

# ADJUSTING TO THE TRUTH

By Peter McArthur

There are many differences between the two great competing cultures of the West and East, but it's in the area of education that we find one of the most marked divergences. The Greek or Western idea of education emphasizes what we might call "detached information," while the East or Hebraic idea stresses something akin to "a personal encounter." This of course is a generalisation, but nevertheless is basically true.

Biblically speaking it was important to the Hebrews that each learner should have a personal encounter which would transform them. It's obvious that having an encounter and responding to God are the central dynamics of Scripture. For the Hebrews all of life became a classroom. Should we choose to use this method today we need to ensure that our "classrooms" are where we practice truth and love (Eph.4:15 "Being the truth in love" is a more accurate translation of the Greek than "speaking the truth in love") and be willing to adjust to it where needed.

One of the key factors about participating in a Lamad-style encounter is understanding the need for each participant to have love from a pure heart, have a good conscience, and a sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:5). Each of these are *heart* issues, and anyone participating in Lamad will soon come "undone" if they have a bad attitude or selfish motive.

I recall one time some years ago when someone was asked to share a personal reflection at one of our lamad-style meetings ("Lamad" meaning an interactive question/answer style of teaching – which Jesus and the rabbis of His time used). The person utilised the occasion to attack the policies of our Church, as well as me as the Pastor, taking us all by surprise! It wasn't long before it became clear she had a major grudge and seized the moment to deliver it, virtually wrecking that Lamad encounter.

Unfortunately this just happened to be our first meeting, and it turned many people off from coming again. It took some months of careful preparation and the binding-up of hurt souls before we could initiate another attempt. I learnt a significant lesson that day.

While this kind of thing isn't at all uncommon in congregations, it does show how many believers allow the mind to subjugate their spirit. Biblically speaking the mind is made to serve the spirit. All spiritual instruction and training is to be focussed on the spirit (or heart), so it's important that a healthy Lamad group should have participants who have already dealt with many of their soul issues, or at least are attending to them for adjustment.

Now this doesn't mean you can only have a Lamad group if you have "mature" people, but it does mean that those in the study group should be willing to strive for maturity. Being open and teachable is something vital to Lamad experiences.

There's a helpful adage that goes like this:

**The spirit is king;  
the soul is a servant to the spirit;  
and the body is a slave to the soul.**

As we adjust more and more to the Word of God, we find that our personal encounter demands a teaching style of Holy Spirit guided discovery. Lamad learning encourages the flow of revelation within the hearts of the students. Discovery often happens best in a lively interchange within the classroom. Therefore, effective group interaction must be promoted

by the *lamad* teacher.

However we do need to be aware of those who might hijack the encounter for their own purposes, as in the case mentioned above. Also, the leader or facilitator will need to carefully but firmly address inerrant doctrine. I find the best way of doing this is to encourage the person who's spoken by affirming their right to speak to the group, but then to let Scripture adjust the issue by saying something like: "Now let's reflect on what Mike said by seeing what the Word says about that." If the comment was unscriptural then the Word will show it to be so. It's very hard to disagree with the Word, but they might well disagree with the leader!

So it's helpful to keep the focus firmly on what the Word clearly says. Certain things are central to life and eternity, others are not. Anger, fear, and doubt are temporary and will be swallowed up by the realities that abide forever: faith, hope, and love. The Lamad curriculum constantly emphasizes the abiding, eternal realities, instilling these into the lives of the students. For this reason it's vital to conclude a lamad meeting with prayer; praying for one another in small groups, asking the Holy Spirit to bring about a reality in our lives based on what's been discussed.

Man is to live in the constant flow of God's grace and purposes. This is accomplished by lifting up our eyes in worship to the King, and becoming consumed by His presence. While we are in the Lord's presence, we acknowledge that we no longer live, but that Christ is our life, and the life we now live is by faith (Gal. 2:20). We live out of daily fellowship with the Holy Spirit, recognizing that everything done outside of divine flow is a dead work.

Such is the joy, the thrill and the aim of a Lamad style encounter. An encounter with our brothers and sisters, an encounter with our God, and an encounter with those things that are eternal.

Lamad encounters will bring us into confrontation with the thoughts of others, and especially with our own ideas and thoughts. Have you ever noticed how we as humans react rather than respond to new ideas? Very few people "respond to"; most of us "react against" what might be presented. This isn't such a huge problem because it's natural that we would defend long-held opinions. But it does become a problem when, after due consideration, we begin to actively resist what's being shared.

In a lamad style encounter we don't set out to pull down the views of others, nor do we attempt to exalt our own. What we do is to listen, and then measure everyone's views against the standard of Scripture.

For some years now I've wondered what it would be like to have a group of believers meet together for one purpose: to methodically go through all the fundamental doctrines of "church teaching" and to be scrupulously honest in seeing how they measure up against the plain teaching of Scripture. I wonder how many of us would be so brave?

To test how you might react, I'll throw something your way right now.

As Christians we commonly speak about the New Covenant; when we share communion we usually refer to that whole event as the inauguration of the New Covenant; and some groups even call themselves "New Testament churches."

Now - here we go, so get ready! Scripturally speaking what group of people are associated with the "New Covenant"? Some might answer, "All who have faith in Christ", others might say "Those who are born again", and others might boldly declare "Only true Christians are members of the New Covenant."

Now, what does Scripture simply and plainly say? Read it slowly and out loud to yourself.

**“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” Jer 31:31**

**“Listen! The days are coming, says the LORD, and I will establish a new covenant over the house of Israel and over the house of Judah.” Heb 8:8**

Now please read it just once more before we go on, asking yourself that one question, ‘With whom is the new covenant made’?

Note what the Word says, in two different places (“two” for witness - Deut 17:6); “...**with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...**”

Not a mention of the gentiles here! No mention of any other group except the houses of Israel and Judah. The Word plainly says the new covenant will be established with Israel and Judah.

Let that sink in for a moment. Now please, I’m not trying to stir you up and get you all agitated, but I do want to ask you a question.

What are you feeling right now? Are you stunned by what you plainly read from Scripture? Are you agitated that I should throw you a curly one? Are you angry with me because you conclude I have some weird doctrine? Is your mind already racing ahead and making certain deductions about me and my opinions?

Well, that’s OK because I’m not going to defend myself about what I’ve asked you to read through. What I would like you to consider is ‘How do you feel? What emotions has this brought forth in you?’

What has just happened is what happens when we share in a lamad encounter. Issues will definitely come up that will test whether you’re going to respond to or react against something.

I’ll let you mull over those two Bible verses for a while; the Word and the Spirit will be the only ones that will work it out for you. Besides, my point in doing this little exercise was NOT to try and change your doctrine, or to make you run to other verses to support your entrenched views (and by that I don’t mean to be demeaning). I’m not making any judgement on you, truly! All I wanted to do was to see how you felt about something that would challenge your understanding. That’s all.

Let’s move on. If you can tap into your feelings about being challenged and begin to assess them, then we’re off and running. What will happen as we further investigate our opinions, is that the Word will open new ways to us. We’ll begin to see how long-held understandings can’t always be supported by the direct reading of Scripture. Gradually the Holy Spirit will enlighten us about some of our views, even dearly held ones.

It’s not that we’ve believed a lie and exalted it as truth, but that we’ve simply taken on-board some teaching in good faith, often from a respected preacher or established doctrinal stance. If the Word shows us that our view point isn’t quite accurate, all we need do is to adjust to the truth.

This is a regular feature in Scripture, but often we overlook it. Revelation is progressive, and

so too should be the formation of our mind. We are to conform to the mind of Christ and to His Word, not to what our favourite preacher said or what the latest best-selling book propagated.

I prefer to not try and “change” people's minds; that rarely works. And actually it's not the way of Scripture either. What is needed, and what works best, is allowing our opinions to be re-evaluated against the standard of Scripture. This is what I prefer to call “adjustment”. It's a less confrontationist word and encourages us to re-think our ideas by testing them solely against Scripture and no other source. Quite exhilarating really!

So let's look at some examples from the Word. **“And going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. And He called them.”** Mtt. 4:21

In this verse the word “mending” (or “repairing”) is where we start in considering adjusting to the truth. In Greek it's *katartizō* (G2675) and a more accurate meaning is “*to adjust, to put to rights, to articulate, to mend if needed, to get ready, to equip thoroughly, to fully train, to render fit, to make complete again, to make sound, to restore, to mend what has been broken or torn*”. What rich insights are here! You can probably already see where we're going with this.

Here we have James and John “restoring” their fishing nets because they needed to be made *sound* again, they needed to be *adjusted* and *put to rights* so that they'd be useful, *equipped* and functional at sea. Now transfer that kind of concept to a believer who needs their doctrine re-aligned so that it comes back into harmony with Scripture, and there you have it - adjustment to the truth.

Other supportive texts in Scripture are: “(Apollos) **began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And Aquila and Priscilla heard him, and they took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly.**” Acts 18:26

Here we find a believer called Apollos, fervent in spirit and who taught boldly about Jesus as Messiah (vs. 25), but who was nevertheless limited because he only had John's baptismal understanding. So Aquila and his wife take Apollos aside and *adjust* this thinking so that it more accurately reflects the complete truth about Jesus. Apollos is thus *rendered fit, made sound* and *put to rights*.

Aquila and Priscilla did it the Biblical way, and re-aligned a new believer so that he'd be equipped for further ministry. They didn't chastise him, run him out of the synagogue, confront him rudely or criticize him - they simply took him aside and explained things more accurately to him. There was a re-alignment of received truth. This should be a good model for us.

Let's continue with this vein of thought: **“But I exhort you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same purpose.”** 1 Cor. 1:10

Here we have the same Greek word *katartizō* as found in the text about repairing the fishing nets (Mtt. 4:21). Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to be like minded and wants them to be adjusted in their thinking so that they all have “*the same mind and same purpose*”. If only today's churches would sit down and do this, what single-minded purpose we would have as the joint Body of Christ! (see 2 Cor. 13:11).

Paul gives us a clue towards the adjustment process when addressing the brethren in Galatia. **“Brothers, if a man is overtaken in a fault, you the spiritual ones restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.”** Gal. 6:1

Here is the use of a metaphor taken from the idea of a skillful surgeon restoring a dislocated limb and putting it back in place. Notice that Paul says it's to be the “spiritual ones” who are to do the restoring.

Those believers who are still carnal, loose in their minds, untested by the Spirit, and not been through the adjusting themselves (i.e. unskillful), will not be able to properly adjust others. Leaders in the Body need to take notice of this, and implement it well. Failure to do so has taken a drastic toll through the years.

Should a person considering themselves to be “spiritual” Paul throws in a warning about pride. His exhortation is addressed to the conscience of each believer as if to say, ‘Before you deal severely with your erring brother, consider your own weakness and susceptibility to temptation first, and only restore him in view of that fact.’ This is a good antidote for spiritual pride. An old saying makes the point rather well: “Satan loves a shining target.”

So far we've looked mainly at the how to adjust others, but now it's time to bring the matter closer to home and take stock of ourselves. In His discourse to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gives this exhortation. **“Therefore you also be ready, for in that hour you think not, the Son of Man comes.”** Mtt. 24:44

The phrase “be ready” (G2092 heteos / hetoimos) means *fitness, adjusted, made ready, accomplished*. It also has an added meaning that is quite striking: *to receive One coming* (Thayer's Bible definitions). Here the Lord Jesus is exhorting in very strong terms, the need for believers to be *adjusted*, and *spiritually and mentally fit*. And notice how this is linked to being aware of the times and seasons relating to His return.

Further on in the same discourse Jesus tells the parable of the Ten Virgins; and notice what He says about the state of those welcomed into the wedding feast: **“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came. And they who were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.”** Mtt. 25:10

Only those who were “ready” went in to the wedding feast! Guess what that English word means in the Greek? The same as in Matthew 24:44, *hetoimos* meaning *fitness, adjusted, made ready, accomplished*.

So we have Jesus warning us to be *adjusted*, for if we don't bend to it, and if we're alive at His Return, we will not be welcomed into His wedding feast. Let that sink in!

Hence we find the disturbing truth that adjusting to truth is not simply something for new believers; it's not just something that needs to happen to those with wrong doctrine or misplaced sympathy for unusual teaching; it's also got something to do with an issue as large and important as being welcomed into the Lamb's wedding banquet!

How vital then is it that we give ourselves over to the adjusting work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. This is not an option. It's a Biblical requirement associated directly with our maturing. Dare we hesitate to not bend to this great adjusting? I think not, and I sincerely

pray not.

Paul saw this as a major component of his ministry, and he made a very bold declaration stating that the joint ministries of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher would continue to exist until the Body came to the **“measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”** (Eph. 4:13).

*Adjusting* to the truth, being *made internally fit* for ministry, *put to rights*, and all the other words that we’ve looked at so far; all these come together when Paul says that individually you and I need this to happen to us. For when that process is underway within us, then the Body corporate, the “Church” will begin to mature. Then and only then. And it will be the ongoing ministry of Ephesians 4:11 that will enhance that maturing.

This stirs me; this excites me; this makes me jealous to be part of that great day; this is what our purpose is to be as the Body **“...with a view to the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the perfecting up of the body of Christ.”** Eph 4:12

“For the perfecting” (πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν). This phrase is only used once in the entire New Testament. In non-Biblical classical Greek writings it referred to the idea of *re-fitting* or *equipping* a ship, or the *re-setting* of a bone. This radical idea of *adjustment* we’ve been looking at is forcefully brought out in the next verse. **“...that we all may come to the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”** Eph. 4:13

You can’t get better than that. This is what the Word tells us the Father wants of us; this is what the Word tells us will actually happen in His timing. Fear not that you might die before that day arrives, for Paul encourages us that **“...we the living who remain at the coming of the Lord will not go before those who have fallen asleep.”** 1 Thess. 4:15

We go together; we arrive together; we are glorified together, as a Body!

Now whether our joint maturing happens all at the same time, or whether it happens to individuals throughout history and accumulates on the Great Day - I don’t know. But logically it would seem that this exhortation by both the Lord Jesus and Paul, indicates that it’s our personal obligation and duty throughout all periods of “church history” to *get ready*, to *be adjusted*, to *be rendered fit*.

May it be so, individually and corporately.