

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts
. . . come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price . . .
Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live”

(Isa. 55:1,3).

In contrast to the wholesome doctrines of the Truth, the false teachings of the Babylonian harlot make the nations drunk. In language based on Jeremiah 51:7 we read in the Apocalypse that “. . . the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication . . . having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication” (17:2,4); “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (14:8).

Wine a symbol of sacrifice

We conclude this study of the symbology of wine in Scripture by looking at wine as a symbol of

sacrifice. The obvious connection between red wine, “the blood of grapes” (Gen. 49:11), and shed blood has already been discussed in the context of the pouring out of God’s wrath on the wicked in punishment. The very opposite of this is a life laid down in love so that blood might be shed for the forgiveness of sins: “I lay down my life for the sheep” (Jno. 10:15); “but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26).

In our weekly remembrance of this great act of self-sacrifice, in which Jesus “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3, AV), the cup of wine becomes the symbol of his “blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28); “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [mg. fellowship or sharing] of the blood of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). The sacrifice of Jesus thus becomes a continual reminder to us of our need to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24, AV), and the love of Christ constrains us to that end (2 Cor. 5:14, AV).

(Concluded)

Bible workshop

X marks the spot

2. Building with wood, sticks and straw: studying the context

Robin de Jongh

A crucial factor in determining the meaning of a passage is the context in which it is set. Most readers will be familiar with the use of the context in Isaiah 14 to show that Lucifer is a description of the king of Babylon and not a ‘fallen angel’. This article explores the matter of context further.

THERE ARE FEW more difficult and misunderstood verses in scripture than 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. Yet they are actually explained just a few verses further on in the next chapter. This highlights once again that it is no use taking a chapter or paragraph in isolation. It is part and parcel of a carefully worded argument. Paul meant something specific with what he had written, and

it is not open to interpretation. And, actually, it is this that the verses are talking about.

A few verses on, in 4:4, Paul says, “he who judges me [or what I am saying] is the Lord”,¹ corresponding to the fire which tests a building, burning away anything that is combustible. In verse 5, “[the Lord] will both bring to light the hidden things . . . and reveal the *counsels of the hearts*”, referring to doctrine not from God, which will not stand the test because it does not build faith. Paul concludes, “Then each one’s praise will

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from the NKJV.

come from God”, referring to 3:14, about those whose wisdom is of God, and who will stand up to the fiery test.

So Paul is contrasting those who think from the heart with those who think from the Word. One’s words, doctrines or explanations, if you like, will come crashing down when tested. Fire is the symbol of God’s chastening, used particularly as the ending in the wonderful passage in Hebrews 12 about God’s work in our lives, to chasten us as a father does his sons (vv. 7,27-29): “for our God is a consuming fire”. Here again in verse 27 the context is of something remaining steadfast through trials: “that the things which cannot be shaken may remain”. And we cannot be shaken if God’s words have built up faith within us.

So we each have a choice lying on the table before us every time we open our mouths to say something about God’s Word. Do we listen to our heart or to the Word itself? In practice, it is nearly impossible to tell the difference, hence the idea of a building made from different materials (combustible or non-combustible) yet still a solid building either way. Jesus, you will remember, said nearly the same thing about building on sand or rock. This was aimed at the Jews, who usually were accurate with the Word, but built on the Law rather than on Christ. They were building a good house on bad foundations. But, for the Gentiles, it is often the opposite that is the problem. We have no particular trouble accepting Christ as our founder and the basis of our faith. But we tend to want to build upon him with philosophy, ideas, theories and nice fables.

Context determines the meaning

How often have you heard someone in a talk say the following (or even said yourself): “The eye of the needle refers to the name of a gate in Jerusalem which was too narrow for a camel to go through, unless you took all the baggage from it. Then it could just about squeeze through”? Where do teachings like this come from? Are they correct? Well, Paul himself says a resounding “No!” If teachings are not found in the Bible, then they are incorrect teaching, no matter how plausible they sound. And, admittedly, this needle example sounds plausible, and has an excellent-sounding message attached. *But it is not God-derived.*

When we say things like this we derive teaching from elsewhere than Scripture, and it is this that Paul calls building with wood, hay or straw. It works. It hangs together. You can shelter in it and find warmth. It might even stand up for a

while. But it is not what God planned for you and me to build with. In other words, it will not build faith, being empty teaching. Now consider this crazy example: You buy a maths text book for college. It has lots of questions at the end of each chapter to test your comprehension. You try to solve a few, and turn to the back of the book for the solutions. The first one says merely, “Correct”. The next, “Sounds about right”. Perplexed, you look through the whole answer section. It does not have a single specific answer. Would that book help you? Would the writer get away with something like that? So do we expect that from God?

What does the Bible itself lead us to if we are to understand this passage within the context, explaining the detail rather than *explaining it away*? If we look at the context we see that the question of the disciples, in direct response to Jesus’ point about the camel, is “Who then can be saved?” (Mt. 19:25). They understood Jesus’ statement perfectly. A camel cannot pass through the eye of a needle. And Jesus confirms their understanding to be correct when he says, “With men this is impossible” (v. 26).

The whole point of this important part of Scripture is completely lost when we explain away Jesus’ words, the point that salvation by works (inheriting the Kingdom as a Jew) is impossible in practice due to our desires and worldly burdens. Taking those burdens off will make our walk easier, granted, but if a camel divests itself of its baggage and hump it still will not fit through the needle. Jesus then leads on to the important lesson that “with God all things are possible” (v. 26), namely, that if we have faith in this fact we will be saved. So going to external sources outside the Bible for our explanation has left faith out of it, and rendered our Saviour’s lesson meaningless.

Looking carefully for the right answer

When we go to sources outside the Bible to explain what is *in* the Bible, we accuse God of leaving His work unfinished. He has published a book with questions, and wants us to find the answers by prayerfully, faithfully and humbly exploring His Word. The answers *are* all in there! No one who goes to a college expects the teacher to say, “Write whatever you like”. So why should God? If we have built up our knowledge of God in this kind of way, Paul now counsels us to pull down the house and start again (1 Cor. 3:18). Paul’s solution is painful but thorough, and a challenge few of us

can face. But all of us have to face it at some point if we *truly* love God and Jesus. Some people have accepted this challenge. You might have come across speakers who suddenly are not willing to speak any more. They may be taking stock and reappraising what they truly believe. Or there are people who suddenly stop teaching Sunday school, or commenting in Bible discussions. These people have taken up the challenge to become a fool, taking down the house they've built, before starting again with the right materials. Thankfully, not all of us may have to pull down the whole house. If you are one of those brave ones, God will bless what you build. If you are tempted to speak out with non-Biblical solutions, take warning: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness

with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'" (v. 19).

Question time

Readers will know the famous saying of Jesus in John 15:4, just before he went to his death: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me". Jesus obviously felt this was such a vital message that he was willing to spend most of his last precious moments delivering it. So what did he mean? How can Jesus live in us and we in him? To demonstrate the importance of context, find the answer by looking at all the places where the idea of abiding/dwelling and fruit appear in this chapter.

[\(To be continued\)](#)