

## UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God*

**IN KING JESUS.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

#14-2003

by – Stuart H. Pouliot

February 2, 2020

### **Consistency**

I woke this morning with these thoughts rolling around in my mind (or: imagination). Frankly, I hesitated titling this issue *consistency*, for the conclusion I offer at the end contradicts what I have to say about inconsistency, which actually goes along with the heart of what I want to share. Bear with me! Starting many years ago (too many in fact), I began quoting Oscar Wilde who once said: *Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative*, and Ralph Waldo Emerson who said: *A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds*. Emerson might be a bit too challenging to interpret, but Wilde makes it perfectly clear that consistency stifles the imagination.

What is **imagination**? According to various sources, *imagination is the ability to form pictures in the mind; something you think exists or is true; faculty of imagining, or of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses*. I believe the one with the greatest imagination in all of creation and beyond is none other than our Creator God. Proclaiming *let there be light* took great imagination, not to speak of creativity to bring His imagination into existence.

With this as a backdrop, I make it no secret that I like thinking outside the box of organized religion and appreciate others who do likewise, even if I see things differently from them. I don't believe God lives in the boxes of man's religions. Simply, we can't box God in, no matter how much systematic theology and doctrine we pull out of scripture and package as so-called *truth*. I'll take it one step further; I believe God enjoys those with imagination, even those who some would call *dreamers*. It makes me think of Joseph, whose brothers called **the dreamer**. Of course, Joseph literally had dreams from the spirit of the Lord. Why Joseph and not the others? What made him different? One answer is that he was the first born of Rachel or, in terms of the two sisters married to Jacob, he was the second-born. The other answer that probably goes with the first is that the Lord wired Joseph this way. My point is: don't discount dreamers or ones with imaginations—the Lord might be speaking through them.

There was a time when, in my study of scripture, I thought every line of thought (camp, school of thought or however one defines it) based on sets of scripture had to fit together. Theologians often write tomes attempting to do so, and, in the process, critically analyze other theologians who see things differently. A term often associated with the study of scripture is **hermeneutics**, which refers to *the science of interpretation and explanation; exegesis; esp.; that branch of theology which defines the laws whereby the meaning of scripture is to be ascertained*. So, seminaries and the theological tomes produced by those who graduate from them and the ones who expound from the pulpits along these lines feed the Lord's people based on some science worked out by man—it is man's science. Where is the spirit of God in all this? In my view, hermeneutics has led to **interpretative bias** in the interpretation of scripture. Mind you; I am not saying all of this is bad, for some of it has value.

It is one thing for a theologian or seminary graduate (by whatever title) to produce books, videos, or sermons along hermeneutic lines (*aka* interpretative bias), but how assemblies deal with such lines of thinking is another thing. Assemblies of God's people (*aka* churches) often do the same thing as they form **a camp around one line of scriptural interpretation**. There is some good in this in that it keeps the group

together and in focus. However, generally speaking, there is a flip side to this togetherness that fights anything that doesn't meet the norm of the group or, stated another way, doesn't meet ***the institutionalized mind-set of the group***. Thus, anyone who challenges the groups "camp thought" can become unwelcome in their assembly. Based on my experience, this occurs more often than not. I have had at least five such personal challenges in my nearly forty-year walk with the Lord.

Putting theologians and assemblies aside, on an individual level, the problem with trying to fit everything together in such a way that one's conclusion is air-tight, so to speak, is a challenge, at the least. Eventually, a scripture pops up that doesn't fit or, worse, seems to contradict the main line of thinking being pursued. At other times, it appears that there is more than one conclusion that can be reached, each with plausible explanations. Some might counter this with the idea there are "fundamentals" that do line up in scripture that are consistent and conclusive. I'm not so sure about this either, for I see disagreement even on the so-called *fundamentals*. Just take the topic of *resurrection* as a prime fundamental example. Some make it all spiritual, some make it all physical, and others blend the two. Which is it? Well, it depends on which theologian (or: simply which commentator) one wishes to follow. Even Jesus Himself, who should be the most fundamental and foundational topic of all scripture, is interpreted in a variety of ways. For example: when He ascended, did He shed His physical body and become a spirit, meaning the new humanity will not have physicality in the spirit? Big topic; we'll leave it at this.

It is safe to say that for every topic pulled from scripture, there is more than one interpretation, even multiple interpretations. And, groups of the Lord's people form iron-clad camps (fortresses) based on their interpretation of these topics, making these, at a minimum, the emphasis that permeates their assembly life or, at a maximum, the basis upon which they exist as a group. Mind you; I am not suggesting that all of this is wrong, for their interpretation of scripture might, in fact, be sound. What I do suggest is that such an approach is dangerous, for it can and often does hinder the spirit of the Lord from working within the group, ultimately leading to stunted spiritual growth. The same applies at the individual level. The Lord's people must be careful they do not stifle the introduction of something new to the group by the spirit. After all, the declaration of the Lord is: *Look, I am making all things new* (Revelation 21:5). Or, as Paul wrote: *Old things have gone, and look—everything has become new!* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This does not mean we accept every new thing, no matter how wacky it might be. I've seen some groups go off into crazy things. But even here we need to be cautious, for what seems crazy to us (based on our built-in interpretative bias) might just be the spirit of the Lord in action. Consequently, everything in a Christian's life requires ***spiritual discernment***, or, as John put it, discernment of the spirits. By the way, discernment comes through ***the anointing*** all of us who believe have within us, continuously and progressively working to lead us into all truth, which is none other than Christ Jesus our Lord.

One more point: I am surprised at how so many commentators make so much of their teaching ***mutually exclusive*** (meaning it is about A and excludes B) as opposed to ***mutually inclusive*** (meaning it is about A and B and most likely C, D, etc.). For example, some who interpret the book of Revelation say that the entire book is to be interpreted as a spiritual allegory (A) while ignoring its historical fulfillment (B). However, just because something is symbolic does not rule out the possibility of it being a symbol of fulfilled historic events. Perhaps there is room for both A and B and more.

All this leads to the heart of all scripture—**JESUS!** He was not consistent with the ways and views of the Jews and they resented it, even demanding His crucifixion. Simply, He was inconsistent to the religious mind. But He was absolutely consistent in spirit with the mind of His Father. So, let us not be so quick to discount what appears inconsistent—it just might be the consistency of Jesus revealed in a new way. Let your imagination roam, dream a bit, break the boxes—you might discover Jesus in a new way.