



# Minutes With Messiah

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## POWER IN PURITY

By a pure life Je - sus gave me pow'r to be God's own. By a  
Bles - sed are the Pure in heart be - cause our God they'll see, And will  
pure love In my life his sav - ing grace was sown. Pow - er in pur - i - ty;  
show his Won - drous love through - out e - ter - ni - ty.  
Free - dom in grace. We see Je - sus dim - ly now, But soon face to face. All good and per - fect gifts  
Come from a - bove, Like pow - er in pur - i - ty, Ac - tion in love.

Song written for Spiritual Explosion, a youth rally at the Riverside congregation in Albuquerque, NM. This year's theme is, as the title suggests, "power in purity."

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Matt 5:8)

Spiritual Explosion XV will be held April 24-26, 2015. Youth (or adults) wishing to attend should contact the Riverside Church of Christ in Albuquerque for details and housing reservations.

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# BEING CONSISTENT

“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.” (Emerson) Sometimes consistency is necessary and good. Parenting experts say we should be consistent in punishing our children so that they do not become confused about what is acceptable and what is not. Lawyers argue the “fairness” of giving one person a harsh sentence and another a slap on the wrist. Sometimes people who otherwise insist on consistency, especially in relation to the scriptures are guilty of inconsistencies, themselves, foolish or not.

## Consistently inconsistent

Some people say that God turned away from Jesus on the cross because he quoted, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Of course, that ignores the Jewish mind, which would automatically go back to Psalm 22 (the source), and say that he was claiming to be the Messiah promised in that psalm. Instead, these people say God must have turned away from Jesus because he was carrying all the sin of the world, and God is so pure that he cannot be in the presence of sin. Most of these same people take the view that Satan in the Old Testament is the devil, rather than some “prosecuting attorney angel” as pictured in Zechariah 3. The inconsistency comes in that passage and the book of Job. If Satan is the ultimately evil

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devil, and if God cannot be in the presence of evil (or vice versa), then how could Satan come in the presence of, and even speak to, God? Either Satan is not the devil (likely), or sin can come in the presence of God (also a possibility), or God did not turn his back on Jesus (a real possibility). Or all or any combination of the above.

Some people read Titus 1:5 and say that if a congregation has elders there must be more than one. If the congregation has two elders, and one dies, therefore, the surviving elder must resign or the congregation must immediately get at least one more elder. This seems to make sense, because it would prevent one man from gaining too much power and being tempted thereby. It would also reduce the chance of a congregation being easily led into error when the one elder believes

something not supported by scripture. The inconsistency, though, comes when the same people say that a man who has only one believing child can be an elder. Paul tells Timothy that an elder must have “faithful children.” (Tit 1:6) He tells Timothy that the bishop must “have his children in subjection.” (1 Tim 3:4) The argument is that if you ask a person who has only one child if he has “children,” he will likely answer in the affirmative. He is not likely to say, “No I don’t have children; I have only one child.” Children, although plural, is often taken here as generic. Multiple men have multiple children. Why, then, does the same argument not apply to cities and elders? Multiple cities, multiple elders, even if one elder in each city. To be consistent, those who argue for multiple elders per city from the verse in Titus must necessarily argue for multiple children per elder from the same passage in Titus. Those who argue that an elder may have only one child must agree that a congregation may have only one elder.

On the other hand, some argue for Emerson’s “foolish consistency” to prove the Bible wrong. There are many genealogies in the Bible. Some leave out one or more generations. Others seem to trace a line through an alternate parentage that diverges from the other at some point. (This is how some account for the differences in the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke.) Matthew clearly leaves out multiple ancestors in order to fit his “fourteen” generations from Abraham to David to Babylonian captivity to Christ. He has a point to make, although we seem to have lost what that point was. But those who want to discredit the Bible will look at these different genealogies and argue that the Bible cannot be true because the genealogies are inconsistent. Likewise Belshazzar was historically the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, but the Bible calls him a son. Even in English we sometimes refer to any descendant as a son or daughter. This was apparently much more often true in ancient cultures. People are left out of family lists because they were the black sheep, or simply unimportant. It is foolish to demand that every genealogy, regardless of its purpose, be identical in all points; and yet some critics of the Bible insist that it must be so.

There are some areas where consistency might be even more controversial, especially in some conservative circles. One such instance relates to whether women are allowed to speak in the assembly of the church. In spite of some recent arguments otherwise, it is pretty clear that Paul related the prohibition of women speaking in the assembly, or at least the “learning” part of the assembly, to Eve’s sin in the Garden.

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.  
But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp

authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Tim 2:11-14)

It is common in some groups to prohibit women from preaching or praying in one assembly of the church (when all the “membership” is together) and yet allow them to speak in another assembly (the Bible class). The argument is that the Bible class is not the same as the “worship” assembly. This would imply that “small group” gatherings on a Sunday night (or even a Sunday morning) are not the same as the general assembly, and so women could comment, pray, and even teach in those assemblies.

One question, then, is, “what makes up an assembly of the church?” Is it that the assembly is for worship? The author of Hebrews says one of the principal purposes of the assembly is not worship but fellowship. (Heb 10:24-25) Is Bible study any less worship than singing, praying, or the Lord’s supper? If so, then we can fire all the preachers, because they are not that important. The bulk of most of our assemblies consists of Bible study.

The more important question, if one is to be consistent, is whether Paul was speaking of an assembly of the church for any specific purpose. Obviously he is making a distinction between the learning in one place and “at home” when he speaks of silence in 1 Cor 14. But the passage in 1 Timothy makes no such distinction. It simply says that if a woman is learning, she should be silent. That would seem to include the modern Bible class. Whether we should “toe the line” or allow leniency in this matter is not the purpose of this article. It is, rather, just to point out an apparent inconsistency. Those who argue for women’s active participation in every assembly of the church certainly point out this inconsistency in their own justification.

## **Foolish inconsistency**

Sometimes it is a case of a “foolish inconsistency.” Even as long ago as Isaiah’s time, God revealed the foolishness of some people’s inconsistencies. The idolatry of his day (and sometimes of ours) was full of a lack of consistency.

He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven

image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? (Isa 44:14-19)

Sometimes people look at God with this same inconsistency. They create God in their image, and expect him to do their own bidding. This can be seen in the “prosperity gospel,” that seems to say that God owes you a living. Sometimes it can be seen in the “God is on my side” philosophy of prayer. This must keep God very busy during the World Series or the football (American or

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otherwise) playoffs, when everybody seems to be praying that their team win. Somehow, God just doesn’t seem to manage to make everybody’s team win, or else he just doesn’t care to try.

Another inconsistency common today is the theory that what we pay for is the same as doing it ourselves. Sometimes this is true. A person who hires a contract killer is just as guilty of murder as the one fulfilling the contract. Sometimes it depends on the intent or the ability of the one paying. If I am not an auto mechanic, then paying someone to work on my car is essentially the same as doing it myself. There are many people who cannot go overseas or to another city to teach the gospel. By supporting those who can, they are essentially preaching. No inconsistency there. The inconsistency comes when some people pay to have others teach the gospel elsewhere, and try to believe that this fulfills their obligation to teach. Hiring a preacher is good, as long as it is not the end of the matter. It is not like hiring the mechanic. Everyone has an ability to teach about Jesus. It may not be to large groups, small groups, or door-to-door; but because everybody can talk to somebody, hiring someone else only enhances their ability, not replaces it. Paying someone to teach is admirable, but only if it is not intended to relieve oneself from further obligation.

If we are going to insist on consistency in the scriptures, let us at least be consistent about it. On the other hand, let us not let a foolish consistency blind our eyes to the truth.

# IS THAT A HINT?

In my family around gift giving times I am famous for my “hints.” The problem is that the clue is often so obscure that nobody can guess what is in the present, or (after opening it) how the hint relates. I have even been known to forget the meaning of the clue. Often a *remez* (Hebrew for hint) is likewise so obscure as to make the interpretation questionable. Just because the *gematria* (numeric total based on assigning numbers to letters) of two words is the same, it doesn’t always make sense to say that they must be related, as some Jewish scholars do. Nevertheless there is a passage that makes me wonder whether there might be a true hint in it.

In 2015, Passover comes on April 5. Many things happen on Passover (*Pesach*); some happen every year, others only incidentally. I am wondering, based on a *remez*, whether Elijah’s confrontation with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel might have happened on Passover.

The Hebrew word translated Passover is, as indicated above, *p’sach*. It means to pass over, jump over, or to limp. (I am wondering if this last meaning comes from the leaping gait of the one who limps.) Usually the word is used in conjunction with the holiday, Passover. In 1 Kings 18, however, it is twice used separate from the holiday. This double double-entendre might lead one to wonder whether it is a hint that the event happened on the holiday. What do I mean?

In the description of the events on Carmel, the passage says that Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to a contest to determine the true God. Before making the challenge, though, he addressed the people gathered there. He chided them for worshipping God and the Baals at the same time. In 1 Kings 18:21 he said, “How long halt [*p’sach*] ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” He pictures

them limping or jumping between the two deities. By asking them why they “pass over” between two opinions, is he reminding them of the day they are supposed to be celebrating; a day of remembrance that God delivered them from the gods of Egypt? Perhaps his choice of words was quite intentional.

The challenge was made. Elijah and the priests would each make an altar, but not light it. The wood and the sacrifice would be laid out properly, and the god that lit the fire himself would be the one to worship. Elijah even demonstrated his confidence by letting the other priests go first.

And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon [*p’sach*] the altar which was made.

These priests were probably Israelites themselves. If not, they were quite familiar with Jewish practice. When a day’s worth of praying and cutting themselves did not get the attention of their deity, did they “pass over” or “leap upon” their altar, in reference to the day on which they held the contest?

No other passage that does not specifically refer to the holiday uses the same word twice. It may just be a coincidence, but many people believe there is no such thing, especially in the scriptures. Just as it was not a coincidence that Esther was chosen queen when she was, it may not be coincidence that both Elijah and the prophets of Baal are associated with the word *p’sach* in the same context. The problem with “hints” is that it is hard to say that one’s interpretation is absolutely correct. But it still leaves one to wonder.

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