

October 9-15, 2023

Philippians; Colossians

"I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHICH STRENGTHENS ME"

Summary: *Philippians 1. All that happened to Paul furthered the gospel cause—Our conduct should be worthy of the gospel.*

Philippians 2. Saints should be of one mind and one spirit—Every knee will bow to Christ—Saints must work out their salvation—Paul faces martyrdom with joy.

Philippians 3. Paul sacrifices all things for Christ—True ministers set examples of righteousness.

Philippians 4. Stand fast in the Lord—We believe in being honest, true, and chaste.

Colossians 1. Redemption comes through Christ—He created all things, is in the image of God, and is the Firstborn of the Father.

Colossians 2. The fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ—Beware of being deceived by the traditions of men—The handwriting against us was nailed to the cross of Christ.

Colossians 3. Some lives are hidden with God in Christ—The Saints are told to be holy and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 4. The Saints are told to be wise in all things—Luke and others greet the Colossians.

Colossians 5. The Saints will know the season of the Second Coming of Christ—Live the way Saints should live—Rejoice evermore—Do not despise prophesyings.

The lesson title suggests a focus on The Son of God so that human efforts to progress may have a unified purpose. Let's examine the theme of unity as it may or may not be apparent in the Middle East – where the Savior is hardly or not at all known. In Israel, several cultures can be observed, and their varying forms of unity (or disunity) can be identified.

What "motivates" the Bahais?

The Bahai religion, which has its headquarters in Haifa, Israel, has a main religious concept that promotes unity. They believe that all people are brothers and should even speak the same language. They suggest that all religions have truths that would unify mankind and that God will continue to reveal truths through prophets from time to time. Their own religious disciplines are similar wherever you go throughout the world. That discipline includes administrative structure, health rules, and charismatic procedures and exercises. "Originating out of the mystic Persian Babi movement, Bahatism is a world religion centered in Israel and stressing truth, equality and unity of all peoples." "Bahai's reside all over the world, in as many as 11,000 localities. However, the spiritual and administrative center of the Bahai World Faith is in the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, which is directed by nine members known as the Hands of the Cause." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What happens to people without knowing the Savior?

What is the result of Arab culture clan-individuality?

The Arabs, on the other hand, have a much less unified identity. Although their families are important and many

memorize generations of their family genealogy, they have not been able to carry on any major unity as communities or countries. "With the emergence of strong national identities in the Arab World, Arab countries have never been able to settle their own differences and unite." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) The Arab culture is largely influenced by Islam and one of its main principles is to "follow." The word "Moslem" means "a follower." The challenge is that Islam has many charismatic leaders, usually geographically separated, and so a unity of religious expression is almost impossible to achieve. The Englishman T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) vainly attempted to unify the various Arab tribes and geographic leaders into a common Arab nationality. His western concepts were too difficult to be adapted to the Arab eastern way of thinking.

How do Jews come closer to the unity concept?

Looking at the Jews, there is a popular anecdote in Israel that seems to denote a characteristic among them. Jokingly, they say, "Two Jews in a conversation always come up with three opinions." It is Jewish nature to discuss and even make up opposite points of view so that the contrasts or opposing ideas of view can become a learning experience. Yet, in the Jewish culture there is an underlying unity of "a people" or a "community of Israel." "Community of Israel" is the term used to describe the common responsibility, destiny, and kinship of all members of the Jewish people. The rabbis declared that "all Israel are responsible one for another" and sinners must be rebuked because the entire community is ultimately responsible for the sinner's wrongdoings. The unity of the Jewish nation was considered an historic and spiritual concept, in addition to being a social reality. All generations of Jews (including converts to Judaism) were viewed as having been present at

Mount Sinai and sharing in the responsibilities of the covenant with God. Likewise, the righteous of all generations will be reunited at the time of the resurrection of the dead during the messianic period. This concept of community and shared fate is referred to often in the *Talmud* with the terms *Klal Yisrael* and *Kneset Yisrael*." "World Jewish Congress" (WJC), is an association of major Jewish organizations from more than 80 countries, whose aim is to "assure the survival and to foster the unity of the Jewish people." "The activities of the World Jewish Congress included working on behalf of threatened Jewish communities such as those in Arab and communist countries; representing the Jewish world community in international organizations such as the United Nations, promoting inter-religious cooperation, and preserving Jewish identity in the face of the increasing trend towards assimilation . . ." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What is the underlying component of Jewish identity?

The family has always been the basic unifying element of the community of Israel. "Judaism considers the establishment of a family a holy task. Children are a gift from God and childlessness the greatest misfortune that could befall a marriage. The virtues of domestic bliss have been frequently extolled by the rabbis, and the close-knit Jewish family, where the home has been the center of religious practice and ceremony, has greatly helped the survival of Judaism and preserved the moral integrity of the Jews." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Modern Jewish communities reflect some similar cooperative efforts as was done anciently. One such community structure is called the Kibbutz. "Kibbutzim with similar ways of thinking often group together in federations, which save their member-villages money by purchasing for them all in bulk and arranging from one

central office to sell all their crops. In addition, many kibbutzim cooperate with other kibbutzim in the same region, whether they share the same ideas or not, and together they are able to build central silos and arrange heavy transport. Likewise, the kibbutz associations have their own adult education courses, choirs, amateur orchestras, art collections, bulletins, publishing houses, and even their own teachers' training college. Thousands of members of certain older kibbutzim, after completing their three-year army service, volunteer a year's labor --- unpaid, of course --- in newer kibbutzim, in order to help them stand on their own feet." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What do scripture prophets say about societal unity?

A similar unity and community bond can be seen in the scriptures. "And all that believed were together and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (**Acts 2:44-47**) "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." (**Acts 4:32**) "And they taught, and did minister one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another." (**3 Nephi 26:19**)

Who brings us to better progress?

The valuable lesson that we can learn is that unity represented in the scriptures is always connected with a central belief and faith in the Lord. That focus assures a unity because His directive powers are

the same for everyone. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (**Proverbs 3:6**) "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you." (**1 Thessalonians 3:11**) "Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day." (**Alma 37:37**) "And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given." (**Doctrine and Covenants 43:8**) ". . . you would not criticize a group of people who sought the same high ground in the midst of a flood; you would not see their presence in one place as an unintelligent act, for they came together in order to be saved. So it is here. Life here is life in a large, affectionate, and unified family. Love in a family does not diminish the freedom of each member thereof; our unity does not jeopardize our individuality. Undivided, we are multiplied. Being of one heart and one mind permits no divorce between knowing and feeling in the City of Enoch." (**Neal A. Maxwell, Of One Heart, p.51**)

What "echo" reflects unity taught in the House of the Lord?

A beautiful principle of Jewish unity can be sensed in the repeated prayers said when a "prayer circle" (minyan) is formed in Jewish ritual. The request for forgiveness should include all. "The rabbis placed great emphasis on the relationship of the individual to the community during prayer. Almost all prayer, for example, was written in the first person plural --- "Forgive us," "Teach us," "Bring us to our

Land." Although private prayer was certainly permitted, the individual was urged to join a congregation (minyan) when he prays and to incorporate the needs of the minyan in his prayers." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) The member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint's concept of focusing on the Lord has promoted a unified way of community life that can still be expressed individually. The thirteenth Article of Faith reflects a unified lifestyle that actually reaches back to God's initial instructions to all mankind. "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." (**Articles of Faith 13**)

How does Jewish thought reflect the 13th Article of Faith?

A look into Jewish cultural statements from the **Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.** also reflects the common biblical similarity. "**Honest**" – "While prophets urged men to be just, the rabbis of the *Talmud* went into detail about what justice means in commercial life: employer-employee relationships, duties of workers to employers; legitimate prices, fair weight and measure; fair contracts; fair and unfair competition; the spoken word as a binding contract. The laws are infused with fairness in spirit as well as in fact. It is recognized that in a ruthless business world of mixed peoples, honest dealings are difficult, but the Jew should know and retain his ideals." "**True**" – "Communal prayer opens the worshiper to the needs of others, it "takes the mind out of the narrowness of self-interest." "Prayer is a way to master what is inferior in us . . . it helps us discover our true aspirations . . . Prayer teaches us what to aspire to . . ."

"However, prayer is no substitute for action." Through prayer we deepen our commitment to righteous living." "**Chaste**" – "Judaism encourages modesty as one of the means to chastity. Thus the Jewish woman is enjoined to dress and act modestly at all times. Furthermore, a man is forbidden to be alone with a woman with whom he is not permitted to have sexual relations from considerations of both chastity and modesty." "**Benevolent**" – "In the Bible very often the acts of God are referred to figuratively using terms such as "the hand of God." Such metaphors are examples of how the Bible speaks in the language of man in order to help us understand concepts which would otherwise be beyond our grasp. Thus a metaphor like "The hand of God" may be used to represent strength and protection such as in the verse, "Your right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy" (Exodus 15:6). At the same time, the image of God's hands has been used to show benevolence and loving-kindness, as in the verse, "You open your hand and satisfy every living thing with favor." (Psalms 145). "**Virtuous**" – "Righteous gentiles (Hebrew: *Hasidei Ummot ha-Olam*), rabbinic term for those non-Jews who, because of their moral character or virtuous acts, rank equally in merit and grace with Jews. According to the Talmud, the righteous gentile is as eligible as any Jew for a place in the world to come." "In the stories, plays and poems of Isaac Leib Peretz (1852--1915) the world of Yiddish-speaking, East European Jewry is brought to life. Not only the Jews in the stories, but all those who are suffering and oppressed are Peretz's real heroes. He understands and sympathizes with their misery and discovers in simple and ignorant people the virtues of love, faith, heroism, gentleness and unselfishness. Perhaps the best known of his stories is *Bontsche Shveig* ("Bontsche the Silent"). Here Peretz describes a man

who is the most virtuous of people. His entire life is one long nightmare of suffering, but he endures his troubles silently. Then, in the afterworld, he is to be rewarded and is told that he can have whatever he would like best. And poor Bontsche, so miserable was his life on earth, that, seated among the patriarchs and saints of all ages, he can think of nothing better than a hot roll and fresh butter for breakfast every morning as his heavenly reward." **"Doing good"** "Ethics are the principles by which man can live a good life in relation to his fellow man. The ethical life is basic to Jewish religious observance: "Love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord." (**Leviticus 19:18**). Love of God is incomplete without love of man. This precept underlies the rules of conduct which the Torah prescribes . . ." "Hospitality is considered by Judaism to be one of the most important virtues that a person can develop. This has been true since the time of ancient Israel, when hospitality was not merely a question of good manners, but a moral institution which grew out of the harsh desert and nomadic existence of the people of Israel.

The biblical customs of welcoming the weary traveler and receiving the stranger in one's midst developed into an important Jewish virtue. Isaiah states that one of the duties of the pious is to "deal thy bread to the hungry" and to "bring the poor that are cast out to thy house."

Who strengthens me to be more holy?

"A.J. Heschel (1907-1972) based his views on a *Midrash* (*Talmud* teaching) stating that holiness is the only way to combat evil and that learning and obeying the precepts of Torah is the only way to gain holiness. The simplest advice in combating evil: "Turn from evil and do good" is from the **Book of Psalms (34:15)**." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Each part of the House of Israel (old and new) has a common unified goal of turning from evil and in doing good. Focusing on the God of Israel, who is the Atoner, makes all good things possible through Him. He gave us the way of turning from evil and doing good. "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." (**Philippians 4:14, 21st Century King James Version**)