

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

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Dear Reader

It is hard to believe we are beginning our fifth year of publication of the Assembly Messenger. Bob Costen and I thank the Lord for all He has permitted to go forth and we are trusting Him to make this year a blessing too. As requested by Thomas Nelson, we remind you that the New King James Version, used for most of our quotes, is copyrighted and used with their permission. We sometimes fail to give our return address, which is either Roger P. Daniel 22240 Morley, Dearborn MI 48124-2127 or Dearborn Heights assembly 24570 Ann Arbor Trail, Dearborn Heights MI 48127, and to remind you that we will publish signed doctrinally-based letters and make comments as necessary.

We had intended to continue on with the last two of four issues on 1 Corinthians, but letters and other means of communication have convinced us that we should first answer two criticisms or questions as to some material that has been published in the Assembly Messenger, which we believe will be of interest and help to our readers. Then we will complete 1 Corinthians, the Lord willing. The first criticism refers to the proper use of the Old Testament; the second involves further questions on our stand on so-called “occasional fellowship.” We will look at J.N.Darby’s position.

THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

One comment by a brother illustrates the controversy as to the Old Testament that has come to light as part of a system of error recently promulgated by a number of brethren around the world. He says, referring to the Old Testament, “There can be no illustration of supposed truth that doesn’t exist in the New Testament. Nor is it correct to think that the Old Testament modifies or expands the New. We have not the liberty to interpret the types or illustrations apart from the New Testament. The Old Testament, not interpreted and applied according to the New, is called ‘weak and beggarly elements’ in Galatians 4:9, and ‘rudiments of the world’ in Colossians 2:20. As a shadow or type, the passage [on leprosy] in Leviticus, as all others in the Old Testament, can only be used to illustrate the truth of the New.”

Since the occasion for the above remarks by a brother was brother Leslie Grant’s article on *Leprosy* in Assembly Messenger #38, we first will let brother Leslie speak in defense of his article before making other comments. Brother Leslie answers, “A brother has written to strongly oppose my article on Leprosy in the Assembly Messenger, not because he found any unscriptural principle advanced in my interpretation of Leviticus 13 and 14, but because he refuses to believe these principles have any application to the present day Church of God, for he insists that only the New Testament provides instruction for the conduct of believers.

But he has not read even the New Testament correctly in taking such an attitude, for the New Testament says, “*All scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim.3:16). At the time Paul wrote he was referring mainly to the Old Testament as scripture. More than this, Paul was writing Timothy as to how he should behave himself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God. Does our brother insist that the Old Testament is *not* profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, in connection with the house of God, but only good as giving *illustrations* of things in the New Testament?

Our brother has also not read the New Testament carefully when he writes, ‘Also, the Church was hid in God, not in the Old Testament (Eph.3).’ The apostle Paul here is speaking of ‘the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known ... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel’ (vv.4-6). Thus, this mystery hid in God was that Jews and Gentiles should form one body. There was not even a *type* of the body of Christ in the Old Testament, but there are other types of the Church — as the bride of Christ (Gen.2:21-24; 24, etc.) and as the house of God (1 Ki.10:4-5), etc.

It is true that any Old Testament examples must be carefully interpreted consistently with the *truth* of the New Testament. If Leviticus 13-14 is profitable for doctrine, will our brother present an interpretation of this that is more clearly applicable to our present day than I have done? But he dismisses my interpretation because this passage is not in the New

Testament. He says, 'I imagine that he (LMG) believes he has New Testament instructions for the process he outlines, but he does not give them.' Dear brother, I have counted 13 times that I have referred to New Testament scriptures in the short article I wrote. These scriptures, and other New Testament scriptures, have deeply impressed me with a sense of deep responsibility to seek to be both careful and faithful in properly interpreting the Old Testament as well as the New.

I am fully persuaded that the Old Testament as well as the New is the pure, unadulterated Word of God, and both complement one another. Certainly the Old is not complete without the New. The Old emphasizes the greatness and the government of God, while the New more strongly emphasizes the grace of God. But when grace is known, it does not ignore government. Do we need to be properly governed? Absolutely! While the New Testament also implies the need of God's government, as well as grace, yet the Old Testament supplies many illustrations of the principles of government that we must not ignore. Leviticus 13-14 provides us such principles.

Let our brother draw attention to any one matter considered in the article that is contradictory to New Testament teaching, if he can find it, and let him propose an interpretation of the passage that is more consistent with the truth of the New Testament. Would this not be more commendable than dismissing the passage as though it has no value?"

Thank you, brother Leslie. Now, some further comments. The JND translation and two Greek-English translations make 2 Timothy 3:16 even stronger than brother Grant gave above — "*Every scripture* is divinely inspired and profitable for teaching ... instruction in righteousness." There is not *a single verse* in the Old Testament that is not profitable for us today for teaching, conviction, correction, for instruction in righteousness, so the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work. Of course, like every verse in the New Testament, the Old testament passages must be cut in a straight line or handled accurately or rightly divided (2 Tim.2:15). The Holy Spirit and *all* that Scripture (Old and New Testament) says on any subject must be taken into account, for no scripture can be isolated from the entire Bible (2 Pet.1:20) — those 40 or so "holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (v.21).

We wouldn't want to think the Lord was wrong in Matthew 4:4 when He quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God." In direct interpretation, when the Lord spoke, that "word" was the Old Testament as far as what was written. Of course we today rightly make that interpretation include the New Testament. So to live a healthy, balanced spiritual life I need "every word" of the Old Testament and the New Testament. In Acts 17:1-3 Paul "reasoned with [the Jews] from the [Old Testament] scriptures." In verse 17 the Bereans searched the Old Testament scriptures as to whether Paul's New Testament teachings were so. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Timothy was to publicly read the Old Testament scriptures — all he had. Then there are seven Old Testament quotations in Hebrews 1. And we could go on and on like this!

Let's now look at several New Testament verses that deal with why the Old Testament was written. Romans 15:4 tells us it was "for *our* instruction" (JND). The Old Testament was for us! Much was said and written for the people of that past time, but God has recorded it in a book *for us*! The Bible is one book, although in two parts. For example, Abraham's faith was imputed or reckoned to him as righteousness (Rom.4:13-24; Gen.15:6). Romans 4:23-24 tell us it was not put in writing in Genesis 15 for Abraham alone, but for *us* also! We believe the Old Testament — every word of God — is full of such examples and instruction *for us*.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 give a number of events in Israel's history — the fathers of Israel were under the cloud; they passed through the Red Sea; they were thus baptized unto Moses; they ate of the manna; they drank water from the rock; they died under the hand of God. "But these things happened as types *for us*" or "became our examples" (v.6 JND, NKJV). We are given some of the types — the manna is spiritual food, the Word of God; the water is spiritual drink, Christ; the dying in the wilderness is God's judgment of people in unbelief, unappreciative of their spiritual blessings. Are there not hundreds of other types, not so clearly spelled out, for us to find and profit from?

Verses 7-10 expand on events in Israel's history, and again it is repeated, "Now *all* these things happened to them as *types* [as *examples*, NKJV] and have been written for *our* admonition" (v.11). Is that not plain enough? They were written *for us*, that we might find the types and learn or be trained by the written word. The Greek word for *admonition* is *nouthesia* and means "training by word" (Vine).

The brother quoted earlier brings up Galatians 4:9 as descriptive of the Old Testament when not interpreted and applied according to the New. That is quite a statement! The point being made in Galatians 4 is that to go back as a way of life, a way to blessing, to the Law and Judaism which is weak and beggarly (Gk: *ptochos* — powerless to enrich, descriptive of the religion of the Jews, Vine), is going back from freedom to bondage, since now Christ has come. The Law was our tutor “up to Christ” (Gal.3:24) — until Christ came. But the Law is still good and perfect, still the Word of God, for us to learn and profit from (1 Tim.1:8); but as with all Scripture, it has to be handled accurately. So Galatians 4:9 is no condemnation of *any* of the Old Testament.

Then our brother turns us to Colossians 2:20, “If ye have died with Christ from the elements of the world, why as if alive in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances.” The amazing thing here is this portion does not even speak of the Old Testament, but of the world — of that which man thinks will make him more spiritual. So we stop here.

We thus proclaim that the Old Testament is in every way God’s Holy Word, written for our instruction, filled with principles, instruction and examples that, with the Holy Spirit’s guidance (as with all Scripture), and all that Scripture says taken into account, will fill in many of the gaps and questions left by just reading the New. One example. There is simply the fact given in 2 Peter 2:24 that Christ bore our sins on the cross. Some gospels record the Lord’s cry of abandonment. But without the pictures given in the sacrifices and in the statements in the Psalms and prophets, we would have no concept of the *intensity* of that wrath-bearing when He satisfied a sin-hating holy God as to sin, in bearing our sins. Indeed, many modern-day authors completely miss this vital aspect of the Lord’s crucifixion because it is not described in the New Testament, and thus in their books seriously undermine the Person and work of Christ.

OCCASIONAL FELLOWSHIP

From calls, letters and rumors we hear of some dear brethren who consider us to be the worst kind of *legalists* (whatever that term means) because we do not advocate reception to the breaking of bread of all who J.N.Darby would have received in the earlier days of his ministry. Although undefined in Scripture, we will define a *legalist* as one who goes beyond Scripture (adds to Scripture) in teaching or practice, whereas we are not to turn to the right [legalism] or to the left [looseness] (Josh.1:7). We were recently given a pamphlet of JND’s letters on reception (I’ve seen several such pamphlets) evidently put together to support a less-guarded table. Now Mr. Darby was just under 30 years of age when the movement with which he is usually associated, began. He didn’t have a wealth of literature to help him (as we do), or a long background in the pathway he entered, but only a Bible and the Holy Spirit — all any of us really need. So he had to learn as he went through the experiences of that pathway. I thought it would be interesting to take JND’s letters and see how his thoughts matured in the last two decades of his life. The following is my study.

JND’s VIEWS ON RECEPTION FROM 1864-1881

John Nelson Darby wrote a number of short articles on “reception” during his lifetime. They became somewhat more restrictive as he matured in the truths of “assembly practice.” His continuing but well-qualified basic views were (a) that an assembly can’t refuse a person known to be a Christian and *blameless* because he was not of that assembly, and (b) that ignorance of ecclesiastical truth is not a ground of excommunication *where the conscience and walk is undefiled*.

Although I believe the Holy Spirit didn’t stop at 1881 (when JND died) in revealing the truth of “reception” and it is thus short-sighted not to consider the additional light of godly, well-known 20th century giants in the truth, where matters such as “associations,” “Nicolaitanism” (which God hates), and the fact that the teaching and fellowship of the apostles precedes the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42), were brought more to light, it is interesting to see the points JND insisted on as to reception in his older days. All quotes except Darby’s 1881 letter are from a booklet entitled *First Principles in Closing Days* compiled by John Weston. The 1881 letter was not in brother Weston’s booklet. The indented portions are Mr. Darby’s quotes. The bold and italicized words are the requirements.

A Christian Free from Moral or Doctrinal Sin. The early writers emphasized wrong doctrine as to the Person of Christ. We note today that many or even the majority of denominational “churches” and other groups falsely teach that Christ could have sinned or that He had a *struggle* in the Garden of Gethsemane as to whether He would save Himself or obey the Father, or will not affirm His eternal Sonship, etc. Equally serious are the false teachings and practices concerning the

Holy Spirit of particularly the Charismatic Movement, and their claims of special revelation. Surely Darby would have considered such false doctrines in receiving or not receiving someone. Loose reception allows in that which defiles.

The Lord's name [is to be] maintained as to doctrine and discipline (1864)

There cannot be too much care as to holiness and truth (1869)

Only in the last days we are called on to distinguish those who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart, *which at the first was not called for* (1879)

In the *present state of Christianity* we are called to maintain scrupulously, faithfully and with zeal, the holiness of the Lord's table (2 Tim.2:22) (1881)

Looseness is so prevalent now among the denominations that more care is needed (unknown)

The Person Received is Under the Discipline of the Assembly and thus not Free To Do As He Pleases. What shouldn't be allowed of one normally breaking bread in an assembly, cannot be allowed in one breaking bread on an occasion. We thus need to know about the person's conduct and doctrines.

It [the assembly] must exercise discipline as cases arise according to the Word (1869)

He is subject to all the discipline of the house [of God] (1870)

They must walk orderly and be under discipline ... the assembly is bound to exercise discipline as to them, and know their walk and purity of heart (1873)

But if persons break bread they are as subject to discipline as if always there Had he given occasion he would have been refused in discipline just as if there every Sunday (1875)

The Person's Coming is His Own Choice: No Outside Pressure Such As Inviting. When one is invited it is no longer his own conscience before the Lord that he simply wants to please Him in doing what the Lord has asked of him. "Inviting" was never practiced in early church days, nor in the days of J.N.Darby by those who sought to maintain the truth with Darby. It is a practiced that has allowed the reception of many who otherwise had no deep exercise to be received on an occasion at a particular assembly, and even had a conscience against such reception.

They came bona fide in the spirit of unity to that which is the symbol of unity (1873). NOTE: It was *their* coming; *their* exercise.

Going Back and Forth Would Not Be Allowed. This coming and going seems to be the common practice of those today who promote or emphasize so-called "occasional fellowship," that a person can come to that position which he does not agree with, go to the position he agrees with, and come back again, at his convenience. At least by 1881 Mr. Darby wouldn't allow such a thing.

Nor indeed do I think a person regularly going from one to another systematically can be honest in going to either That is not, in that act, a pure heart (1869)

If they came claiming as a condition liberty to go elsewhere, I could not allow it because I know it is wrong, and the church of God cannot allow what is wrong. If it was ignorance and they came *bona fide in the spirit of unity* to that which is the symbol of unity, I should not reject them because they had not in fact broken with it, but I could not accept what made us part of the camp, nor any sort of claim to go to both, to be inside and outside (1873)

The assembly is bound to exercise discipline as to them They cannot come in and out just as they please Looseness in this is more fatal than ever now. If a person practically says I will come to take a place in the body of Christ when I like, and go into sects and evil when I like *for convenience or pleasure*, that is not a pure heart (1873)

If one wanted to be one day among the brethren, the next among the sects, I should not allow it and would not receive such a person (1881)

If brethren *scrupulously* followed even these final views of Mr. Darby on a guarded table (so-called) and then in Christian love spent the time and effort to search the Scriptures together with others as to the truth of the other requirements we believe Scripture adds (which we have detailed in previous Assembly Messengers), it would go a long way towards reducing the emotion of this important subject and help us find together the full truth of Scripture. RPD