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Editor's Introduction

Welcome to another issue of YPS. In this issue there are a variety of writing styles and lots to get you thinking. Please take time to read all of the articles. I have found them all different but equally stimulating and challenging. We trust that you will find YPS helpful as you seek to build up yourself on your most holy faith, Jude 20.

Stephen Baker



THE LAND OF the emoji

BY ANDREW ROBERTSON CHATHAM, ONTARIO, CANADA

'Having put on the breastplate of righteousness', Eph. 6. 14.

Our world is changing at an incredible speed. Advancements in technology are a blur. And yet, even though it's all happening so fast, some things will never change about us. That's what Shigetaka Kurita found out in the late 1990s when he created 176 simple little symbols to express emotion on a computer screen. Little did he know that he was paving the way for the emoji. He could not have imagined that his invention would eventually become an entire smartphone keyboard. It's a language we all understand.

Mr. Kurita didn't actually create language. It already existed in the human heart. But he gave our text-crazy culture a way to express it. It's the language of 'emotion' and it runs deep inside us. We start communicating with emotion from the moment we're born. The existence of the emoji proves that we cannot communicate by merely exchanging information. True human connection can only happen on an emotional level.

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed International*, 34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh, Sheffield, S21 1HW, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.

Our Creator made us emotional beings and there's everything right with that. But what is wrong – with our culture and with our hearts – is the place we give to emotions. In the animated film, *Inside Out*, emotions are depicted as being in the central headquarters of the mind. We live in a culture where emotions rule. The message is clear, the pathway to true fulfilment is in following your feelings wherever they may lead.

Our advanced culture is remarkably close to the mindset that existed in first-century Ephesus. Paul knew that one of the devil's cruel schemes is to hit us where we are most vulnerable. For a Roman soldier, the upper torso needed the most protection. It was an easy target, and also a deadly one. It's no different for the Christian warrior. If Satan can wound us in our deepest feelings and desires, he will do serious damage.

Our emotions are vital to the health of our soul. It's through them that we truly connect with God and others in relationships. Apart from them, we are lonely and isolated. They also play a major role in understanding personal guilt. We don't just 'know' we are guilty, but we 'feel' our guilt. Emotions are a powerful voice but not necessarily true. The enemy does all he can to confuse us, and when we fall into temptation, he shames us into isolation.

When we've been hurt or abused, we withdraw from others and build walls around our heart in our shame. But our self-protection only makes our condition worse. If we are going to follow Christ, we may have our hearts broken or hurt, but Paul says

we are to 'be strong in the Lord' and not in ourselves. It is God alone we need to trust. Paul describes His protection for our hearts as 'righteousness'. He wasn't referring to a 'thing' but to a person, Jesus Christ. He is the defender of hearts that have been deeply wounded by sin in a broken world.

If only we could write the Old Testament story of Ruth in emojis. The language of emotion is deeply embedded into the narrative. Ruth's heart could not have been more vulnerable than 'in the days of the Judges' when women were abused and discarded. But she met a man who stands out in the moral darkness. Eventually, she lays herself at his feet in the dark of night – totally vulnerable and unprotected – and she seeks protection in the righteous strength of Boaz.

Regardless of who has taken advantage of us, or how far we have fallen, we are declared 'righteous' in our Redeemer. No matter how guilty we feel, 'Jesus Christ the righteous' stands and pleads our cause by His sacrifice. We may feel like giving up in our battle against sin, but the Lord will never give up His work producing righteousness in our lives. He knows our deepest secrets and He gave His own life to free us from shame and guilt.

It's time we dropped our efforts to self-protect. Let's live in the freedom of the righteousness God gives us in Christ. Just like the woman who found her righteousness in Him and said, 'Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did', John 4. 29 NKJV.

THOUGHTS ABOUT THINKING:

word versus image



BY JOHN PARKER LIVERPOOL AND MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE GRANTHAM, ENGLAND

After having beseeched, urged, appealed to us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, the apostle Paul now turns his attention to the mind, for this is where the necessary sanctification process must begin. Only by being transformed by its renewal can the believer prove, that is, discern, appreciate and determine to obey, God's will.

There are two things that we are simultaneously urged to ensure; the verbs translated 'be not conformed' and 'be ye transformed' each speak of an ongoing process. The apostle Paul does not tell us here how the mind is renewed, but it is clear from the whole corpus of his writings that only the Holy Spirit has the power to do this and that He does so as we read, study, meditate on, and

'hide in our heart', the Holy Scriptures, the word of God. As maturing believers, we also know this to be the case experientially.

The word translated 'mind' here denotes, 'the seat of reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding, and those of feeling, judging and determining'.¹

Perhaps the most fundamental faculty of the mind is language. It has long been understood that language not only expresses the mind but that, as it is used, it also shapes and forms the very fabric and character of how we think, that language 'programs' the mind; mind and language are inseparable.

From the very beginning, God is revealed as one who speaks: 'And God said, let there be light, and there was light', Gen. 1. 3. So creation, in all its glory and diversity, commenced and was accomplished by His word, Heb. 11. 3; for 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth', Ps. 33. 6. Creation is also upheld by that same powerful word, Heb. 1. 3.

From eternity the Word was with God and the Word was God. 'God' and the 'Word' cannot be conceived as ever having existed without each other. They are distinguishable but inseparable.² The Word is the eternal Son who became God incarnate, 'and the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth', John 1. 14.

God is a communicator; we see throughout scripture that He desires to communicate with mankind. He uses various means,³ but centrally He uses language, to converse and communicate with us in propositional terms.

The capacity for language and its associated activities of speaking, reading, writing, rational thought, empathy, perception and so on – all at a very complex level – are, thus, essential and foundational to what it is for man to be created in the image of God and are therefore unique to mankind. Language is fundamental to nearly every human activity.

Language is at the heart of any personal relationship. It is through language that we convey our thoughts and feelings, our very selves, to another person. We cannot get to know someone by merely basking in their presence; we need to communicate with that person, to converse and to commune. There can be no personal relationships without language.

There can, therefore, be no relationship with God without language. It should not surprise us, then, that God chose to reveal Himself to us in the most personal way through His word – the Bible.⁴ Would we expect Him to reveal Himself in mere feelings? Some religions may stress visions, experiences, or even the silence of meditation as the way to achieve contact with the divine. The Judeo-Christian tradition, however, insists on the role of language. 'What better way could be conceived than that God should address us through language, that He should give us His word?'⁵

'My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee . . . then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding', Prov. 2. 1, 5-6. 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life', John 6. 63.

The whole Christian revelation centres on a book. Indeed, according to English Professor GENE VEITH, 'The Bible is the primal Book, the most ancient of all literary texts and the source of all literacy. Reading the Bible tends to reading other books and thus to some important habits of mind'.⁶

We can see now that the skill of reading, and its associated activities, is essential to our spiritual growth and one that must be guarded and developed if we are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. It must also be said that, since the Holy Spirit is the transforming power, we must be diligent to 'be filled with the Spirit', to not 'grieve' or 'quench' the Spirit and to continually 'walk in' and 'sow to' the Spirit.⁷

There are two classes of activity that are ubiquitous in contemporary life, even essential in the second case. They are, if uncontrolled, potentially detrimental to the skill of reading. The first is watching television and the second the use of the internet. Our purpose here isn't to proscribe these activities, or even to consider their content, but rather to briefly consider the problems of the first of those forms itself.⁸

Media scholar and social critic, NEIL POSTMAN, astutely analyses how different forms of communication shape the thinking and culture of different people groups. He first discovered this connection when he read the Bible. In the second of the ten commandments, God prohibits the Israelites from making any graven image, and bowing down to them, or serving them: 'for I the Lord thy God

am a jealous God', Exod. 20. 4-5a. Recently delivered from Egypt, their God was the one true and universal God and was uniquely to be found in and understood from the word. Any iconography was thus blasphemy, for it allowed a false god to enter their society. He concluded that, 'People like ourselves who are in the process of converting their culture from word-centered to image-centered [TV was beginning to dominate when he wrote] might profit by reflecting on this Mosaic injunction'.⁹ Television, for him, was akin to an electronically graven image.

This is not to speak negatively against what is legitimate. The contemplation of aesthetic beauty and the ability to create and appreciate art are given by God in His creation and can be used for His glory.

In another very influential book,¹⁰ POSTMAN explores the differences between the mental processes involved in reading and those involved in watching television and found that 'word-centred' people think in a completely different mode from 'image-centred' people.

There are varying cognitive theories of reading, but they all agree that reading involves the highest order of abstract thinking. Reading is an active process demanding and training a sustained attention span. It develops logical reasoning and promotes continuity, the gradual accumulation of knowledge and its connectivity. It involves the sustained exploration of ideas and the confrontation and mastery of complexity. It fosters thinking, planning, imagining, creating and a sense of self.

In contrast to reading, engagement with visual media is a passive process promoting a short attention span. It develops merely emotional responses and promotes fragmentation, anti-intellectualism and immediate gratification. It fails to allow the development of the God-given imagination, for all the imaginative work that the mind would do when reading a book, is presented already

done. It also fosters a monolithic but shallow public consciousness.

Language is cognitive, appealing to the mind, whereas images are affective, appealing to the senses. When reading, one is able to exercise and develop one's analytical and critical powers whereas visual content is, by definition, irrefutable: you may aesthetically dislike it but you cannot disagree with it. Propositions are true or false. Pictures are not. Thus, the very propensity of images to evoke a sensual, emotional response is at the heart of the commandment to Israel to 'make no graven image'.

POSTMAN connects the new dominance of electronic media with the undermining of authority and the loss of a sense of history. He also associates it with the emergence of new values based on instant gratification. It cultivates short-term relationships and pleasure-centredness.

The 'Modern' reading age, he says, was characterized by activism, self-confidence and optimism, whereas the 'Postmodern' TV age is characterized by passivity and cynical insecurity. He also warns of the logical danger that people who never read never develop the ability to think thoroughly and critically for themselves and, therefore, become easy prey for malign manipulation and tyrannical rule.

Finally, let's remember Paul's injunction to Timothy, 'Exercise thyself . . . unto godliness', 1 Tim. 4. 7. He was 'to be as devoted to godliness as an athlete is to his sport'.¹¹ A part of all that encompassed was to devote and develop his natural powers, sanctified to the Master. We all have the ability to read, so let us recognize it as a responsibility, even as a talent¹² and apply our minds, for their supernatural transformation, to the greatest book of all.

¹ W. E. VINE, 'Mind' in *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants, 1940.

² J. SIDLOW BAXTER, *Explore the Book*, Vol. 5, Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1955.

³ Cf. Heb. 1. 1; Rom. 1. 20, etc.

⁴ See the interesting discussion on this in: GENE EDWARD VEITH, *Why God Gave Us a Book*, P&R, 2011.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 9.

⁶ Quoted from GENE EDWARD VEITH, *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature*, Crossway, 1990, pg. 17.

⁷ Eph. 5. 18; Eph. 4. 30; 1 Thess. 5. 19; Gal. 5. 25; 6. 8.

⁸ Those wanting to investigate the effects of internet use on our mental faculties may be directed to NICHOLAS CARR, *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember*, Atlantic Books, 2011.

⁹ NEIL POSTMAN, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Viking, 1985.

¹⁰ NEIL POSTMAN, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*, Delacorte Press, 1979.

¹¹ WARREN W. WIERSBE, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, David C. Cook, 2007.

¹² Cf. Matt. 25. 14-30.

**THE BIBLE:**

sword for protection

BY ALAN AFFLECK LOSSIEMOUTH, SCOTLAND

The maintenance of a soldier's issued weapon is always a priority. While they may have a wide variety of kit that can offer some level of protection from the enemy, it is only their weapon that will cause the enemy to leave. As a result, in basic training, they are taught how to disassemble clean and reassemble their weapon. A rifle that is not clean could malfunction, which is potentially fatal during an attack.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul defines the spiritual armour that a Christian must wear in order to be protected against the attack of the devil. He identifies one resource that is offensive rather than defensive, 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God', Eph. 6. 17.

The power of the weapon

Consider the power of the weapon at our disposal. 'By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God', Heb. 11. 3 ESV. The sword of the Spirit is the only weapon which can pierce 'to the division of soul and of spirit', Heb. 4. 12 NKJV. There is no question that our enemy is powerful; Paul states that we fight 'against spiritual wickedness in high places', Eph. 6. 12, yet our weapon is sufficient for us to be victorious.

The use of the weapon

When John sees a vision of the Son of man at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, he states, 'out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword', Rev. 1. 16. This shows us that the Bible is not a good luck charm that wards off evil merely by its presence; it must be in our mouth, that is, it must be spoken or communicated.

The Lord Jesus demonstrated this during His

temptation in the wilderness. Repeatedly, the devil came to him with a variety of temptations, and, on each occasion, Jesus quotes scripture, stating 'It is written', Luke 4. 4, and, as a result, the devil 'departed from him for a season', Luke 4. 13.

This is an important tactic. We also must make use of the word of God when facing temptation. Perhaps we are tempted to respond angrily in a certain situation, quoting an appropriate scripture either audibly or mentally will help us to overcome the temptation. For example, we might say, 'He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city', Prov. 16. 32 NKJV.

The preparation with the weapon

Jonathan and his armour-bearer defeated many Philistines in 1 Samuel chapter 14, but it was clearly not the first occasion in which he had used a sword. Similarly, we must spend time with the word of God prior to the attack of the devil. For example, I read recently of a Christian who had the verse 'I have made a covenant with my eyes', Job 31. 1 NKJV, taped to his computer monitor. This man obviously understood the potential for sin, and had prepared accordingly for this temptation.

This does not mean we have to be able to memorize the whole Bible. We must get to know our enemy and be aware of the ways he might attack us, or perhaps areas where we have previously failed and are vulnerable. An elder or older Christian may be able to advise us regarding verses or passages that are suitable for the temptations we face. It would be good if we were able to say, 'Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you', Ps. 119. 11 NKJV.

ADVENTURES IN ACTS:

Acts 20-21 - A seasoned spiritual traveller

BY JEREMY SINGER BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

With modern innovations like TripAdvisor, Easyjet and Uber, we often fail to realize that Mediterranean society in the first century was just as accustomed to long-distance journeys as we are. Paul was particularly well travelled, which is why W. M. RAMSAY entitled his biography of the apostle, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*. In our chapters for study, Paul visited many different locations; over twenty places are named. We want to examine Paul's travelling habits, and show how they are relevant for our busy lives today.

Companionship

Paul rarely travelled alone. He spent a short time walking solo to Assos, Acts 20. 13, possibly to pray and commune quietly with his Master. But, in general, he surrounded himself with godly fellow believers, v. 4. God decreed that it was 'not good that the man should be alone', Gen. 2. 18. The original context of this statement involves marriage, but it is also true that single Christians, like Paul, need other people to support and encourage them. Paul's companions all had their part to play. Some suffered with him, like Silas, Acts 16. 19. Some witnessed with him, like Timothy, Phil. 2. 22. Some served with him, like Mark, 2 Tim. 4. 11.

Similarly, remember that Elisha poured water on Elijah's hands, 2 Kgs. 3. 11. There was blessing for both men. The high-profile servant was helped in a practical way by a seemingly less important character. Elisha learned much from being with Elijah. We should cultivate the companionship of godly believers.



Breaking bread

Paul's life was full of variety. The one fixed point in his schedule seems to have been the Lord's supper, 1 Cor. 11. 20. The apostle made it his priority to meet with Christians in local churches, wherever he could. At Troas, he deliberately waited until 'the first day of the week' so he could break bread with the believers, Acts 20. 6-7. This was consistent with the Lord's instruction, 1 Cor. 11. 23-26, therefore it was Paul's pleasure to obey.

There is a direct challenge to us when we travel, whether on business or holiday. Do we look for companies of the Lord's people, where possible? Obedience is more important than convenience!



Hospitality

Paul was glad to receive hospitality from Christians, and they were glad to offer it. According to the parable of sheep and goats, looking after Paul was as good as looking after the Lord Himself, Matt. 25. 40. We need to be ready to give and receive; this mutuality draws us closer to our fellow believers and to our Lord, Acts 2. 44, Phil. 4. 10.

Philip and Mnason were highly hospitable, Acts 21. 8, 16, like Stephanas and his family, 1 Cor. 16. 15. This was a healthy addiction. Hospitality is a clear indicator of spiritual maturity, 1 Tim. 3. 2, Titus 1. 8.

Submission

Paul knew he had to go to Jerusalem, Acts 20. 22. He was aware that this journey would lead to trouble, 21. 13. Nonetheless, he was determined to continue. This was the pathway of submission. In the same manner that the Lord Jesus had suffered for the will of God, so too would Paul, 1 Pet. 2. 21.

The lesson for us is to seek God's will and then to pursue it, despite personal cost. In the next article, we will begin to discover the great price Paul paid for his obedience, when he finally reached Jerusalem.



PART 2

The Lord's coming

BY PAUL ROBINSON MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

In part one of this two part series we discovered that Paul refers to the Lord's coming in each chapter of 1 Thessalonians. He also presents five reasons we should be actively waiting for His coming. Two have been dealt with – service and reward, the other three will be dealt with in this article.

Character

In chapter 3 verses 12 to 13, Paul reminds us of how important it is for believers to be caring people.

'And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love toward one another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints'.

He speaks of the importance of not only having a heart of love for both believers and the unsaved (all men) but seeing that love increase and overflow. This is the Lord's work, for it does not come naturally to any of us so we must be willing to allow His Spirit to create this attitude in us. The process is not only for the blessing of others but for the benefit of ourselves, that we might be blameless before God when the Lord comes.

We are reminded here that it is not only our service for the Lord that will be reviewed at the judgement seat of Christ, but our character as well.

Reunion

1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is a very well-known passage in the Bible that provides some detail about the manner of the Lord's coming for the believer. They were written as words of comfort and encouragement, v. 18.

In chapter 4 verses 16 to 17 we read, 'For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds'.

While the believers at Thessalonica waited for the Lord to come, some of them died. Those who remained were concerned that those who had died would not be involved in this great event. Paul assures them that this is not the case. Both those who have died (the dead in Christ) and those who are alive at the time will be taken up and we will all be together with the Lord.

This is something to look forward to, especially so for believers who have family members who belong to the Lord and have passed away, for it will be a wonderful time of reunion.

Sanctification

As Paul draws his letter to a close, in chapter 5 verse 23, he prays, 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

His prayer for the believers is that they will be preserved blameless until that day. Blameless does not mean sinless, but free from causes for reproach and regret.

Notice this important reference to the unique and threefold nature of every person – spirit, soul and body. The word 'preserve' means to guard carefully. This is a reminder of the importance that we should attach to how we live so that there will be no reason for shame at the coming of Christ. It also highlights how our behaviour affects every aspect of our person.

Summary

So rather than just passively wait for the Lord's coming, we should recognize the unique opportunity that we have between now and then to serve Him. We should allow the Holy Spirit to work upon our character so it is more like the Lord. We should seek to behave in such a way that we will be free from regret, 1 Cor. 3: 15, when He comes. We can also look forward to a time of reward and reunion with believers who have already gone to heaven.