of an acrostic. However, in this case *three* verses begin with the same letter, following the alphabet's order, all the way through. Although chapter 5 contains 22 verses, it is not written as an acrostic.

CHAPTER 1:- Jeremiah, without any delay, expressed his sorrow at Jerusalem's desolation. The great and prosperous city was no more! There was no comfort to offer because the people were suffering on account of their sins (v.1-5). Spiritual adultery had been committed. As a judgment of God the temple had been sacked, and the inhabitants of the city were suffering the effects of famine. It was too late for them to appeal to God for mercy because just judgment had to fall upon them. Jeremiah felt it keenly and exclaimed, "For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint" (v.22).

CHAPTER 2:- The theme of God's judgment on His guilty people is continued. No pity had been shown. The temple had been destroyed, and the altar for sacrifice lay in ruins. The gates of the city no longer served their purpose (v.9) while children were weak through lack of food (v.12). Once Jerusalem had been "the joy of the whole earth" – but no longer was that true (v.15). Well might "tears run down like a river day and night" at such a scene (v.18). With dead bodies lying in the streets, it was indeed "a solemn day" (v.22).

The last verse of this chapter is particularly interesting. "Those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed, (v.22). This refers to babies who had been tenderly wrapped up for their protection by their mothers but had been torn from those loving arms and killed by the enemy. Does this not remind us of the Babe at Bethlehem who was "wrapped ... in swaddling clothes, and laid ... in a manger" (Lk.2:7)? Contrast that expression of love with the treatment meted out on Him in manhood by those who scourged Him before leading Him to the cross.

CHAPTER 3:- Personification is used in this chapter, with Jeremiah expressing the sufferings of the city as his own. But although "hope is perished" (v.18), the "mercies" of God could *still* provide him with "hope" (v.22,21). "The LORD is good unto them that wait for Him," he declared (v.25), and He "will not cast off for ever" (v.31). God was right to have punished His people for their sin, and they had no grounds for complaining against Him (v.39). After this brief interlude of hope Jeremiah again returned to his dominant theme, encouraging his guilty

fellow-citizens to acknowledge their sin and pleading with God to see what the enemy had done.

CHAPTER 4:- This chapter resembles the first two, both in its construction and in its theme. The earlier sins of the prophets and the priests (v.13) accounted, in part, for the hand of God in judgment. Experiencing desperate famine, the people of Jerusalem had been forced to resort to cannibalism (v.10). Judah's king ("the anointed of the LORD") had been taken to Babylon as a prisoner (v.20). But "the punishment" (v.22) meted out on Jerusalem was enough, and Jeremiah anticipated God righteously dealing with those who had taunted and tormented His people.

CHAPTER 5:- In the opening part of this final chapter Jeremiah enumerated the many painful experiences his people had endured. "Our necks are under persecution," he lamented (v.5). But in the last four verses there is a slight change of mood. Jeremiah found comfort in his unchanging God as he confessed, "Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever" (v.19). "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O LORD," he pleaded (v.21), but at the time of writing the reality remained before his eyes. He felt his people had been "utterly rejected" because God was "very wroth" with them (v.22).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Sin has very serious consequences, and we cannot trifle with it. The principle of reaping what we sow is true in the spiritual realm and in the natural realm. There is a price to pay for our disobedience, "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom.6:23). If we are true believers our sins have been pardoned through the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ at the cross. However, if we live carelessly and disobediently we must not suppose we are beyond God's intervention in our lives.

Although Lamentations presents a very dark scene, some wonderful gems can be found in the middle chapter. Are we not familiar with the thought of "the LORD'S

"new every morning" mercies" being "new every morning"? Truly "His compassions fail not," and we can exclaim, "Great is Thy faithfulness" (v.22,23). The next few verses are also

a great source of encouragement and instruction. We need to be able to say, "The LORD is my portion," (v.24). "The LORD is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him," (v.25). Two more "good" things are brought to our attention. "It is good" to "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD," (v.26). It is also "good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (v.27). Here we have yet another reminder of the Lord Jesus who invites us to take His yoke upon us and walk with Him along life's troubled pathway. He declared, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Mt.11:29,30). Nobody like Him can understand our sorrows.

KNOWN - YET UNKNOWN

by Martin Girard

Epaphroditus & Epaphras

Recorded in Paul's epistles are the names of people he remembered. Some appear to be simply mentioned by him in passing, with very little background information supplied. Without allowing our imagination to run riot it is possible to look at what we are told and make a few relevant comments about some of them.

Two of the people mentioned by Paul have very similar names, and it would be easy to confuse their identity. Epaphroditus features in Philippians, while Epaphras is mentioned in Colossians. Taking the details recorded in Scripture, let us create a small vignette of each of them.

EPAPHRODITUS

Paul's relationship with the Philippians was warm and affectionate. He was concerned to know of their circumstances, but his imprisonment had prevented him from visiting them. A trusted representative was needed, but who could it be? At once Paul thought of Epaphroditus, his "brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier" (Phil.2:25 KJV). Notice how Paul did not consider he was superior but regarded Epaphroditus as being on a par with him. Being his "brother" indicated a close relationship. He was both a fellow-worker and a fellow-warrior, thus serving the Lord as Paul was and fighting in His battles.



If, as suggested, his name means "charming" how well he lived up to its meaning! Evidently Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippians for he is described as "your messenger" and had ministered to Paul. He had been sick and was touched by the concern of the Philippians who expressed their sorrow at his illness. The affection between them is therefore abundantly clear. Epaphroditus had been "sick

unto death” on account of “the work of Christ” (v.27,30). He had laboured to the point of exhaustion and had over-taxed himself. His commitment to the Lord’s service had almost brought his life to an early end. Paul honoured him greatly and told the Philippians to respect such devoted servants of the Lord (v.29).

The early Homecall of Epaphroditus would have been a blessing for him as it would have resulted in an instant entrance to glory. However, he would have been missed by so many of his friends – including Paul. For this reason the apostle referred to his recovery as an act of “mercy” from God. Knowing how much pressure Paul was experiencing at the time, the Lord deemed it best to heal Epaphroditus and raise him up for future service lest Paul should have experienced “sorrow upon sorrow” (v.27).



What a dear servant of the Lord Epaphroditus was! We should show the utmost respect for those who give their all in the Master’s service. How do we match up to his example? Are we labouring for the Master and engaging in warfare for Him without counting the cost? Epaphroditus has a permanent place in Holy Scripture for that very reason.

EPAPHRAS

Epaphras (whose name may mean “devoted”) is not to be confused with Epaphroditus. He is mentioned in Colossians and Philemon. In Colossians 1 we discover that he was “a faithful minister of Christ” at Colosse who brought news to Paul of the Colossians’ “love in the Spirit” (v.7,8). His ministry was appreciated, for Paul describes him as a “dear fellowservant” (v.7). When Paul



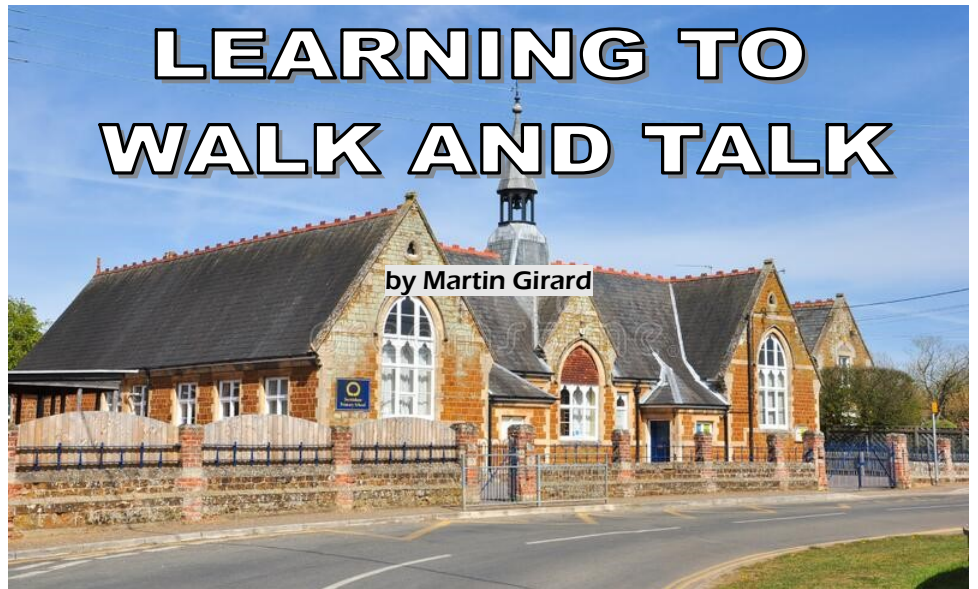
penned his epistle to the Colossians Epaphras was present with him (Col.4:12,13). Absent from his home church for a while, he sent them his greetings in the Lord. Bearing witness to the prayers of this man, Paul recorded that he was “labouring fervently” for them and for their stability and obedience to the Lord. His prayers were therefore noticeable and “always” – not just occasional. In a note of personal testimony Paul witnessed to the fact that he possessed “a great zeal” for the believers at Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

One more verse provides a little insight. In Philemon he is described as Paul’s “fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus” (v.23). It could be asked why he was in prison with Paul. Had been arrested along with the apostle, or could he have chosen to go to prison with him in order to provide encouragement? The question can only be raised, not answered with any degree of certainty.

Epaphroditus and Epaphras have both gone, but true and challenging words of testimony could have been etched upon their gravestones. They set us an inspiring example to follow.

LEARNING TO WALK AND TALK

by Martin Girard



As children develop it is natural for them to learn how to walk and talk. The first steps of a child mark a milestone and are watched with pleasure by the parents. In the same way the child's first faltering attempt to speak is a sign of progress. Before long the little one will be able to walk unaided across the room and string together a coherent sentence. If there is any indication of a defect, whether in mobility or in speech, a caring parent will be quick to provide help.

Spiritually we need to learn how to walk and to talk too. Christian educators have recognized the importance of this and have taught young children, and older ones, to “be careful” what they do. You may be familiar with the simply-constructed song which encourages “little eyes ... ears ... tongue ... hands ... feet ... heart ... mind” to be careful what they do. We all need reminding of this!

In view of the expansive nature of the topic being explored, this article will make use of a wide-ranging number of Bible verses. However, three anchor points will hold our thoughts together as we focus on three separate Psalms – one at the beginning, one in the middle, and the other at the end of the article.

PSALM 33

As we commence it is worth reflecting on Psalm 33:13-15: “The LORD looketh from heaven; He beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation He looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; He considereth all their works” (KJV). The simple truth at the centre of this

passage is expressed in a number of ways. We cannot avoid the plain fact that God is looking upon all of us all of the time. We are accountable to Him, and if we are His children our chief ambition should be to please Him.

Human beings possess five vital senses. We can consider them one by one and discover some practical lessons from God's Word.

THE SENSE OF SIGHT

Think of the gift of sight and the importance of our eyes. How do we use them? Job determined that he would not allow his eyes to focus wrongly on a young woman's appearance (Job 31:1). Many centuries later the Lord Jesus explained that looking lustfully on a woman was actually committing adultery in the heart (Mt.5:28). Solomon was aware of the danger posed by alcohol and counselled his son not to "look" longingly on the sparkling wine because it could sting like a serpent (Prov.23:31,32). As the eyes are the gateway to the heart, it is vital to watch what we watch! This can certainly be applied to films and television. David's words in Psalm 101:3 challenge us not to set anything wicked before our eyes. Is God pleased with what we watch? He can certainly see it.



THE SENSE OF HEARING

The second sense to ponder is hearing. Consider briefly, in this respect, a warning from Solomon. Putting it bluntly, Solomon explained that you might hear your servant curse you. Is this unthinkable? By no means, Solomon continued, for we have all said wrong things about others (Eccl.7:21,22). "A bird of the air" (an unsuspecting source) may carry "the voice" (or even your thoughts) to someone else (Eccl.10:20). While we ought not to speak unadvisedly, this verse also reminds us not to have our "ear to the ground" too often. We may hear things about ourselves we would be better not knowing!



TOUCH, TASTE, SCENT

The sense of touch may relate particularly to our hands. How are we using them? "Touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor.6:17) is a necessary warning. We live in a very impure world, so we must ensure we do not put our hands (figuratively speaking) to unclean activities. "Keep thyself pure" (1 Tim.5:22).



When we consider the sense of taste we might think about our tongue. Solomon warned his son not to develop a taste for the "dainties" of the rich (Prov.23:6). That itself is a lesson to ponder, but we will return to look at the subject of the tongue a little more broadly later.

The nose enables us to use of gift of scent. The elderly Isaac smelt his son Jacob's garments and detected "the smell of a field" which persuaded him that it was Esau (Gen.27:27). It is possible, like Isaac, to be deceived if we depend too much on our natural senses. Had he possessed the gift of sight he would have seen that it was Jacob and not Esau.



PSALM 34

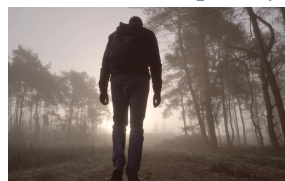
Having looked briefly at our five senses from Scripture, we must return to the book of Psalms for our second reference point. David wrote, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps.34:13,14).

In Psalm 33 we noted the general truth that God is watching us all the time. Nothing escapes His attention. Those two verses in Psalm 34 remind us of the two activities which were mentioned at the beginning of the article – walking and talking. In this passage our attention is drawn first to our talk. David's exhortation is that our tongue should be kept from evil or harmful conversation and our "walk" in this world should be along the pathway of peace which is "good" in God's sight. Both activities must be considered in the light of Holy Scripture.



WALKING

First, let us think about our "walk". So many verses in the New Testament portray the life of a believer in terms of "walking" through this world. Due to the constraints of space it will only be possible to look at a few references. In the writings of John we are reminded of the need to "walk in the light" (1 Jn.1:7). Just two verses earlier we are told that "God is light", so walking in the light means allowing His character to shine upon us. Sin is associated with darkness. We must therefore avoid the paths of sin and allow the light of God's Word to illumine our pathway through this world.



Another practical lesson can be found in Ephesians 5:2 where we read, "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us". How can we forget the love of our Saviour who willingly surrendered His life at Calvary when He took our place and died for our sins? Remembering that love and His call for us to follow Him, we should also tread the pathway of love. This means loving God and seeking to please Him, as well as loving one another. A high standard has certainly been set for us when we consider how we should "walk, even as He walked" (1 Jn.2:6).

Colossians 4:5 states, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without”. This refers particularly to how we live before unsaved people. What a great need there is for wisdom! How easily we can fail and bring the message of the Gospel into disrepute. We must live sanctified (holy) lives without being sanctimonious, or simply *appearing* to be morally superior. Not only is God watching us; other people are too. In 2 Timothy 2:4 Paul used the illustration of a soldier endeavouring to please his commanding officer. If we are born again we have been called by Christ to follow Him and to be His soldiers in a hostile land. How important it is therefore to please Him in all things.



TALKING

Returning to the instruction found in Psalm 34, it might be helpful to spend a little more time thinking of our speech. “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Ps.34:13). The classic passage dealing with the tongue is James 3 in which the apostle reminded his readers of how easily we can cause offence by our speech. Although the tongue is such “a little member” in the body, it boasts of great things (v.5). It is destructive by nature and cannot be tamed, being “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (v.8). This practical portion of God’s Word is worth reading carefully and prayerfully on a regular basis.



Another very helpful book containing practical instruction is Proverbs. There is great benefit in reading it regularly – perhaps in small, digestible sections. Much of the teaching is presented in short, pithy (expressive) statements. Contrasts can often be found. For instance, consider Proverbs 12:18: “There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.” Words have the power to hurt or to heal. Speech that pleases God is health-giving. All too often we speak before we have thought about the consequences which may follow. Another timely warning is found in Proverbs 29:20: “Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.” The fool presented in Proverbs may sometimes not have the ability to speak, but at least this keeps him out of trouble! How many problems have arisen because we expressed ourselves too quickly and then regretted it.



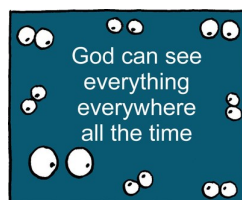
The numerous warnings in Proverbs may make us feel very inadequate. If, as James taught, the tongue cannot be tamed, what hope do we have? Left to our own efforts we could do nothing, but help is available. The Lord is able to assist us in our sinfulness and weakness. Truly, the prayer of Psalm 141:3 is timely: “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” We would do well to make this a daily prayer.

Walking and talking are two very basic activities. The life that is “all talk and no walk” achieves nothing worthwhile. Our words and our actions must be in harmony. It is no good uttering high-sounding statements or boasting of our good deeds when our actions and habits discredit us because they are in contradiction to the principles of God’s Word. We have already seen how our speech and actions are brought together in Psalm 34:13,14.



PSALM 139

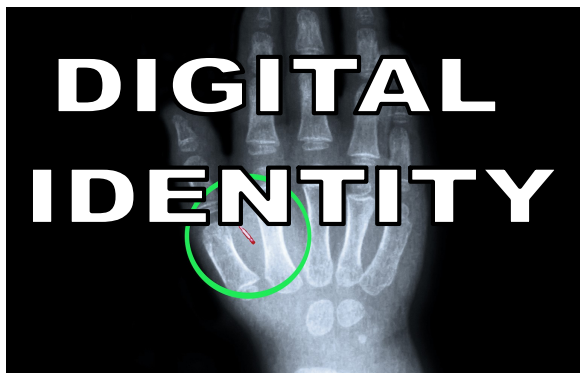
As we draw these thoughts to a conclusion we can consider David’s honest prayer recorded in Psalm 139. “O LORD, Thou hast searched me, and known me,” he declared (v.1). Nothing could be hidden from the all-seeing eye of God. Whether sitting down or standing up, God knew everything about David’s actions (v.2). “Thou ... art acquainted with all my ways,” he wrote (v.3). Not only did God know his every word, but He understood his thoughts “afar off” (v.2). What a wonderful God! Before a word is framed by our tongue, He knows exactly what we are going to say. Also, every thought we have is read by Him.



Psalm 139 reminds us that God surrounds us and is everywhere. We cannot escape from His presence, even for a moment. The darkness cannot hide us, and the widest ocean cannot remove us from His view. There is no point in rebelling against Him. In the first verse of this psalm David yielded in submission to the Almighty. What more could He say? “O LORD, Thou hast searched me, and known me.” But there was no objection from David in that statement as the closing verses make clear. Honest before God, David was willing for God to *continue* to search Him through and through. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (v.23,24).

NOTHING
can be
hidden from
God, because
He sees
EVERYTHING

Would we be prepared to do this? Would we object to God knowing our thoughts? Perhaps we know that those thoughts really do not please Him. Are we ready for Him to lead us “in the way everlasting”? Moved by these thoughts, Francis Bottome penned the lovely hymn, “Search me, O God! My actions try”. Like David, he was prepared for God’s “fiery glance” to “cast its holy light through all” of his life. We need that same kind of honesty. No matter how long we may have known the Lord, we need to live as His obedient children. With the Holy Spirit’s help, the simple and straightforward truths of His Word will enable us to walk and talk aright.



by Martin Girard

And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his

name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six. (Revelation 13:16-18 KJV)

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

The words recorded at the end of Revelation 13 have intrigued Christian believers for centuries. Much has been written on “the mark of the beast” as Bible students have attempted to identify the coming dictator and his “mark” in particular. Over the past 50 years interest has mounted as technology has advanced. Some have linked the mark to bar-coded products while others believed in-the-wall cash dispensers were introducing something sinister.

Before propagating unfounded theories it is important to understand what the Bible actually teaches. Revelation 13 introduces two beasts. “The first beast”



(identified in this way in verse 12 to distinguish him from the second beast) is both *a system* and *an individual*. The latter part of the passage seems to focus on the individual – an unbelievably evil man whose mouth blasphemes God (v.6).

The second beast works in conjunction with him, is a miracle worker, and has the ability to succeed in deception. It is this second beast (also known as “the false prophet” in Rev.19:20) who orders the construction of “an image to the beast” (13:14) and the imposition of “a mark” in the right hand or forehead (13:16).

The word translated “mark” is *charagma* meaning something impressed or engraved. All people, whatever their status in society, are ordered to receive this mark. Without it there is no possibility of doing business (v.17). It therefore represents a kind of economic dictatorship. Unless one has this mark, “or the name of the beast, or the number of his name,” he or she will be excluded from social interaction (v.17). The beast’s number is “the number of a man” – 666 (v.18). In Scripture 6 represents man, so a triple 6 suggests a trinity of evil.

THE MEANING OF IT

It is not possible to correctly interpret this number at the present time, but its true meaning will be absolutely clear when that day dawns. However, as we think of the implementation of a system which excludes those who refuse to comply, there are a few points to consider.

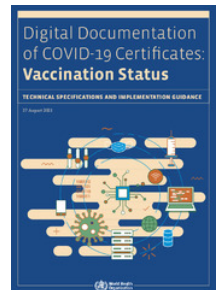
At the time of writing (2023) there is a lot of debate over digital identity. It is no secret that world leaders and the heads of global entities are enthusiastically promoting such a scheme. In September 2022 the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* provided \$200 million to create an infrastructure that “encompasses tools such as interoperable payment systems, digital ID, data-sharing systems, and civil registry databases.” In their own words, this will make countries “more resilient to crises such as food shortages, public health threats, and climate change, as well as to aid in pandemic and economic recovery.”



At the World Economic Forum’s annual gathering in Davos in January 2023, the grinning Tony Blair spoke of the importance of “national digital infrastructures” which will identify individuals who have not been “vaccinated”. Some months earlier Tony Blair branded all who refused the experimental Covid-19 injections as “idiots”. Why does he think it so important to “vaccinate” people and force them to have a digital identity?



When digital identity has been implemented, it can track, trace, and monitor the activities of individuals. This digital identity will be the gateway for Central Bank Digital Currency. The aim is to bring in a global social credit system similar to China’s. Once such a scheme is in place we will lose our individual freedom to spend our money as we choose. This will make supporting the Lord’s work difficult. In August 2021 the World Health Organization published a booklet entitled “Digital Documentation of COVID-19 Certificates: Vaccination Status” in which it reveals that the work was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation.



Developments are happening constantly. We have reached a point in human history that we have not reached before. Events prophesied in Revelation 13 are about to be fulfilled before our eyes. It is high time to wake up and take notice.



But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken His commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him. (Numbers 15:30-31 KJV)

In Old Testament times, before the coming of Christ, a sacrificial system existed in Israel. An individual who was conscious of sin and wished to put matters right with God would bring an animal to the high priest at the tabernacle or at the temple in Jerusalem. Clear instructions can be found in Scripture detailing the *type* of animal which could be brought to atone for sin and the *manner* in which it would be presented to God.

Similar instructions were prescribed for worshippers who brought an animal to the priest as an act of thanksgiving or appreciation. In this case the animal was not offered to restore the individual to a right relationship with God. Rather, it was brought *because* of that relationship which was enjoyed. The person bringing it was not a penitent sinner but a worshipping believer who delighted in being able to approach God.

However, one fact can easily be overlooked. The person who brought a sacrifice to atone for sin did so because he or she had sinned “through ignorance” (Num.15:27 KJV). The laws of God had not been deliberately flouted. As a matter of fact, Scripture makes it very clear that intentional sin was to be viewed altogether differently. Consider the verses from Numbers 15 quoted at the

beginning of this article. If anyone sinned “presumptuously” – whoever they were, whether a native “born in the land” or someone who had chosen to live with the people of Israel – that person was not invited to come to the altar with a sacrificial animal. Their background made no difference. They were to be “cut off” from the other people, forfeiting their place in society (v.30).

BRINGING THIS UP TO DATE

Reading this in the twenty-first century we might be inclined to complain that this seemed unnecessarily harsh, but our criticism demonstrates that we are unaware of the gravity of sin. The two verses above show us the seriousness of the matter. One who has sinned “presumptuously” was guilty on three counts. First, the person had reproached the name of the LORD, bringing Him into disrepute and showing Him scorn. Second, the sinner in this context had “despised the word of the LORD” (v.31). The LORD had provided His Law which outlined the standards God expected and identified sin. Knowing this, the one who had sinned “presumptuously” had acted independently of His Law and considered himself to be above its claims. Third, God’s “commandment” had deliberately been broken by the sinner who was now guilty before Him. “That soul” would not simply be “cut off from among his people” (v.30) but “utterly” cut off from them (v.31).

The Law of God makes us aware that sin is serious when we understand how atonement required the death of a sacrificial animal such as a lamb. But we see how much *more* serious sin is when we consider the one sinning “presumptuously” being “utterly cut off” from the community. The words “his iniquity shall be upon him” offer no hope. The penitent sinner could come before the priest with his sacrificial animal and confess his sin which would be removed through the death of the animal. In that case the sin would, in effect, be “upon” the animal. But here the stiff-necked sinner would continue to bear his own sin and face the awful judgment of God.



Forgiveness now, according to the New Testament can be found alone in Jesus Christ. There is no other Name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Sin is so serious in the sight of God that it cost the death of His only Son. Knowing how we ought to live, how dare we act “presumptuously” and defy His Word and the consequences of sin outlined therein? However, if we truly repent of our sin before God and confess it to Him, He can forgive us and cleanse us through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Bible never downplays the gravity of sin – and neither should we. Nor should we ever despise the amazing grace of God who will “abundantly pardon” the wicked if they forsake their self-willed way (Isa.55:7).