

A large, hand-drawn red heart outline is centered on a piece of aged, yellowed parchment scroll. The scroll is unrolled, showing its texture and some wear at the edges. The heart is filled with a vibrant red color.

Love Letter

by
Séafra Ceall

An issue we dare not face?

You may have noticed there is no blurb or recommendations on the cover of this book. The only details you have are the title and category.

Is the book fact or fiction? Maybe it takes a very radical approach? Perhaps this very back cover itself is part of a challenge?

Have you the guts to read the book with no prior knowledge or pre-conception.

Do NOT go, as we are wont, and try to read the conclusion to see if the book, or solution, is worth it.

If you start at the beginning may you finally reach the end, or is it the start?

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Love Letters

Advisory notice:

Before you start on your travels through this short offering you may wish to note the following:

If you are fortunate enough not to be as old as the author and indeed were born after the mid-1990's then it may be that you would need to check out a little of early 21st century history.

Apart from that, buckle up, (you may need a safety belt!) and enjoy the journey.

Bon voyage.

P.S. If perchance you feel like bailing out before the end of the book, remember that you do have that safety belt and He can preserve you from the very worst that you may feel you are encountering.

Prologue

Have you ever had the joy of receiving a love letter? In this world there is something so special, so exciting, at times so overwhelming, about the receipt of a written token of love.

As you follow the narrative of this little book, you may wonder: “why such a title?”

Certainly in the initial chapters you will need ‘patience’. Following patience, you will surely require ‘love’ (toward the author?!). Do not be dismayed. Of such is the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit is the natural result of growth.

So as you rest in the assurance of your indwelling Lord and the direction of His Holy Spirit, you will manage to cope with what follows. Indeed you may even have a revelation of the Spirit!

Whatever your final reaction, allow yourself to be challenged, as were our brothers and sisters of old.

Chapter 1

Fact- not fiction.

Many years ago, 1976 I believe, I had the privilege to be in a meeting where Pastor Richard Wurmbrand shared.

At that time he had the latest news from Cambodia, recently taken over by the Khymer Rouge.

On the first Sunday of the revolution, soldiers of the new regime surrounded churches and ordered all the worshippers to go outside.

As they exited they were told to spit on a Bible or a crucifix. If they failed to do so, they were informed they would be shot.

At one church the first fearful members left and indeed spat on the Bible.

However one young lady emerged and refused to follow this example. As the guards harangued her, they asked why she could not do as the others had done.

She explained that this book was like a love letter written to his beloved. How could anyone desecrate something so beautiful, written to them by one who loved them so totally?

The guards showed no mercy, and this sister became another martyr for her lover, as have multitudes over the centuries.

Sad or what? Challenging?

The outcome of this episode:

On that day every Christian in a surrounded church who had not managed some means of escape was shot - non-spitter and spitter alike!

Chapter 2

A love letter (fiction!)

131 Paul St.
Athens
Greece
September 1st 2001

My dearest sweetheart Ignacio,

How I long to see my beloved and soon we shall be reunited!

I am so excited that within just three months we shall be husband and wife.

Why should I, little old me, merit such a wonderful man as you? I know how much you love me and I trust I will live up to all your expectations.

Just a few days and we shall see each other again, never to be parted. As you know, I hope to transfer immediately I arrive in Boston, get American Airlines, flight 11, and so to see you later that day at LAX.

I understand completely if you cannot be at the airport to meet me – your boss can be quite a pain! However I know that my dear Mom and Dad will be there as always, to greet their only daughter. How happy they are, as the saying at the wedding reception goes; “not to be losing a daughter, but gaining a son.” They too love you sooooo much!

I know where our love originates and I try to share it with all whom I meet here. Sometimes it is easier to share with unbelievers!

However I have been so blessed to be with this small group of

locals who meet in one of the brothers' large apartment.

Like us all, they have their idiosyncrasies, but as yet we have had no problems with meat offered to idols! I shall truly miss their love and fellowship.

It is so hot here that even L.A. will seem cool by comparison. Some day I must bring you here to meet the saints and to see a few of the sights.

I'm afraid the night has really drawn in and I am up early tomorrow to help Rosa with her children.

This means I have to leave you – at least on this page, but my heart is forever with you.

There is not enough paper for all the hugs and kisses, so just let this one big kiss with my lips seal this letter to you my darling.

See you on the 11th – pray I make that connection in Boston. Miss you sooooo much.

Your Precious,

Anita

P.S. Did I say, I LOVE YOU!!

Beautiful ?

Gut wrenching ?

Let us look at this letter in more detail.

Chapter 3

Details

So, what do we see in this letter?

Well let's start with the address.

Obviously it is sent from Greece prior to the financial collapse of 2008/9 so one may assume that the accommodation is hopefully in good repair and that Anita is happy there.

It is not apparent if 131 is a whole house divided into apartments, or if Anita simply has a room in the house. Maybe the house belongs to one of the saints?

We can know, from Google Maps, that this house is modest by the standards of Paul St., it being in a middle class area of the city.

From the style of the house as seen on Google Streets, one could surmise it was built to a classic design for that area, some 30-40 years ago- small though it is.

If the house does belong to one of the church members, it would appear that this saint is not overly rich – certainly the outside could do with a lick of paint! However there is no reason to assume that Anita is unhappy there. Surely she would have mentioned it.

However one does have the impression that Anita is one who is contented no matter what her state, - or the state of the décor!

Of course to be fair to the owner of 131, we must remember that several years have elapsed since the writing of the letter and the recent Google photo.

Stick with me dear reader!

Let's study this letter some more.

Chapter 4

More details.

Actually a week has elapsed since we started our study of the love letter.

Last week we discussed the address and this time we shall look at the date.

To the uninitiated the date is simply 2001. This is just into the new millenium. Do you remember celebrating that point in time? We had great fun in our family and I hope you did too.

Look more closely though.

It is September 1st 2001. Still a very warm period of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, and especially in cities like Athens. Indeed we will note later that Anita even mentions the heat.

Now September is the ninth month of the year, and letters would typically take 7-8 days from Europe to L.A. in 2001. This means Ignacio would receive his letter on about 9th/10th September, assuming Anita managed to post it the next day.

Imagine the joy and love in Ignacio's heart as he opens that letter on September 10th.

Just one more day and he and his beloved will be reunited.

September 11th and the final chapter of their courtship will begin.

Are you still there? Please, please read on.

Remember, “patience”, and all will be revealed, though maybe not as you expect it.

Chapter 5

Yet more details!

So week three and here we are reunited to study the next part of this beautiful text. Perhaps you have been rereading the complete letter in the interim.

“My dearest sweetheart Ignacio”.

There is no doubt about this line being an introduction to the whole thrust of this letter: LOVE!

Anita is so in love she does not stick with the simple greeting, “dear”, the more formal, “Ignacio”, or dare we say the “super spiritual”, “My dear chosen brother (betrothed one) Ignacio.

Of course psychologists and philologists could do to death the words ‘dearest’ and ‘sweetheart’, but to us, the uninitiated, we simply see these words brimming with what evidently is in her heart, and no doubt understood and reciprocated by Ignacio.

Finally in this section we have Ignacio’s name.

This is **extremely** interesting for there is a high chance that Ignacio is of Hispanic origin.

That being the case, maybe we are seeing a mixed- race relationship, a couple who have gone beyond any of the old struggles and are making their mark of freedom in Christ. Of course Anita too may also be of Hispanic origin, though interestingly she writes in English.

Is she second generation Hispanic and likewise Ignacio?

Indeed there is a possibility that neither are of Hispanic origin and we could be looking at two white, black, even Eastern

people. We may never know but it is intriguing is it not?

I can hear you!

What is going on here? What on earth is this writer trying to say?

You are probably confused by this narrative and at worst wondering why you even spent time, let alone money, on this book!

Let's see if I can help:

Chapter 6

The letter

- 1) 131 Paul St.
Athens
Greece
- 2) September 1st 2001
- 3) My dearest sweetheart Ignacio,
- 4) How I long to see you my beloved and soon we shall be reunited!
- 5) I am so excited that within three months we shall be husband and wife.
- 6) Why should I, little old me, merit such a wonderful man as you? I know how much you love me and I trust I will live up to all your expectations.
- 7) Just a few days and we shall see each other again,
- 8) never to be parted.
- 9) As you know, I hope to transfer immediately I arrive in Boston , get American Airlines , flight 11, and so see you later that day at LAX.
- 10) I understand completely if you cannot be there to meet me – your boss can be quite a pain!
- 11) However I know that my dear Mom and Dad will be there, as always, to greet their only daughter. How happy they are, as the saying at the wedding reception goes, “not to be losing a daughter but gaining a son”.

- 12) They too love you sooooo much !
- 13) I know where our love originates
- 14) and I try to share it with all I meet here. Sometimes it is easier to share with unbelievers!
- 15) However I have been so blessed to be with this small group of locals
- 16) who meet in one of the brothers' large apartment.
- 17) Like us all, they have their idiosyncrasies
- 18) but as yet we have had no problems with meat offered to idols!
- 19) I shall truly miss their love and fellowship.
- 20) It is so hot here that even L.A. will seem cool by comparison.
- 21) Someday I must bring you here to meet the saints, and to see a few of the sights.
- 22) I'm afraid the night has really drawn in and I am up early tomorrow to help Rosa with her children.
- 23) This means I have to leave you – at least on this page, but my heart is forever with you.
- 24) There is not enough paper for all the hugs and kisses
- 25) so just let this one big kiss with my lips seal this letter to you my darling.
- 26) See you on the 11th – pray I make that connection in Boston. Miss you sooooo much.
- 27) Your precious, Anita.

28) P.S. Did I say I LOVE YOU!

Does that help?

Now do you understand? Grouping of words (verses?), have really helped us to study and understand this love letter.

Thus we can take verse 20) and with a good dash of: head knowledge, unbridled emotion, verbosity, and even pride maybe, have a wonderful study and discussion.

With the help of God this study of : “It is so hot here that even L.A. will seem cool by comparison”, will last at least 20 minutes, hopefully half an hour, then we can enjoy a cup of tea and biscuits together.

Chapter 7

Versification

Unfortunately we can probably see that in fact our study of a verse, or a group of verses, have not especially helped us understand our love letter.

Indeed chapters 3, 4, 5, have more likely DESTROYED our appreciation of that beautiful creation.

What leapt off the page as you first experienced that letter from Anita?

LOVE

Did you also feel emotion, empathy, concern, excitement?

Then we took the letter, section by little section, to “study” what was there, and rapidly all of our initial joyful observations were dissipated.

Of course you may not be like me. Maybe you really loved chapters 3, 4, and 5!

Answer me this though: Every time you receive a letter, or more likely an e-mail, how do you read it? I guarantee that you first get an overall picture, (then maybe bin it, as occurs with increased frequency these days!). You may re-read to check points or further understand the overall import, but I seriously doubt you study it little by little, ad infinitum, on your own or with friends.

Nor do you interpret words or phrases to see have you missed something, or more likely to show you are able to add a titbit from your wealth of knowledge to prove YOU are able to enhance anything presented to you!

Certainly there are occasions when you may draw attention to a whole letter, or a small part thereof, for the benefit of your friends or co-workers. The norm, however, is not what we did with, nor how we reacted to, the initial love letter and the subsequent chapters.

Now do you see where this is leading?

You are dealing with a heretic who wishes to remove verses from scripture.

No! But be ready, and hopefully willing, to be challenged, and do not lose sight of what first blessed you; our Cambodian brethren and our “love letter”.

By the way, if you are a brother or sister who simply cannot get enough of verse based Bible study and exposition such as we experienced in the previous chapters, perhaps you should stop reading now.

Chapter 8

Let's see

Are you now expecting, dear reader, a diatribe against Bible verses, or expositors, even scripture itself?

I hope to disappoint you. Rather we will look for a few facts, traditions, challenges. No doubt some will take offence. Such is life, but thankfully God's grace is there, more encompassing than we can ever know. Disagreement is part of church history, but so, thank God, is regular renaissance of revelation.

Let us use stories and histories to see can we advance our understanding of the Bible:

I will tell you my story- and throw in a few observations!

You also have a story- perhaps similar.

The Jews, early Christians, even the earthly powers at those times, have histories, stories, preserved in various ways in the pages of scripture.

We will understand that God ensured that for His chosen people relevant writing was preserved in the Jewish canon, and for His Church, in that "Old" and the New Testament.

Indeed it may dawn on us that these preserved texts were often for corporate enlightenment, lifestyle, and judgement. This makes it a lot safer for the believers, because it is not one man interpreting, stringing his chosen topics together, and then imposing these ideas. God somehow seems to think there is "safety" in numbers - tribes, peoples, local churches. Ever wondered where much heresy originates?!

First context therefore; my story.

Unfortunately, should you choose to continue with this book, you will have to suffer my reminiscences.

Sadly too, it is unlikely that I will hear your story. I have a funny feeling that you will nevertheless acknowledge many similarities, and the same questions and challenges.

Chapter 9

The Author's Story

Many moons ago, I had the joy of coming to know my Lord Jesus. I do not remember the evangelist at the time quoting from the Bible, but I certainly got the message of the love of God and my own total inadequacy.

As a result I had no reason to equate this salvation with the Bible.

Happily some wise “brothers and sisters” (I now know what these words mean!), invited me to a “Bible study”- (“What’s that?!”), to be held the following week. Certainly I needed friends and I realised I had to obtain a Bible. My very kind landlady lent me a huge tome – a New English Bible.

This I discovered was to be the only N.E.B. at the Bible study.

My very studious brothers and sisters often asked what way such and such a verse was presented in the N.E.B. as we ploughed (plodded?) our way through 2 Corinthians. A good book for a new Christian? I don’t know, but God’s grace is wonderful, and gradually through these friends and others, lots more, probably more relevant, scriptures were opened to me.

Over the next few years various levels of Bible knowledge accrued – whether through the typical, approximately one hour long, studies- coffee and biscuits following!-, or through church services or conferences, where a verse or verses were expounded, half an hour being the average though this time only involving one voice!

One also learnt that the “useful” division of scripture into

verses allowed you to debate, or formulate dubious, even erroneous ideas, or, God forbid, doctrines .

If you had an evangelistic bent- which surprisingly most were encouraged or assumed to have, despite the fact that is not a particularly correct interpretation of scripture (or dare we say of tradition!)- then most especially the knowledge of scripture, above all one-off and often isolated verses, was a great way of sharing with (haranguing?) the unsaved.

You know the picture:

“You should repent and be saved”

“Why?”

“Because it says so in the Bible, Paul’s letter to , chapter X, verse Y”

“What’s this ‘Bible’ then? - Who’s Paul? Are you really telling me I need to know eternal salvation because of a line in a book?”

Happily of course God’s grace and the Holy Spirit can even have a say in such a limited way of evangelisation. Hopefully the conversation may have continued with something like:

“Well no! Not a line in a book, rather because God loves you; He sent His son Jesus Christ.....;Here, let me tell you all about this person Jesus....”

Perhaps at some point this Jesus and all His plan could be intimated on the grand scale within the Bible, and maybe even one or two relevant verses quoted.

The assumption that a phrase, designated as a verse, is going to cut ice with Mr. or Miss individual heathen is a very cheap gospel!

For those of you jumping up and down quoting Peter on the day of Pentecost as an example, remember that when he quoted from the prophet Joel, he did not, (could not!), cite chapter and verse, and more importantly he was talking to a crowd 99% familiar with this and other scripture.

“We’ve sussed you brother”, I hear you say. “You do not believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible word of God.”

Sorry but I do. In fact as a dear brother once said, I even believe it when it says on the first page: “Covered in genuine Moroccan leather”, even if the leather comes from Algeria!

The fact God ensured through the generations that we should have in written form exactly what He desired us to have, is a miracle. Unfortunately our dealings with, and interpretation of, these writings has often fallen short of the mark. That does not make God or the Bible wrong.

Thank God that He preserved, through His son and by the Holy Spirit, written records for all generations. His heavenly wisdom chose men as writers and interpreters. The blood of martyrs, our brothers and sisters, ensured the record would not be forgotten.

For now, to misquote the French, “ Revenons à nos versets”.

Chapter 10

Bible (verse?) study

So back with our verses.

That for a large part is what we are dealing with here. Add in chapters and a few other attendant features like sermons, pastors and bible study leaders, and you have, at times, a debilitating mix.

Having read my story, and, I do regret, having to take your story as individually unknown, but a probable given, let us look at one of the “histories”.

The history of “bible study” stretches back to the 2nd – 3rd centuries. For many, as theology developed it became, sadly, a reason to consolidate doctrine, particularly “our”, or even worse, “my”, doctrine.

Bible study as we tend to know it at the start of the 21st century mainly finds its roots in the last 200 years as more people became literate and home study groups proliferated. By then the system of verses and chapters was entrenched, causing us to lose some of God’s original intentions. Bible study became the study of chapter and verse.

Do you know that at the time of the writing of the New Testament, principally in Greek, with some Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic influences, there was no separation of words or lines?

Can you imagine Philemon receiving a letter to the Colossian church and having to decide when to pause, or to make those listening know that these words were a question or

an exclamation. No punctuation, no separation! Somehow scholars of those days had their brains wired to interpret without the benefit of commas, full stops or paragraphs.

One can understand how modern translators can face some difficulties. You probably know the argument about where the comma should fall when Jesus is addressing the thief on the cross:

“Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise”,
or: “Assuredly I say to you today, you will be with Me in paradise”.

Add to this the fact that for centuries after the life of Jesus the concept of the written word did not exist for the vast majority. It was so rare to see, even hear, the written word. How vital it was that those who were able to read, read correctly to the assemblies. Not only correctly, but one hopes they also transmitted some of the emotion, admonition, encouragement that the writer intended.

As Christians we are so bombarded by the written word these days that we can scarcely comprehend how different it was for those of the 1st century, especially those of the churches.

From the 1200s on, men, in their wisdom, began to add chapters and verses. By c.1440 the Jewish Bible had numbered verses and by 1555 the first whole Bible with chapter and verse was published.

There are obviously positive features to such divisions. At the time of these additions it was felt scholars could more easily find passages they were looking for.

Funny how the church, including our own Lord Jesus, had managed to find passages up until then! Maybe our Lord would have appreciated chapter and verse when He took the

scroll in the synagogue and read the prophecy concerning Himself.

Did I hear you say: “Luddite”?

No dear friend, I can see some purpose in our system of verses but have we lost more than we gained by these additions?

“So you would like to remove verses and chapters from the Bible?”

Well it would be interesting to read many passages uninterrupted. Add to that the fact that many verses fall in the middle of paragraphs, even in the middle of sentences,(you should see how Microsoft Word coped with the “versification” of our “love letter”!), and one would have to wonder why certain verses are so designated.

In addition, it has to be admitted that by the use of verses much of what passes for Bible study has destroyed the original import of whole passages and messages.

We have not been adverse to “adding” to scripture. We all have Bibles with these little numbers all over, or a title to one particular epistle – Ephesians- which is clearly an addition. For many of us our interpretations of text are additions.

Many modern European language groups, both non-Christian and Christian alike, laud the standard of literature of their Bible, (particularly old, “original” versions!), or extol the poetry of the Old Testament. The “modern” translations of ancient literature do not precede the original. Nor was the Hebrew understanding and use of poetry anything like the European notion. How “shocked” we would be, if one day we were ever able to understand, enjoy, be carried into

previously unknown raptures by, a rediscovered meaning and appreciation of ancient Hebrew poetry, and not our limited interpretation thereof.

Unfortunately to some, additions are as “inspired” as the Canon itself. Often these are people who believe the Bible – or portions thereof- can somehow magically, of itself, draw people to Christ.

You don’t know anyone like this? – Be very thankful! Usually they think “their” version, e.g. KJV is THE Bible and that God wrote it thus. Removal of verses would be tantamount to the addition and subtraction referred to in the last verses of Revelation.

Of course it is so suitable to their way of thinking and interpretation that these verses do not just appear at the end of Revelation, but at the end of: “THE Book”.

For those of us who are more heretical, (my tongue is bulging my cheek!), removal of items that were never there in the first place may have surprising consequences.

Will all of Christendom ever live to see a readily available Bible without verses and chapters? [**STOP PRESS**, see the Good News Addendum]. Probably not, but already modern languages have provided suitable and fairly sensible divisions, like sentences and paragraphs. The Psalms, and other poetic literature, are also divided to varying degrees. Verses, (but less of them), would probably enhance the book of Proverbs.

Even if Isaiah was written by more than one author, do we have the right to divide it any way beyond paragraph, sentence, or topic? Like so much of what Jesus accepted in simplicity, we, modern man, with our theology and biblical criticism, tend to want to investigate, explain, or enhance.

Finally in this area of verse “history” it is worth noting that the most popular use of versification is by the governments of this world and the legal systems that uphold them!

In their case though, because man never has the perfect solution, and can never attain to the truth, they can have amendments and subsections in an attempt to cover all the bases. Addition and subtraction anyone?!

The other group who have attempted a similar style is the business world.

Ever felt confused by “bullet points”- a late 20th century invention, or “End User Agreements”!

----- Here’s a thought: Who are these latter “verses” helping?

And, while we are thinking of secular versification, it might be worth remembering, you student of scripture and user of verses, how many of your school texts had anything approaching little numbers beside the narratives of your school history, geography, English, French, Russian books. For the average student, even science or mathematics texts are narrative or explanatory without versification such as we find in our Bibles.

Obviously, in the case of certain maths or science features, there are numbered divisions as one is taken from point to point, or Shakespeare needed Act, Scene and character division, but these are all inherent to such topics, unlike the verse numbers we added to scripture.

Did, or does, anyone really think versification would aid our

study of most school subjects or improve text book sales?! Suggest it to a school publishing company and check their reaction! There is something in the human psyche that likes, in general, straight narration and presentation. That is why novels or factual documentaries, for example, are presented for the most part, in the form we generally accept.

In fact it is interesting to note that for certain effect, a few “modernist” writers have even attempted works with no punctuation, or capital letters, or chapter division- such as their antecedents over 2,000 years ago.

Chapter 11

Another “History” - The verse, the text, the sermon.

Ever noticed that in many Bible study groups there is a leader?

Maybe he or she is not named as such, but for one or several reasons that person generally exists. Naively you may have thought that we all attend a group on an equal basis, but history has conspired that this is not normally the case.

No one is particularly to blame for this situation; its roots probably lie back as far as the early Christian period, and essentially as far back as the fall of man.

It appears though that versification has helped this sad state of affairs on its way.

Back in the 4th century the church of Jesus Christ received a blow from which it has never recovered. Indeed latent signs of this problem were always there- man seems to love the sound of his own voice, (or if not, that of someone else!)

Pre-Christian Greek philosophy took up residence in the Church and rhetoric and oratory, -those topics beloved of seminaries-, finally became the immutable approach to sharing truth and doctrine. These topics, along with others, could be taught and then disseminated by one person, - no longer the need for all member participation that the Church had enjoyed in the first three centuries.¹

¹ Many cite 1 Corinthians as an example of the chaos that can reign if brothers and sisters participate in meetings with no obvious leadership present- whether in a meeting or in daily life. In fact Paul is stating the complete opposite, and assumes that all member participation and no ‘clergy’ (a word Paul would not have known!), is what is normal for the churches of Jesus Christ.

With a few notable exceptions the “Dark Ages” for the church at large had begun by 400 A.D.

Gradually the very Canon itself became simply an item for study and scholarship (not always a bad thing, it must be admitted). The scriptures though were lost to the masses, other than via weekly sermons which over the years lost the life and gave the law, much of which was man-made. Even a Bible reading would be in Latin- not the language of the average European.²

By God’s grace the European scriptures were gradually returned to His people, in languages they could understand, from the late 1300s on.

Unfortunately this was around the very time that numbering of phrases began, and it appears that this very action of versification and chapter division only consolidated the one man, pastor, minister expression of revealed truth.

It also made it easier for any one individual or small group to verse hop around the Bible, especially the New Testament, in order to prove their doctrine – (Well they are “inspired” words / verses aren’t they?!). This, despite the fact there was often no understanding of what each whole book of the Bible meant or purposed, nor its relation to all the other books. You remember our friends who quote the end of Revelation as if it was the end of the whole Bible book itself?!

Fast forward to the 1800s until the present day and we have our Bible Study groups.

Some actually meet in homes; at least that is closer to the Apostolic churches. Even these invariably end up, unwittingly

² To this very day there are religious groups, (among the Amish for example), who refuse to let their people read, or understand, modern versions of scripture. Only “schooled” leaders can intone from an unintelligible text, and that only on a Sunday morning!

maybe, with one strong leader.

In some cases the leader may already be an actual church leader, or their appointee.

Often it is down to their agreement as to what should be studied.

Here are some examples of “Bible Studies”, and worse still, “verse studies”, that pastors have inflicted upon their congregations:

1) “Okay”, (Study leader speaking- well someone has to take control and guide, certainly if you step outside of the concepts of church in century one!)

“Okay. So that was good, and those were lovely biscuits, Mary.

Now for next week..... Hmm. Let’s see. We’ll take the next five verses....No, make that the next three (all the while glancing down at his Bible). Actually, do you know what? Let’s do verses 1-7, they look good..... No, come to think of it let’s stick with 1-4, they seem to make up a unit”

Great preparation there brother! At least the scriptures are inspired!

2) “Glad to see you all here tonight for your group Bible study.

I shall endeavour over the next 32 weeks to give you a deep insight into the book of Romans.

That’s right John, you’ve got it- half a chapter each week, and you can all read it beforehand so, as I expound, I don’t lose you along the way.”

What freedom here brother, and wonderful isolation of

verses- I'm sure that is what brother Paul intended when he wrote to the church in Rome! (My cheek is bulging again, in case you are wondering!)

3) "How many years have I been with you, my dear flock?"

"Too many", did I hear you mutter Patrick?

Well you'll be pleased to hear, following our reading from the book of Philemon this morning – beautifully read Jacinta though I say it myself- that today we embark on the first of my twenty-five sermons on this book. Twenty-five glorious weeks on these twenty-five inspiring verses."

(I truly heard one pastor proclaiming, (more like "warning", I think) that he would spend the next three years going through one of Paul's letters.)

I do understand that there are some people who love this approach- not least those who see themselves as leaders, or future (they hope!) leaders.

But does the ordinary believer really "enjoy" this? Do we even remember what the text was, let alone the "message"?

Maybe as a person you enjoy hardship; you revel in the tight suit, the rush to Sunday church, the hard seat, the half an hour sermon (which you quickly forget), and the rush home before the dinner burns.

If that is you, then verses have helped along that way.

Perhaps you are quite intellectual, and "study" of verses and a long exposition of one or more of them, suits you. How often have we heard the sermon giver complimented by Christian and non-Christian alike: "Good sermon today pastor"?

Unfortunately in weeks to come how many of a congregation can remember the sermon, let alone the text, and how many can honestly attest to a changed life because of it?

Don't blame your leader though!

The Church today has come to expect this. Seminaries, even Bible schools, work on the theory of: text (one or a few verses), probably from a reading given earlier in a church service, followed by a sermon finding its base in Greek philosophy and rhetoric.

This sermon may pull from other parts of scripture (related or unrelated!), or from life in general. It may involve encouragement, admonition, compassion, or other.

It will probably last 20 minutes to half an hour, (if we're lucky!), and 99% of the time will only involve one voice.

Seminaries give us what they feel is a correct approach, (based mainly on historical tradition), and we accept it. Somewhere along the line verses have had a role to play in this misconception.

I have a funny feeling those precious brothers and sisters of century one would stand agog at such an approach.

"Yes, but Jesus took a text" (Luke 4- See dear reader, I am not averse to division!)

Indeed He did, and managed it without verses and chapters!

Not only that, but initially His "sermon" was shorter than the text! In fact when He had to explain it for the murmurers He only took approximately 30 seconds! That, dear orator, is divine inspiration and revelation expressed with heavenly authority, a word sharper than any two edged sword, and it certainly divided between soul and spirit.

In fact if we take the majority of the thirteen plus sections of the New Testament that bear any resemblance to “sermons”, with or without text references from the Old Testament, it is notable how short most of them are.

Many are presentations of the gospel- in Peter’s case interspersed with Old Testament references because his hearers would generally have been familiar with those scriptures. Likewise Stephen’s somewhat longer presentation of His wonderful Lord.

Paul too, particularly if sharing with Jews, quoted,(not chapter and verse!), from scripture, but even this amazingly erudite brother could preach short “sermons”. Of course there are at least two occasions when he went on and on- once he even bored a young man to death! However scrutiny of these occasions suggest they were far more than what pass for the “text/ sermon/ Greek philosophy based efforts” of post 300 A.D. orators. Indeed one could say he was “sharing”- as he does in much of his epistolary output.

This sharing based on a revelation of Jesus Christ and His Church may have references to Old Testament text, but only because Paul saw how all that witness pointed to Christ, and not for him to use some random “verse” to prove a spurious doctrine.

Yes, that last statement could be talking about an element of your “belief”! Sorry about that, but take a look at church history!

Leaving aside the parables of Jesus, some of which do include references to scripture, one so called “sermon” we have of Our Lord, again interspersed with some Old Testament references, is the “Sermon” on the mount.

If we can assume it was delivered in one period of time then

even this monument of Christian sermonizing only lasts something over fifteen minutes. Contrast that to the minister who takes just one verse from that sermon and manages to talk on it for half an hour.

Of course the Holy Spirit does wish to enlarge us in every possible way, but do we ever wonder why those “orators” of the pages of the New Testament were often so succinct- a diametrically opposed attitude to the text/sermon approach we are battered with these days?

Finally let us join a devoted young pastor on a Saturday night in his home.

Like so many of his co-workers he has to “produce” the reading, text (one verse usually), and sermon for the morrow. Perhaps he has prayed long and hard over this, certainly he has agonised and hopefully trusted for Holy Spirit inspiration.

His eyes alight on a verse in Acts and that becomes his text. Around it are other verses suitable for the full Bible reading- itself usually placed between hymns 2 and 3- Where did 1st century church spontaneity go?

In my Bible this verse starts mid sentence (!??): “was returning”, followed by a full stop, followed by “And”, then “ sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet”.

Fabulous; our brother has his text.

He can now expound about the benefits of “chariot travel”; how there is a similarity to that of our modern car; far more sensible than walking and obviously it allowed Philip to spot the Ethiopian more easily.

Also the eunuch was “sitting”, allowing him to conserve energy

so his mind would be more receptive to Philip's message.

Now let's go to the concordance so we can dazzle our congregation (audience?!) with every verse reference to "chariots" in the Bible. Well they expect no less- is that not what they pay him for?

"Great things concordances". Yes they are, but like verses and chapters should be used wisely and with caution.

Poor pastor. He thinks the word "chariot", (indeed the whole out of context verse), is "inspired", and somehow this is "magically" going to bless his audience. He does not see (or care?) that if the Ethiopian had been walking, riding, or lying on the ground, THIS was his appointment with his destiny.

What's that I hear? The Inquisition at my door: "You want to remove the word "chariot" (even the whole verse!?) from Acts, chapter 8.

Blasphemy!"

Of course not; this is just another extreme tongue- in- cheek example. We have NEVER come across such an approach to scripture verses like that of our dear young pastor, have we?!

Chapter 12

“But I love verses”

Dear brother or sister you are to be commended for reading thus far.

It is likely that by now you have been either seriously challenged, deeply offended, or gently inquisitive.

Certainly those have been my reactions to the many curve balls out of left field in my Christian life.

How did I feel when first confronted about the use of verses to delineate scripture?

Like many, I thought, “Well what about those special verses that mean so much to me or others. They encourage, soothe, reveal”. They may do, and thank God for that, but it is not the verse, it is the author, the instigator, the Lord Jesus Himself.

Verses in themselves are not some all encompassing band-aids.

You are aware no doubt of those one-day calendars with a different tear-off verse each day. Or, you have seen a study booklet that takes you through a verse a day to encourage and uplift you.

Apart from the fact that we usually forget most verses very quickly, if they are isolated from Christ they are of no more spiritual value than a Buddhist, Muslim, or secular poetry, calendar.

On most occasions could we determine to eschew the individual verse in favour of a longer passage, even a whole book of the Bible, to get the full story, the real reason for its

being written?

Give it a try. It can be difficult to read, non-stop, 1st Timothy for example, when there are verse and chapter divisions, but remember how it was written- no gaps at all- and to whom, by whom, and for what reasons. Not only will those reasons begin to jump out, but also something of the nature and love of the writer and recipient, to say nothing of God's nature and love.

As you read the letter to the church in Philippi, it may dawn on you that this love letter is to your brothers and sisters. It talks of one man's personal relationship to Christ, encouragement and admonition to a group of individuals to continue in their Lord, and in all this it allows the love of God to leap off the page, especially if you realise the Philippians were fallen humans like ourselves.

Perhaps it would be very encouraging, and at least extremely lifelike, even 2,000 years on, for one person to read such a letter to their house group. Can you imagine the joy those first believers had?

"A letter – a real letter- (rarer than a computer in Antarctica) written to us! Read it quickly Lydia..... Poor Paul, what suffering..... Praise the Lord.... Thank God..... What does he mean criticising me so?.....Ah! now I see. Hey Lydia, that was beautiful; could we read it again?..... What was that news about brother Epaphroditus?..... Do you know what? I'm sure our brothers and sisters in Thessalonica and Berea would love to hear this."

One dear sister among those believers might ask: "What was that bit you read about : "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain"? She certainly would not have asked for chapter 1, verse 21- (Sorry about that; quoting verses again!:) Her comprehension

of the idea of writing and reading would have been extremely limited, and the church would have been so grateful that God had given them some who could interpret these symbols, and help them to enjoy whole sections of the letter over coming months.

You do not need chapters and verses to get a different (more real) view of so much of scripture.

Epistles were often written over a few days because of the need to have an amanuensis and daylight, and the desire of the likes of Paul to get his message across.³ They were however a complete entity and a joy to receive.

The Gospels, as we have them, are also complete entities. They were written as histories, memories of Jesus Christ. If you read one as a whole – you may need a bit of time -, it may not matter from whence the writer got his material, but you have his true account, as he sees it, of the most wonderful person the world will ever know.

Old Testament histories and stories can be taken as a whole. Already some books cover just one person, one story, e.g. Jonah, but how lovely to read the story of Joseph as one complete narration, despite the fact it spans 15 or more chapters. We can receive a totally different perspective of God and man reading a story thus, and you do not need versification as an aid. Do you remember your childhood books with the stories of Moses or Noah? No verses there, though they were not necessarily “complete” histories.

³ Ever wondered why Paul says “finally” (as to the rest), twice, well before the end of the letter to the Philippians? Maybe it is a good example of the human face of the writer whose epistles we have canonised.

Perhaps as you read, particularly the New Testament epistles, you will realise that they were not written to you.

“Here we go again; more blasphemy!”

Well in the first place, when Paul wrote at least a second time to Timothy, he was not writing to you. He was writing to his younger protégé. Paul wrote that: “the Holy Scriptures... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (NKJV). He was unaware that that letter itself would become part of Holy Scripture.

Likewise of the at least three letters to the Corinthians, God ensured that two found their way into the canon, but initially they were written to an actual first century church. Not everything in those epistles is related to you, or indeed your church. Isolating “verses” is not therefore a good way, in itself, of formulating doctrine for the 21st century. See the whole first; appreciate it for showing the love and grace of God, and the revelation of first century church life among a group of flawed believers. Maybe then those so vital verses for your pet doctrine will have less importance.

We know some “doctrines” appear in letters because Paul, for example, had not had time to explain everything, or because certain situations had not arisen, during his visit. Or he may never have visited a place, Colossae for example.

If Paul and other planters had simply wanted to give a series of doctrines to live by, and a Holy Spirit to enable people, they would have preached and written of them.

LAWS!

Where would Christ and His love for His Church have appeared on the pages of those original scrolls made up of “dos and don’ts”?

See the “whole” and allow the Holy Spirit to illumine the necessary for you and your church. E.g. Do I really thank God for those Romans – living brothers and sisters – who were martyred for my faith? Or do I prefer, as so many, to find some doctrine there, possibly only pertinent to 1st century Rome, but which I try to implant into my life?!

One brother of the early 16th century, Kaspar von Schwenckfeld of Silesia was gloriously converted and very involved with the people of God in Europe.

‘The study of the scriptures became his great delight. He reckoned that if he read four chapters a day he would read the Bible through once a year, and at first made this a rule, though afterwards he left it to the Holy Spirit to direct his reading and did not bind himself to a certain number of chapters daily. “Christ”, he said, is the “summary of the whole Bible”, and “the principal object of the whole of Holy Scripture is that we may fully know the Lord Jesus Christ.” Faith in the accuracy and inspiration of the whole Bible was to him not holding onto an old and doubtful dogma, but a new discovery of unlimited possibilities; not ancient superstition but modern progress’ (E.H. Broadbent, “The Pilgrim Church”)

Broadbent continues: “As a “safe rule” for the expositor, he (Schwenckfeld) says, “where disputed passages occur, the whole context must be taken into account.”

To coin a phrase- “Does Jesus Christ leap off the page” as you read, or are you often stultified by, amongst other influences, the little numbers adorning the writing?

Do you remember the joyful reaction of Israel Narvaez of “The Cross and the Switchblade” when he discovered his name written all over the Bible?!

Imagine the joy (or consternation!) for some saints to see their name in a letter from Paul. Imagine the joy of the church knowing the one who loved them enough to risk his life bringing the gospel, had not forgotten them.

You, precious believer, can participate in that. You are inextricably linked to every righteous one in the pages of Holy Writ. They experienced the same God, the same Son and Holy Spirit as you.

A bit bigger than that individual consoling, (or even than that individual boring or confusing), verse!

One final item on that “individual” verse:

Were you like me as a young Christian? With your Bible you always had a pen or pencil, even a ruler. Perhaps you had several colours of pen.

If you are an older Christian and you still have those items then you are probably slightly unusual.

Check the Bible of the leader who recommends you to underline this or that very important verse. If his Bible is like yours, then after a while he probably cannot see the verse for the underlining! I somehow think you will find yours is the more underlined Bible.

I have seen some Bibles so underlined they would need verses to separate the underlining!

I have a sneaking suspicion that some poor unfortunates even think that in heaven they will only communicate with Bible verses, (listen to their prayer life on earth!), so ingrained is the tradition.

Yes, many individual verses have a great deal to impart, but let us not lose sight of the whole.

Chapter 13

Helps (and hindrances?)

So what can we do about the situation in which most of the Christian world finds itself?

Well for some of you, now is the moment to skip this chapter. Like the seed that falls on all sorts of ground, you may fit into some awkward category.

Category one is the Bible “student” – and that word is used very liberally here – who regularly, (and we have all done this on at least one occasion), opens their Bible willy nilly, closes their eyes and wherever their finger falls on the page, that is the word of God speaking to them today.

If you are one of these who totally misunderstands words like “guidance” and “inspiration”, you may as well ask your neighbour to make a paper dart of yesterday’s calendar verse. Then get them to try to fire it over into your garden, and by God’s grace, once a week it might land near enough for you to salvage it and read.

This is the lowest of low-fat milk and meat is not your diet!

The second category is a person who daily “studies/reads”, perhaps belongs to a Bible study group, or who actually strains each week to pay huge attention to the readings and sermons in their church. Their quota of the Bible per week is determined by a number of verses or chapters, even if those verses do not represent any particular whole.

Usually there is an admirable enough desire to see “what God is saying to me”, and because of such ritual, one has to assume that somewhere in “today’s” study there must be a word or direction from God. Never mind that these verses may have no relevance to you, 21st century Christian, on that given day.

A sub-section of this category is the one, (and again we have all been there, you hypocrite with the plank in your eye!), where because of our form of study we are looking for that inspirational, or encouraging, or devotional verse. (We cannot usually imagine it could just be a word or sentence because “verse” is so ingrained in our understanding of Bible study.)

Not only have we become somewhat selfish in our quest for such verses, misunderstanding the very idea of the inspiration of the scriptures, but all we do is encourage the spawning of books or booklets made up of “Inspirational Verses”, or “Daily Verses to Encourage You”. These quickly become milk because we are so narrowly focused. The 90% + remainder of scripture, (the solid food), is lost to us.

In one precious meeting I used to attend, the ladies were “permitted” to choose hymns or choruses, as the Spirit lead them. One dear sister always chose the same chorus which we all sang with gusto, and not some little joy, it must be said. However there were hundreds more songs in the book, and what life she/we must have been missing. Thus it can be with a narrowed view of scripture, often wrought by the verse system.

The ultimate sadness for category two people is that verses can often become psychological crutches or “mantras”. We know from whence the word “mantra” comes; religions diametrically opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Say a verse enough to ourselves and it, (of itself!), “miraculously”,

gives us strength, hope, love or whatever your perceived need at the time.

It is Jesus Christ you need, not a repetition of words off a page!

(You really should have skipped this chapter!)

Category three – the really “spiritual” people; those who over the years are “well read”; maybe they devour scripture, (often formulating many “doctrines”). This must be “solid food/meat”!

Unfortunately, (I guess you knew that word was coming!), context has very little to do with their abundant knowledge of the verses and chapters on the page. If it did, they would surely, at the most very basic level, have wondered why some verses begin mid-sentence. Also, the fact that some of the Bible books are extremely specific, e.g. written to one person living 2,000 years ago, or the history/story of a given point 3,000+ years ago, or a prophecy already past, does not seem to register as they seek to see what God is saying today.

One of the greatest curses of the modern English language is irrelevant for many Bible expositors, viz. the lack of distinction of the singular and plural “you”. Even at the time of the publication of the King James version, “thou” and “ye” were assimilating into “you”. Hence those “wonderful” preachers who encourage young, innocent Christians to fight the good fight and “put on the whole armour of God”, totally unconcerned that, (as with young David of old), it would be too cumbersome and, dare we say, suffocating!

The exhortation is plural, to a church, but, “let’s plow on regardless, hey”.

“It’s written, it’s inspired, it’s a great verse; so what about our interpretation!?”

So pervasive is the dumbing down of the singular and plural “you”, that even in European languages where there is a clear distinction, most Bible teachers of whatever level, bishop to bible study leader, in Europe, probably worldwide, seem to accept the English status quo, and deny their own linguistic, and more biblically correct, interpretation.

We reach limits of understanding so quickly.

Where would the depths of the riches in Christ Jesus be if we simply took His recorded words and actions in the gospels and Acts? Even with what we have, we miss the variety that He continually exposed. Look how He rarely ever dealt with any two people in the same way – all sinners requiring Him, but only to one did He use the words “born again/from above”! Yet we quote this verse ad nauseam so that it has become a phrase of opprobrium for the world.

Locking into verses however, often allows us to formulate the “safety” of our own ideas and doctrines, and to miss the big picture.

Again a sub-category in this group three are those faithful ones, often of many years standing, who for some reason never realised there were “contexts”. I have heard of Christians who think some Romans wrote “Romans” or Galatians wrote “Galatians”. I jest not!

Recently one old brother commented how amazing it was that Paul could travel so far in those days. His reference was to the Philippines! (Actually even a journey to Philippi was hazardous.)

These may be extreme examples, but they serve to show the

paucity of understanding of context, notwithstanding verses and chapters.

Do we really appreciate that Paul was actually writing a letter of love, encouragement, instruction to a dear son/brother of his, 2,000 years ago? Not that he was writing a letter as if foreseeing little old you 2,000 years on in need of some doctrine. Young, (actually older than the average life span of those days!), Timothy received a personal letter. It may have addressed some church issues relevant to the particular situation pertaining then, but verses have encouraged us to formulate some doctrines that were never intended.

This may sound extreme but “doctrine” at the time of the New Testament was not a matter of extracted verses, but the actual walk of the saints. Jesus trusted his disciples, and the Holy Spirit was given to correct and lead into all truth. Hence the early Church, in Jerusalem, learnt how to walk (in the Spirit) from the teaching of those early disciples, who had learned it from the Master, and Holy Spirit guidance. Obviously some of the “teaching” and background came from knowledge of the scriptures/ the “old testament”, but note how Jesus especially “taught”, and the disciples, “learned”, over the three years. That is a glorious, huge revelation in itself!

Likewise the next generation of church planters. Even “mother church” in Jerusalem found little to “correct” among the Gentile churches when they sent the letter via Antioch to Galatia. There seemed to be an unspoken and unwritten assumption in New Testament times, that this “new religion” did not need a written set of laws/ doctrine.

Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, who knew the “value” of the written law, assumed the indwelling Holy Spirit could lead into all truth, and talked of a walk according to the Spirit, because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us

free from the law (of sin and death).

“Doctrine” was the “walk”. If these people “walked the walk”, then they could “talk the talk”. Verbal history and explanation, not written down specifically, was the way 2,000 years ago (remember most could not read or write). This does not deny the usefulness of what we call the Old Testament to those who **were** the NEW testament!

Where Paul did not have time with the Thessalonians, for example, to condense the whole of the eternal plan during his short stay with them, then the Holy Spirit, through report and at times common sense, brought about a letter for help and correction. If you do not, (indeed you should not!) face similar issues, then those verses of correction have nothing to say to you personally.

Yet we search in vain for what God is saying “to us”.

In fact Paul was more concerned with his flock being imitators of him as he was of Christ, and epistles written on one’s heart, not written with ink.

Compare the letter to Titus, for example to our “love letter”.

In our love letter we appreciated love, sadness, irony. Yet we are totally aware that the letter was not written to us. It had a completeness in itself.

We may have witnessed to some of the love points. Maybe one of you would have wished to have a similar lover; another of you may have, or have had, a similar lover; another may have experienced similar travel or geography.

These things are brought to mind, but we would be foolish to impose our own similar experiences on everyone else simply because of a sentence in a love letter not written specifically

to us.

Likewise with the epistle of Paul to Titus.

This does not mean that universal truths of God are not found in scripture. However just as certain truths dawned on some of the apostles, (or were already there in the human psyche), they did not continually go around preaching them.

Rather they took it as read that man, (Romans 2, 14-16 {Wow, brother, verses quoted!}), or those converted (e.g. Peter with Cornelius), would naturally know, and more so!, the depths of Jesus Christ, and church life.

Much of the direction to churches by Paul, Peter, John, James, or the letter to the Hebrews was first century, and location, specific.

Do you recall the variety mentioned above to be found in the ministry of Jesus? If we search the context of each church, each book of the New Testament, we suddenly see variety, not a list of uniformity and doctrine. We see similarity, not sameness, such as the eternal Head of His church purposes today and forever.

If you feel this Head instigated verses and chapters, then you will readily accept New Testament laws/doctrines.

If you trust Abba as Jesus did, and the Holy Spirit, you will be challenged in your appreciation of scripture until the day you die, enlarged like the Jerusalem apostles in their understanding of their Lord. Not that you will attain, or become perfected (on this earth), but you will so desire to press on to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of you.

Become part of categories four, five, six, whatever, wherever they are. There is no end to life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And what of helps and hindrances?

Surprisingly – as with all our life experience, they are one and the same thing. If we choose not to hear God on an issue, it becomes a hindrance.

And where can we find these helps and hindrances?

Dare we say: “inside of us”? Now that really offends some people!

Chapter 14

We all have a right to opinion

“I am not like that in my individual Bible study; we are not like that in our group study.”

Good on ya. Wonderful. Praise the Lord if that is so. You probably are “nth” in the aforementioned categories.

Be aware though that the “nth degree” is nothing in the light of the eternal realm we are called into in Jesus Christ.

Beware also the words “not like (that)”. Jesus Himself told a story of two men who went to the Temple to pray. One thought he was “not like...”!

Actually we are both of those men!

And so to my detractors, (perhaps those dear “offended” ones of the last chapter):

“You dislike verses but you have hopped all over the Bible and preached an extremely long sermon at us”- (so long, I have forgotten what the text was; - more tongue and cheek!)

Sorry about that. I tried as little as possible to define by verse number, and at the end of the day no one is going to force change upon us.

It’s good to be challenged though, isn’t it?

To those who think I am anti Bible study, “liberal”, or God forbid, “blasphemous”, perhaps reread the book, but especially having come this far, continue to the final page.

Do you know this book could have had a different title?:

“MATTHEW 27, v.5b + LUKE 10, v37b”. This is almost diametrically opposed to what I have tried to say in “Love Letter”

We used to joke about these verses in college. They are the disastrous result of “using/abusing” verses.

However for years I, perhaps like you, was dragged into that morass of verses, or groups of verses, to prove a point, or feel justified.

How I missed the picture!

How I missed Christ!

And “finally”, (this sounds like Paul to the Philippians!), for those in the e-sphere, who will no doubt blog, dissect and critique this book and the author to death. Some would probably like to staple me to a page and hang a verse around my neck. If that is your “calling”, we embrace it in Christ.

You have been warned from the cover onwards that we will not really know where this book is leading.

You thought you “enjoyed” the start; half way through you thought you knew where we were ultimately headed. “Beware of thoughts and ways, saith the Lord” (paraphrase!!). You were incorrect in your assumptions and even now you probably still are.

So what is the “Issue we dare not face”?

Is it verses, Bible study, or “genuine Moroccan leather”?

Is it any and every complexity you can imagine in this world and your walk in Christ?

No, the issues we dare not face are:

How well do we know the one who by His Holy Spirit authored the very scriptures we revere?

How well are we acquainted with the CROSS of Jesus Christ and His CHURCH?

And finally the issue we often dare not face is... You/Me!

All is in Him!

Now: the depth of the revelation of Paul to Timothy, based on the “old” testament, which God allowed become Holy Writ as part of the “new” testament of Jesus Christ, may become apparent: “A wisdom unto a full salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”.

Now: the futility of searching the scriptures to create life based on law added upon law, a rabbinical and Pharisaical code, unwilling to come to Christ that we may have life, might suddenly dawn upon us- the revelation that for the early church “doctrine” was their very walk.

Now: may come the realisation that we, the church, are meant to be epistles known and read by all men.

Now: the joy, the certainty, that anyone who desires to “come after Christ” must not misinterpret, reappropriate, even versify the scriptures, but “must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Him”.

Epilogue

Now dear reader we have reached the conclusion.

You have stuck with me thus far, and hopefully I have not yet been burnt as a heretic.

I understand that from the outset the very concept of a love letter could be quite difficult to imagine. It is likely that in this e-mail and text age you have never sent, received, or even come across the like. Perhaps now is the time to hope to receive, or even better, send one.

If that concept was difficult, I fully understand how the ensuing ideas concerning the scriptures would have been even more challenging.

We are caught in at least 600, if not 1,800, years of tradition.

And we are meant to believe that the scriptures take all precedence over any tradition!

I must of course ask your forgiveness for the preponderance of “perhaps”, “maybe”, “possibly” and question marks in this little book.

I suppose those words and punctuation are there as an example of Jesus, Himself. He does not force Himself or His way on anyone. I cannot know your response to a new thought, idea or challenge.

However, “maybe”, “perhaps”, “possibly” your spirit will have reacted to a tiny spark. This spark has lit the lamp so your feet might better follow the way.

Truly: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into

the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those that love Him. But they shall be revealed to those who will yield to the Spirit of the Lord”.

It may be that now is a good moment to reread the original love letter at the start of the book. Perhaps like me, when you first read it, you felt tears coming.

Have you already noted the dates in the letter?

Do you, like me, hope that in fact Anita did not make that connection in Boston?

As you read, you will no doubt remember how we managed, in the following pages, to more or less destroy any sense of love, empathy, compassion or wonderment.

There’s another girl in this book however; the Cambodian who lost her life to the Khymer Rouge.

Every time I am reminded of her, I realise how much I love my sister in the Lord, a member of that “great cloud of witnesses”. In her dying for the love of her Lord, and the written record which all points to Him, she challenged me, and showed me something fresh.

From that comes a love of scripture which allowed some of the ideas penned here to come forth.

To re-interpret a phrase of the 20th century: This is real “liberation theology”.

“[Much-Afraid, now Grace and Glory] began to understand quite clearly that truth cannot be understood from books alone or by any written words, but only by personal growth and development in understanding, and that things written even in the Book of Books can be astonishingly misunderstood while one still lives on the low levels of spiritual experience and on the wrong side of the grave on the mountains.

She perceived that no one who finds herself up on the slopes of the Kingdom of Love can possibly dogmatize about what is seen there, because it is only then that she comprehends how small a part of the glorious whole she sees. All she can do is to gasp with wonder, awe, and thanksgiving, and to long with all her heart to go higher and to see and understand more.”

Extract from ‘Hinds’ Feet on High Places’ by Hannah Hurnard with permission from CMJ

Acknowledgements

Have you noticed recently that in many new books the list of dedications and acknowledgments would make the “thank yous” at the Oscars seem tame?

Add to that the seeming necessity of an imprimatur or commendations and recommendations from various “theologians” who have attended at least one seminary and have multiple letters after their names. Sorry not to have sought you out, perhaps it is something to do with what Paul refers to in the third chapter!! of the extant second letter to the church in Corinth?

Assuredly I would acknowledge the kind permission of CMJ for the piece from “Hinds’ Feet on High Places”, the quote re. Schwenckfeld from E.H. Broadbent’s “The Pilgrim Church”, and the couple of facts clarified from “The Bible - A History” by Miller and Huber.

Apart from that I am indebted to my whole family in Christ, and those outside of Christ, who have been part of my growth over the years. Those who specially collaborated in this presentation, you know who you are. Rejoice rather that your names are recorded in an infinitely superior book. Nevertheless, míle buíochas - 1,000 thanks, and in the immortal words of the comedienne Janet Webb - “I love you all”.

And thanks also to the cat.

THE END

- “Where are we going to place this book in the store, Mary?”
- “Bible Study Aids section, I suppose.
- “You are joking, right?!..... Right?

Bible study anyone?

Good News Addendum

There is at least one Bible, in English, (NIV), published by Biblica.com, which has made a commendable effort.

Not only does it remove chapters and verses, but it also attempts to put some chronological order on the various books of the Bible. Indeed that is its very name! – The BOOKS of the BIBLE.

Also in a slightly different, but eminently readable, vein, are the combined gospels in “The Story of My Life as Told by Jesus Christ”, published by Seedsowers Publishing House.

Of course there exist audio versions of the Bible in several languages. These often make no reference to verses, and, despite some drawbacks, could help to give one a “real” experience, e.g. of a disciple, or disciples, receiving a New Testament letter.

A final thought?

It would be interesting, but impossible to know reactions to this short tome.

Women are generally thought to be more “sensitive” than men, especially in the areas of love and romance. Many men, particularly in the Church can be much more rigid and dogmatic, not so easily persuaded to change.

I will wonder how each of these two genders coped with many points, but men, never forget that the Church you belong to is a She, and may He, our lover, our husband, help us to find our “feminine side”.

The final page

This page is solely for those who could not resist the temptation described on the back cover.

If you turned here to decide what the outcome of the book might be, or should you read it, then start where God starts: “In the beginning.....!”

P.S. Do you break all commandments?

