

# Walking Together

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Proof-texting is one of the most prevalent methods of giving validity to many odd interpretations found within the fellowship of many Christians. One such Scripture is Amos 3:3. This text is often employed to justify separation from other believers when there is disagreement over doctrinal interpretations concerning cherished traditions. This is just one of the many passages of Scripture that is frequently abused by many sincere, well-meaning believers.<sup>1</sup> This chapter seeks to examine the context of Amos 3:3 and to review the various authors who rely upon their interpretation of Amos 3:3 to uphold their actions of rejection of other Christians for refusing to conform to the status quo of a particular party line. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), editor and author, is perfectly right when he sets forth his caveat of the art of sermon-making by which Scriptures are tortured to maintain the status quo of splinter groups:

The art of sermon-making, a skill wholly unknown to the new covenant scriptures, has led its practitioners far afield in their ardent pursuit of texts. When one is found which seems to suit the propaganda purpose of the hour, they operate and remove it from the contextual body, and by

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<sup>1</sup>For a classic example of misapplication of Amos 3:3 in order to uphold one's sectarian spirit against other believers is found in the writings of J. A. McNutt. See his essay, "Can We Walk Together," *Firm Foundation* 102, no. 22 (September 24, 1985): 7 [567], where he writes:

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). . . . Where there is no agreement with the will of God, there can be no communion or fellowship with their Lord. . . . Another pertinent question at this point regarding fellowship would be, "How can we walk together with those who are not walking (or living) according to the word of God? . . . It is also clearly stated that, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). . . . Unity is a wonderful thing and much to be desired, but should never be sought by sacrificing God's truth, or by compromise with error.

Another example is from the late Ira Y. Rice, Jr., (1917-2001), who also advanced the same mindset and abuse of Amos 3:3 to give validity to his castigation of Christians who could not subscribe to his odd interpretations attached to many Scriptures. For this illustration, see Ira Y. Rice, Jr., CAN TWO FAITHS POSSIBLY BE ACCEPTABLE? *Contending for the Faith XXVI*, no. 8 (August 1995): 3, where he says, "The merest tyro acquainted with Amos 3:3 should be able to understand that two CANNOT walk together except they be agreed!"

injections of their own intellectual distillate seek to make it develop into a new body of its own. No creation of homiletic fantasy better illustrates this than the use of Amos 3:3 by modern advocates of unity based upon conformity.<sup>2</sup>

## KING JAMES VERSION

The King James Version renders this verse: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (יִדְּוּ יַחְדָּם, 'im--nô·'ā'·dû) unless they have **made an appointment**, Amos 3:3).<sup>3</sup> Surface reading appears to support the assertions by many God-fearing men and women that unless there is agreement, then there can be no fellowship. This Scripture is alluded to in order to substantiate almost every division within the community of the redeemed. For example, the following is a list of problems in which Christians withdraw association: the use of individual communion cups versus the common cup, the employment of wine instead of grape juice, the breaking of the loaf instead of pinching the loaf, the acceptance of the “exception rule” in Matthew 5:32 versus those who reject this particular rule as applicable to the Christian dispensation,<sup>4</sup> the adoption of Sunday school classes versus those who reject the employment of

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<sup>2</sup>Carl Ketcherside, “Except They Be Agreed,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 11 (November 1965): 162-163.

<sup>3</sup>*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

<sup>4</sup>Even though the following citations do not cite Amos 3:3, nevertheless, the mindset for such outlandish behavior is founded on Amos 3:3. When I labored (approximately seventeen years) among these believers, Amos 3:3 was cited to justify separation on many trivial issues. The following is an account of one division that should never have taken place. I was acquainted with all of the men listed (one possible exception is Glen Bray) in the following citation from Paul Nichols, *Fifty Years of Service* (Oakdale CA: Paul Nichols, 1992), 98, where he says:

At the next annual meeting at Sulphur Oklahoma, several brethren met together. Glen Bray, Fred Kirbo [1912-1968] and **Barney Welch** [1915-1992] represented the no exception position. Edwin Morris [1922-2008], Clovis, Don McCord and **Ronny Wade [1936-2020]** represented the exception position—divorce for the cause of fornication. At this meeting it was pointed out to Fred that it was inconsistent for him to be out of fellowship with Edwin [Edwin Morris—1922-2008] and still fellowship those who believed as he did. So Fred withdrew from the rest of us at that time and did not fellowship us until the day he died of a heart attack while in a meeting at Warsaw, Missouri, October 26, 1968, at the age of 56 years.

**Paul Nichols** also cites an example of how Christians in the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement—all of equal devotion to Christ—divided over another issue known as the so-called “order of worship.” Again he captures the parting of the ways by equally godly men, *ibid.*, 90:

Since he [**Homer A. Gay**, 1894-1958] had already taken his stand against the unauthorized practices of the class system and cups on the Lord’s table, it is no wonder when he became concerned when co-editor of the *Old Paths Advocate*, Brother **J. D. Phillips** [1904-1981], began contending for an unvarying set order of worship. Brother Gay did not want to see the unity of the brotherhood disturbed. The battle for truth to gain this unity had been hard fought. He would not stand by and let it be disrupted without expressing opposition. . . . Although the division over the order of worship was extremely regrettable and the brotherhood suffered for it, something had to be done.

Sunday school as an innovation, the use of the instrument in singing versus the rejection of the instrument (acappella), the support of Bible colleges, the support of orphan homes, and so on.<sup>5</sup> This list is almost infinitum.

For Christians who rely on this verse to substantiate their sectarian attitudes toward other believers is based upon isolation of a text out of context. The King James rendering of the passage is misleading, especially if we fail to consult the context. When we attempt to exegete this Scripture, we must always place ourselves into the mind frame of the author and stand upon his threshold and look through his eyes. We must study with precise attention the prophet's language. Where differences of opinion have prevailed for hundreds of years, we must not allow *a priori* (made before or without examination—not supported by factual study) assumptions of what ought to be found in this verse, or what ought not to be found there.

## INDOCTRINATION VERSUS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the examination of any text, the author should be permitted to explain himself. Many interpreters are so full of ideas drawn from past traditions, so impregnated from beliefs of past ages, so indoctrinated from well-known preachers, and so full of desire to find what is not manifestly there that it is impossible to see the text clearly in its historical context. Cedric B. Johnson makes the following succinct observation about presuppositions:

My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms; and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues. . . . Most people are familiar with the idea of “seeing” what you want to see or viewing a situation through “colored glasses.” The assumption is that our perceptions of the real world can be distorted at times.<sup>6</sup>

James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000), pastor and articulate spokesman for the Reformed faith, correctly brings out the obvious implication of Amos 3:3 when he writes: “Amos’ points are quite obvious. If people meet in order to go walking, it is by prior

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<sup>5</sup>See Garland Elkins (1926-2016), “Changing Attitudes Toward Fellowship,” in Bobby Liddell, Editor, *Changes In the Church of Christ*, Nineteenth Annual Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, Florida, June 11-15, 1995 (Pensacola, FL: Austin McGary & Company, 1994), 140, where he goes right to the heart of justifying division among Christians with Amos 3:3:

Are the faithful churches of Christ and the denominations agreed? If not, how can there be fellowship between them? Are the faithful brethren and erring brethren agreed? If not, how can there be fellowship between them? Amos wrote: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). If they are not agreed, how can there be fellowship between them?

<sup>6</sup>Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 42.

arrangement. If they have not agreed to meet, the walk will not take place.”<sup>7</sup> James Luther Mays has correctly observed:

The first seven questions range across happenings, which common experience and outlook would connect self-evidently with another event. When two men are seen making their way across the horizon of Judah’s empty hill country, one knows they could hardly have met except by appointing a time and place (v.3).<sup>8</sup>

Hans Walter Wolff also expresses the concept by the Hebrew word that is translated “agreed” in the KJV: “עָדַי (y‘d) niphal (simple passive) usually means ‘to make an appointment,’ but later connotes ‘to meet (by appointment), to assemble.’”<sup>9</sup> Regarding this same concept, C. F. Keil (1807-1888) writes:

The examples are evidently selected with the view of showing that the utterances of the prophet originate with God. This is obvious enough in vers. 7, 8. The first clause, “Do two men walk together, without having agreed as to their meeting?” (נִוְעָדוּ, *nō‘ad*, to betake one’s self to a place to meet together at an appointed place or an appointed time; compare Job ii. 11, Josh. xi. 5, Neh. vi. 2; not merely to agree together), contains something more than the trivial truth, that two persons do not take a walk together without a previous arrangement. The two who walk together are Jehovah and the prophet (Cyril); not Jehovah and the nation, to which the judgment is predicted.<sup>10</sup>

John H. Hayes, too, has pungently captured the essence of Amos’ use of the rhetorical questions concerning the inevitability of God’s judgment upon the nation of Israel with the following scenario:

The series of questions opens in verse 3 with an interrogative statement which may be seen as a neutral or rather banal way of getting the series going. Only verse 3 is composed of a single question; the others occur in pairs. Since there are seven questions in verses 3-6, one question had to stand alone.

Various translations have been proposed for verse 3, depending upon how one understands the situation envisioned in the question. The translation offered above is the one most widely found but its straightforward meaning—“Can two people walk together unless they meet?”—appears so simplistic that one wonders how it would have functioned to entice an audience’s attention. The verb *hllk* can denote various forms of movement including walking. Similarly, [y‘d] *yud* can mean “meet” but also “designate”, “appoint,” in the sense of making arrangements about something (see Exod.

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<sup>7</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *Minor Prophets*, Two Volumes Complete in One Edition (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), 150.

<sup>8</sup>James Luther Mays, *Amos* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 60.

<sup>9</sup>Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia, Translated by Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, S. Dean McBride, Jr., ed (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 179.

<sup>10</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 Volumes, originally published 1866-91 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 260.

21:8-9). One could thus translate the verse as “Can two people go on a journey together without having made arrangements?”<sup>11</sup>

For Christians to cite Amos 3:3 to justify separation from other believers who disagree with a particular brand of orthodoxy as advanced by certain groups is to abuse Amos 3:3. We must do more than just surface reading if we wish to arrive at a correct application of a particular passage. We must go “behind” the text before we go “in front” of the text. If we start “in front” for our exegetical studies, then we very well may misapply the intent of the author. Just a brief analysis reveals the intent of Amos as he proposes certain rhetorical questions in order to elicit a positive response as to the present status of Israel as she faces God’s judgment.

## ANALYSIS OF AMOS 3:3-8

### Cause and Effect Arguments

The first question by Amos (760 BC) opens in verse three with an implied answer. The first interrogative statement may be seen as a way of initiating the series. Only verse three is composed of a single question—the travelers. On the other hand, the other verses (4-6) occur in pairs: two lions (verse 4ab), two traps (verse 5ab), and two questions to danger (verse 6ab). These analogies are presented to demonstrate the connection between the prophet’s proclamation and the activity of God. In verse 3, we do not notice any element of force involved in the first question. Yet, on the other hand, the next two questions in verse 4 develop the well-known fact of a lion that overpowers another animal. The next two questions in verse 5 surrounds the hunter’s vanquishing of animal prey.

The rhetorical nature of the questions renders the “cause” indisputable. Up to this point (verses 3-5), the cause is always deduced from the effect. Amos is stressing that no event is self-explanatory; there is always a cause for the effect. His adversaries denied that his appearance had anything to do with God’s proclamation. Amos went, as it were, to the beginning of his prophetic ministry in order to establish the grounds for the validity of his calling by Yahweh. In a nutshell, we can say that 3:3-8 is justification for his ministry. In this section, Amos asks seven rhetorical questions and the answers to all of them were “no.” Just a casual reading of the pericope (a selection of Scripture) reveals that Amos puts the effect before the cause. In other words, the cause, in these rhetorical questions, always follows the effect. We might say that for every effect there is a cause.

### Seven Rhetorical Questions

This message of Amos demonstrates the **cause-and-effect** character of his ministry. The prophet puts forth a series of illustrations drawn from the world of nature to make obvious that “God cannot be mocked.” Over seven hundred years after Amos’ ministry, Paul, too, illustrates

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<sup>11</sup>John H. Hayes, *Amos: The Eight-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), 124.

this same principle to the Galatians: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6:7). Amos, through his seven rhetorical questions, proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that God’s judgment is inevitable. Election carries with it responsibility. It is in this vein that Elizabeth Achtemeier (1926-2002), Adjunct Professor of Bible and Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, captures the relevancy of Amos’ penetrating questions to the Christian community today:

That God will judge us for failing to meet the responsibilities of our election should be a sobering thought for the Christian Church, for, like Israel, we, too, have been chosen by God to be a kingdom of priest and a holy nation, that we may declare God’s wonderful deeds to all the world (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Like Israel, we, too, in our redemption have been adopted as sons and daughters of God, and have been allowed to call God “Father” (Gal. 4:4-7). Because of the work of Jesus Christ, which has grafted us into the root of Israel (Rom. 11:17-24), made us citizens of Israel’s commonwealth (Eph. 2:11-12), and allowed us to share the name of “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), we Christians can now claim to be among the elect (cf. Rom. 8:33; 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:10). But as our Lord tells us in Luke 12:48, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”<sup>12</sup>

Amos paints a picture that we can see—every effect has its cause and every cause has its effect. Once more, consider the following rhetorical questions:

- Do two walk together (**effect**) unless they have agreed to do so (**cause**) [3:3]?
- Does a lion roar in the thicket (**effect**) when he has no prey (**cause**)? Does he growl in his den (**effect**) when he has caught nothing (**cause**) [3:4]?
- Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground (**effect**) where no snare has been set (**cause**)? Does a trap spring up from the earth (**effect**) when there is nothing to catch (**cause**) [3:5]?
- When a trumpet sounds in a city (**cause**), do not the people tremble (**effect**)? When disaster comes to a city (**effect**), has not the LORD caused it (**cause**) [3:6]?

As we reflect upon the impact of Amos’s employment of cause-and-effect arguments, perhaps a statement from Carl Ketcherside captures the force of Amos’ arguments: “The divine appointment is that inevitably the sin and its punishment must meet.”<sup>13</sup> With these illustrations, Amos presses the relationship between cause and effect. For Amos, all of the cause-and-effect arguments are self-evident truths, truths acknowledged by all. The cause-and-effect argument in Amos 3:3 is a depiction of two men walking together. His argument, so it seems, is this: The plausibility of two men walking together would not occur unless they had previously made an arrangement (appointment) to do so. Christian writer Leroy Garrett (b. 1918), author and editor, has penned some compelling words that need to be heard:

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<sup>12</sup>Elizabeth Achtemeier (1926-2002), *Minor Prophets*, in the New International Biblical Commentary (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 190.

<sup>13</sup>Carl Ketcherside, “Except They Be Agreed,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 11 (November 1965): 162.

The verse in question is the first of these cause-and-effect steps. Two men walk together (effect) because they have made an appointment—or because they have agreed to meet (cause).

The point being made is that Amos, only a herdsman and farmer, is prophesying (effect) because he has a very good reason—the Lord has spoken, calling him as a prophet (cause). If one can understand that two men will not be meeting in a remote airport terminal unless they have made arrangements, then he would be able to understand that Amos would not be prophesying if the Lord had not called him. A lion does not roar for no reason, nor are people frightened without a cause. Since I am prophesying, it is because the Lord has called me. This is what Amos is saying.<sup>14</sup>

To illustrate the above scenario from Garrett with a personal illustration should help one to grasp rather quickly the teaching of Amos 3:3. In April 1988, I agreed to meet Ervin Waters (1918-2020), who is from Texas, at the airport terminal in Birmingham, AL, on Sunday morning at 8:30am. We met, we talked, and we walked. Thus, our walking together (effect) came about as the result of our appointment previously made (cause). This story illustrates Amos' saying, "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?"<sup>15</sup> This verse has nothing to do with our agreement, which is the way many writers make use of this famous passage.

In spite of the voluminous translations and commentaries, which shed tremendous insight as to the intent of Amos, nevertheless, there are still large numbers of trustworthy believers who still cite Amos 3:3 to justify castigation, censure, ostracism, and removal of the dissident from their fellowship. Even though Amos is quoted by many godly men and women to maintain the purity of the party, this misunderstanding, so it seems, is not a deliberate rejection of God's Word, but rather, this lack of correct comprehension is simply an honest mistake of the heart. Many Christians are so used to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that it is difficult to read the Bible without colored glasses.

The innumerable traditions of the countless splinter groups have made it almost impossible, if not impossible, to read the Word of God accurately. We might also add that this is especially true with religious leaders—elders and preachers. The leaders of the numerous movements (at least twenty-five factions within the Churches of Christ) have a difficult time hearing God correctly. Justo L. Gonzalez, a United Methodist minister born in Cuba, expresses most concisely the necessity of weighing carefully our traditions, past or present. He writes:

Without understanding the past, we are unable to understand ourselves, for in a sense the past still lives in us and influences who we are and how we are and how we understand the Christian message. The notion that we read the New Testament exactly as the early Christians did, without any weight of tradition coloring our interpretation, is an illusion. It is also a dangerous illusion, for it tends to absolutize our interpretation, confusing it with the Word of God. . . . Likewise, if we are to break free

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<sup>14</sup>Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 123.

<sup>15</sup>*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

from an undue weight of tradition, we must begin by understanding what the tradition is, how we came to be where we are, and how particular elements in our past color our view of the present.<sup>16</sup>

## DICTIONARY MEANING OF “AGREED”

### Various Translations of Amos 3:3

Before investigating more fully the unique interpretation placed upon Amos 3:3 by many Christians within the Churches of Christ, it would be beneficial to search more closely the scholars to determine the definition of the word  $\text{אָד}$  ( $y\bar{a} \cdot \check{a}d$ , “agreed”). The sole question of the interpreter of Amos’ famous saying must be the intent of the author. What meaning did he intend to convey by the Hebrew word  $\text{אָד}$ ? The English word *agreed* is from the Hebrew  $\text{אָד}$ , which means: “to fix upon (by agreement or appointment); by impl. To meet (at a stated time) . . . gather (selves, together), meet (together), set (a time).”<sup>17</sup> The basic meaning is to make an “appointment,” not unanimity in understanding every Scripture with exactitude. Amos is dealing with two people making an appointment to walk together.

Sometimes it is helpful to consult other translations in order to observe the particular flavor of a word. For instance, the **New International Version** renders this text: “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” The **New Revised Standard Version** translates the Hebrew: “Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?”<sup>18</sup> The **New Jerusalem Bible** interprets the passage this way: “Do two people travel together unless they have agreed to do so?”<sup>19</sup> One more translation is in order to fully establish the meaning of the original intent of the Hebrew word  $\text{אָד}$  that is translated in the King James Version as “agreed.” The New American Standard Bible reads: “Do two men walk together unless they have **made an appointment?**”<sup>20</sup>

The root  $\text{אָד}$  ( $y\bar{a} \cdot \check{a}d$ ) occurs four times in the book of Exodus and eighteen times in the Old Testament.<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, Busby, and Carr define  $\text{אָד}$  ( $y\bar{a} \cdot \check{a}d$ ) as “to meet at an appointed place” in Exodus 25:22; 29:42, 43;<sup>22</sup> in Joshua 11:5, “to assemble by appointment”;<sup>23</sup> in 2 Samuel 20:5, “to appoint”;<sup>24</sup> and in Amos 3:3, “to meet by appointment.”<sup>25</sup> Also, it is informative to observe what Holladay writes: “agree, have an appointment, Amos 3.2.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Justo L. Gonzalez (b. 1937), *The Story of Christianity*, vol., 1 (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), xvii.

<sup>17</sup>James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, Strong’s number 3259 (New York: Abingdon, 1958), 50.

<sup>18</sup>*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

<sup>19</sup>The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader’s Edition, (New York: Doubleday.) 1990.

<sup>20</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>21</sup>See Terry A. Armstrong, Douglas L. Busby, Cyril F. Carr, *A Reader’s Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, four volumes in One (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 49.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 43, 49.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>26</sup>William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 137.

## Examples of the Use of This Hebrew Root (יָעַד) Word (יָעַד)

An analysis of several Scriptures in which the root יָעַד (יָעַד, yā·'ăḏ), occurs should help one in determining the correct meaning to this particular word (יָעַד, yā·'ăḏ). In the book of Exodus, Moses informs the people of Israel that they were to “Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide (25:17). This ark was then placed in the sanctuary. God in detailing this significance of the ark, said to Moses: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet (יָעַדְנָא [’iw·wā·'ēḏ, future tense] with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites” (Exodus 25:22). Moses employs the Hebrew root יָעַד (יָעַד, yā·'ăḏ), that is utilized by Amos. Then, following these instructions, God also informed Moses that he would meet him at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting:

For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. There I will meet (יָעַדְנָא (’iw·wā·'ēḏ) you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory. (Exodus 29:42-43)

Yet again, we observe the Hebrew root יָעַד used by God is the same word as employed by Amos (3:3). We also notice that as Joshua explains the defeat of the northern kings by the children of Israel, he employs the same root verb (יָעַד, yā·'ăḏ), in his description of the kings joining forces against Israel:

They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. All these kings **joined** (יָעַדְנָא (wāy·yiw·wā·'ăḏw') forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. (Joshua 11:4-5)

These kings assembled by appointment. Thomas Finley, author of an exegetical commentary on Amos, reminds his readers that the Targum (Aramaic version of the Old Testament) renders the verb יָעַד (yā·'ăḏ) in Amos 3:3 with the following translation: “unless they have made an appointment to meet together.”<sup>27</sup> Another scholar, Thomas Edward McComiskey, taught Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, makes the following succinct observation of the verb “walk”:

The first question (v.3) asks whether two can walk together if they have not agreed to do so. The word “walk” is in the imperfect tense in Hebrew, denoting incompleting action. The question is, Is it customary for two to walk together without agreeing to do so? Certainly two people walking side by side would not be doing so only by sheer coincidence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 182.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey, *Amos*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, volume 7, ed., Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 298.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AMOS 3:3

**As we seek to uncover the meaning attached to any particular passage, we should seek to understand the historical background, if possible, of the Scripture(s) in question.** Hopefully, this investigation will shed light on the meaning to attribute to a particular word, especially if an interpretation of the citation depends on the meaning assigned to a specific word. This principle is extremely helpful in seeking to uncover a correct interpretation of Amos 3:3. The historical background should shed some light on the meaning we should designate to the word *agreed* as employed in the KJV.

At the time of the writing of this Book (760 BC), both Israel and Judah still existed as nations. Israel (Northern Kingdom) met its final end in 721 BC by the Assyrians. Yet, Judah (Southern Kingdom) did not completely fall until 586 BC under the power of the Babylonians. At the time of Amos' call to the prophetic office, he was a citizen of Judah, and, yet, he prophesied in the Northern Kingdom. The first verse of Amos, together with 7:10-13, places Amos in the middle of the eighth century (760 BC) with Uzziah, king of Judah (792-740) and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793-798).<sup>29</sup> Jeroboam was fourteen years contemporary with Amaziah and twenty-seven years contemporary with Uzziah, both kings of Judah. Jeroboam's religious leadership, like the first Jeroboam, intentionally encouraged the practices of fertility cults (2 Kings 14:25-25). The social life of the nation was portrayed by adultery, theft, and murder by the government.

Amos disclosed the spiritual corruption under the religious formalism and material prosperity of the time (Amos 5:12, 21). He rebuked the leaders for the deterioration of social justice and morality. Amos, as it were, goes right to the jugular vein of covetousness in order to get the attention of Jeroboam and his leaders. Listen to the prophet as he spells out some of their crimes:

They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.<sup>7</sup> They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. (2:6-7)

Again, listen to him as he enumerates the utter degradation of the society of Israel: "You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground" (5:7); then he adds: "you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth."<sup>11</sup> You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain" (5:10-11). Once more, he calls attention the very core of corruption within the judicial system among its leaders: "For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (5:12).

In Chapter 7, Amos reveals that Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, accused him of raising a conspiracy in the Northern Kingdom. He dismissed Amos as a prophet for hire whom he did not need to take seriously (7:12). Amos responded to this accusation by saying, "I was neither a

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<sup>29</sup>See John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 29-31. The dates adopted from this book are those assigned by Thiele.

prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. <sup>15</sup> But the LORD took me from tending the flock" (7:14-15a). Again, God speaks to Amos and tells him to prophesy against Israel: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (7:15b). Thus, Amos cries out: "Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac'" (7:16).

Beginning with Chapters 1 and 2, Amos proclaims God's vengeance upon Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre (1:9), Edom (1:11), Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:1), Judah (2:4), and Israel (2:6). God accused Judah for rejecting His law and for not keeping His decrees (2:4). God also condemned Israel for its egregious behavior in the area of social injustice (2:6b). The first eight verses of Chapter 3 contain two messages. These messages provide the background and purpose of Amos' activity as a prophet of God to the nations. First, Amos reminds the Israelites that their deliverance out of Egypt was strictly as a result of God's grace (3:1-2). Israel failed to understand that God's grace demanded responsibility on their part in carrying out God's instructions from His law. We can hardly reflect upon God's condemnation of Israel without reflection upon the words of Jesus as he addressed a crowd of several thousand (Luke 12:1) in which He calls attention to this very principle of privilege: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (12:48b).

### **Election Syndrome**

God bestowed upon Israel many privileges: salvation from slavery, special relationship with Himself, a new land flowing with milk and honey, and so on. Not only had God blessed Israel, but He also blessed Judah with the same blessings. God, too, called Judah to serve Him and to represent Him and His holiness to other nations, but Judah failed in their responsibilities to uphold the holiness of God in their day-to-day transactions. Thus God sent Amos to get their attention through the use of cause-and-effect arguments to utterly tear down any defense that Israel and Judah might put forth to try to justify their immoral behavior or ignore the teachings of God. Both nations suffered from what is commonly referred to today as the "election syndrome." In other words, the two nations assumed that their dishonorable behavior did not negate their standing before God.

This kind of reasoning is somewhat on par with the reasoning of many Christians today who advance the notion that since salvation is "once for all," then God will overlook disobedience. Amos says "no" to such foolish thinking. For Amos, one could not reject God's ethical standards without impunity. Amos is saying that when we act in such a way to dishonor God, we can depend on God to take action against such atrocities. How did Amos go about driving home their misconceptions over the so-called "election syndrome"? He did this through cause-and-effect arguments.

All of the arguments were self-evident. Through the employment of cause-and-effect arguments, Amos was able to prepare these two nations for the impending tragedy that was around the corner for Israel (721 BC) and Judah (586 BC). In order to set forth the scenario of destruction, Amos proceeds to lay down a number of arguments in which he sets forth the effect

with the cause behind the effect. Before he announces any further judgment upon the nation of Israel, he seeks to establish his right and duty to prophesy by calling forth a chain-like series of similes drawn from life. Listen to him as he seeks to highlight his prophetic office and to illustrate the inevitable consequences of God's rejection of Israel and Judah:

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? <sup>4</sup> Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing? <sup>5</sup> Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch? <sup>6</sup> When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? <sup>7</sup> Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. <sup>8</sup> The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:3-8)

## UNIQUE INTERPRETATIONS

When we review the various “party” journals within the Churches of Christ, we quickly become cognizant that we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret the traditions handed down to the Christian community. Today, each distinct group (approximately twenty-five) within the Churches of Christ maintains that its beliefs constitutes the “doctrine of Christ,” that is to say, the distinctive teaching of Christ about the specifics in a so-called worship service and organizational structure of the church. Thus, according to each splinter group, to disagree with its own particular interpretation is tantamount to disagreeing with the Word of God itself. In this basic assumption, many identify what has been handed down through the centuries as synonymous with the Scriptures.

In other words, our interpretation and the Word of God are on par with each other. In examining the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3, we must not confuse a tradition from the forefathers with the text itself. Subconsciously, equally godly men and women substitute their interpretation(s) with Holy Scripture, not deliberately, but, nevertheless, this methodology of handling the Scriptures is the same. Many Christians today are so used to reading the Scriptures as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that it is difficult not to substitute the traditions for the Word of God itself. The hand-me-down interpretations from the church fathers make it difficult, if not almost impossible, for many sincere believers to read the Word of God accurately.

We may think that we have found a text (Amos 3:3) that gives credence for a narrow concept of fellowship, but when we apply Amos 3:3 for this purpose, then we are reading into the text our own understanding, or perception. In other words, we are reading into the text our own presuppositions, our own prejudices, our own likes and our dislikes, and so on. **We cease to interpret the text by foisting upon the particular passage our brand of prevailing attitude.** To make the text mean something that the text does not mean is to abuse the text.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1982), 22. This book is extremely important in assisting one in the proper methods of correct interpretation of the Bible.

Once we equate our interpretation with the Word itself, then these traditions are forced upon other believers under the threat of excommunication. The practices of the various divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement have made it almost impossible for us to read the Word of God without spectacles. Many editors, elders, and preachers have difficulty hearing God accurately because of their heritage. On the other hand, there are many editors, elders, and preachers who seek to hear the writings of God, but many of these men and women also come under the scrutiny of the powerful. Today, we dare not question the interpretation, or rationalization, of many editors, elders, or preachers without fear of retaliation. This philosophy is not isolated to one particular faction, or division, within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies. For us to question the status quo is to question the validity of Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

### **Subjective Distortions of Amos 3:3**

A casual look at the various religious journals within the Stone/Campbell Movement reveals subjective distortions of Amos 3:3. Christians continue to cite this Scripture to justify separation, or disconnection, within God's family. If we take the traditional view of this passage, then the question that concerns every believer is: Are there any exceptions to the general rule enunciated by many writers in their application of this passage? We frequently witness Christians walking together in spite of differences within their own fellowship. Even though many divisions within the Churches of Christ utilize this Scripture, nevertheless, we immediately discover that none apply this principle in an absolute sense. Just how do we harmonize our theories of fellowship with the words of Amos?

Again, we must ask the following question: Is the intent of this passage (Amos 3:3) to teach that there must be perfect agreement before walking unitedly? Can individuals walk together without unanimity of agreement? Do we violate the unanimity of agreement when we do not always agree on every interpretation of Scripture? Or do we resist this Scripture when we disagree with others in so-called secular matters? For instance, do husbands and wives walk together, even when they disagree? Can Christians walk together when they do not see every Scripture "eye-to-eye?"

### **Paul Discredits the Traditional Interpretation**

The answer is a resounding "yes." Just a cursory glance at the writings of Paul explodes the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3. **An analysis of Romans 14 and 15, along with 1 Corinthians 8, reveals that Christians are encouraged to work together in spite of differences in many theological areas.** For instance, we should reflect upon the following statements from these two books:

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.  
(Romans 14:1)

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<sup>31</sup>For a more detailed study of this philosophy, see Dallas Burdette, "Where the Scriptures Speak," in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-152. .

Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. (14:3)

Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand (14:4).

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. (14:5)

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (14:10)

We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. <sup>3</sup> For Christ did not please himself. (15:1-2)

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (15:5-6)

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup> Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; <sup>3</sup>but anyone who loves God is known by him. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one. <sup>5</sup> Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—<sup>6</sup> yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (8:4-6)

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. <sup>8</sup> Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. <sup>9</sup> But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. (8:7-9)

These Scriptures, once and for all, nail the coffin shut on the traditional explanation of Amos 3:3. Paul sets forth in these two epistles the necessity of exercising the “spirit of toleration” within the Christian community. He wanted them to walk together in spite of differences. Even those who cite Amos 3:3 to bolster their factious attitude toward Christians who refuse to kowtow (to kneel in token of homage, worship or deep respect) to outlandish interpretations, we quickly observe that they do not follow their own application in an absolute sense. It is self-evident that when writers or teachers quote Amos 3:3 to justify their disruptive spirit, none apply his or her interpretation in an absolute sense.

For example, some do not concede that it is right for Christians to participate in warfare, or to participate in Bible colleges, or to support orphan homes from the so-called congregational

treasury, or to employ individual communion cups, or to participate in the practice of Sunday school, or to allow remarriage for the guilty party in divorce, or to serve leavened bread in the Lord's Supper, or to serve wine in the Lord's Supper, and so on. Yet, in spite of all this diversity, many Christians still walk hand-in-hand with other Christians who do not concur with their particular brand of accepted views.

We speedily detect that we employ a pick-and-choose mentality. In other words, even though countless Christians cite Amos 3:3 to uphold their sectarian attitude toward some believers; nevertheless, this passage is generally interpreted in a relative sense; it all depends on our own concept of orthodoxy. The traditional interpretation turns on the mindset of the person who wants to enforce his or her strange interpretation of Amos 3:3.<sup>32</sup> Yet, we also observe individuals who seek to circumvent their own initial interpretation. Leroy Garrett crisply articulates the inconsistencies advanced by each faction within the Churches of Christ:

Each of our parties circumvents all this by demanding conformity on "the doctrinal issues," meaning of course the peculiar doctrinal stance of that particular sect. They might differ on what others divide over, while others differ on what they divide over, but they make sure that all others line up on what they call the issues or else. Quoting Amos 3:3 of course.<sup>33</sup>

In the early sixties, a close relative of mine justified his separation from me on the basis of Amos 3:3. He advanced the idea that he could not walk me or with others who disagreed with him concerning the issues promoted by his distinctive fellowship of God's people. He cited Amos 3:3 to give credence to his philosophy of departure from me and others. This brother (one cup and non-Sunday school) cited this Scripture against me when I refused to draw lines of fellowship over these issues. In 1998, while visiting his home congregation, I questioned him about the speaker who was conducting a Gospel meeting (Ronny Wade) who held to a different position on the marriage and divorce question than himself. The guest speaker is known for his views on the divorce issue as "the guilty party cannot remarry." On the other hand, the other preacher (Alton Bailey),<sup>34</sup> holds the opposite position. Yet these two godly men, according to Alton, still walk together. Both of these men are sincere and devout Christians. Yet, they do not hold their differences to be a matter of fellowship. We cannot help but wonder why Amos 3:3 does not apply here. There is no rhyme or reason for the loose application they apply to this text.

Sometimes it is very difficult for us to see inconsistencies in our applications of certain Scriptures. As stated above, years earlier (1960s), Alton Bailey (my first cousin by marriage) cited Amos 3:3 to strengthen his claim for his actions against me over Sunday school and

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<sup>32</sup>For an examination on how to apply the principles of interpretation, see Dallas Burdette, "False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, Who Are They?" (D. Min dissertation, Erskine Theological Seminary, 1999), 36-63.

<sup>33</sup>Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 124.

<sup>34</sup>I agree with Alton Bailey (1932-2014) on the belief that the guilty party can remarry. I briefly discussed this with Alton during my visit (10-6-1998) when Ronny Wade (1936-2020) conducted a meeting for the Murphy Ave. Church of Christ in LaGrange, GA.

individual communion cups during a Sunday morning service in Birmingham, AL. Yet, he alluded to this passage as an absolute against me and all others who use individual communion cups and Sunday school, but, on the other hand, he makes concession—and still makes concessions—for Ronny Wade who, at that time, thought that the “guilty party cannot remarry.” We quickly find that these two believers will not absolutize this Scripture in Amos regarding all differences, only those departures that do not uphold the distinctive fellowship of their persuasion that they deem essential for admission into the eternal kingdom of God.

Alton and I were both taught by the same godly man (E. H. Miller, 1909-1989). Both Alton (1932-2014) and I taught the same faulty interpretation for many years. He was just as sincere then about his interpretation as I am about my new understanding today of this frequently misapplied Scripture. Both of us were brought up on the same diet of misapplied Scriptures. It is impossible for us to maintain the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3 in an unconditional sense. **This kind of interpretation has to be taught; we cannot learn this from the text.** This Scripture is wrenched from its context in order to give validity to ungodly actions that violate the prayer of Jesus for unity among His disciples.

Another example of inconsistency occurred about twenty-five years ago when I sought to place membership with one of the local congregations (cups and Sunday school Church of Christ) in Montgomery, AL. I was rejected because of my association with Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and Leroy Garrett (1918-2015). In addition to this objection, the elders could not agree with me on my position concerning the guilty party in a divorce. **Also, I objected to the position that elders are rulers and that religious leaders are infallible interpreters of the Word of God.** This transaction occurred on a Wednesday evening, but on the following Sunday, the pulpit minister, Dabney Philips (1917-1992), cited Amos 3:3 to uphold the elders’ position of rejection.

Yet, this same brother could fellowship Jimmy Allen (1930-2020, 91 years old), professor at Harding University—Church of Christ, who held to a different view concerning the rebaptism controversy.<sup>35</sup> In spite of this disagreement, he held out the right hand of fellowship without citing Amos 3:3. In this scenario, they both walked together, although they were not in agreement on the rebaptism issue. In this particular case, the preacher who spoke against me did respond to Jimmy Allen’s views with the right attitude. Again, Garrett captures the forbearance that is to saturate the life of every believer:

*Forbearance* is a Christian virtue that was urged upon the primitive saints again and again, in such terms as “forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:2), which shows that differences sometimes ran deep. In a congregation where conformity is the rule there is nothing to forbear. Besides, our acceptance of one another is to be on a kind of “as is” basis, with all our foibles and hang-ups, for that was the ground on which Jesus received us—even while we were yet sinners. And so Ro. 15:7: “Receive one another, therefore, as Christ has received you, to the glory of God.” That chapter begins by urging: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failing of the weak, and not to please

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<sup>35</sup>For a detailed study of rebaptism, see Dallas Burdette (b. 1934), “Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 196-235.

ourselves.” The entire 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans lays down principles whereby differences of opinion are to be handled in the congregation.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

3259. **אָד** *yā’ad*: A verb meaning to appoint, to summon, to engage, to agree, to assemble. It also means allotted or appointed time, such as the amount of time David appointed to Amasa [ă-mā’sâ] to assemble the men of Judah (2 Sam. 20:5). This word can also take the meaning of appointing or designating someone to be married (Ex. 21:8, 9). Another meaning is to meet someone at an appointed time. **Amos asked the question, How can two walk together unless they appoint a time at which to meet** (Amos 3:3)?<sup>37</sup>

This chapter is an effort toward making an appointment for God’s children to meet together and to walk together. This in-depth study is not to question the integrity of those who cite Amos 3:3 to maintain their separation from other believers, but rather to try to encourage Christians to go back to the “drawing-board” in order to reexamine the traditions that are so entrenched in the mindset of so many godly men and women. The words of **Jaroslav Pelikan** (1923-2006), leading scholar on the history of Christianity and medieval intellectual history, are to the point:

Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant, discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.<sup>38</sup>

In the nineteenth century, **Friedrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834), German theologian and philosopher, originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: **“Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts.”**<sup>39</sup> Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.<sup>40</sup> Hermeneutics<sup>41</sup> ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis. Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the “here” and the “now.”

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 455.

<sup>38</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

<sup>39</sup>Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, “Hermeneutics,” *NTC’s Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: “The term ‘hermeneutics,’ ... Simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation.” See also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God’s Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, “In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another.”

Having said this, we must never forget that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning. We must reject the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3 not because it is private but because it is wrong. When we abandon the original author, when we usurp his place, this leads to confusion on the part of the interpreter. The author of a text is the determiner of the meaning of his text, not the reader. When we abandon the author, this act "leads an afterlife of its own, totally cut off from the life of its author."<sup>42</sup>

Amos considers his preaching to be the call of God. Since God calls him, he could not refuse to warn Israel of impending destruction through a series of rhetorical questions, questions that all know the answers to. Amos concludes his cause-and-effect arguments by proclaiming the inevitable judgment of God: "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.<sup>8</sup> The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:7-8). To state more clearly, Amos considers his call as an appointment with God. Just as we are not likely to see two men or women walking together without having previously made arrangements to meet, so, Amos argues that he was there as a result of an appointment with God: "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?" (3:3). We must not allow tradition to deaden our minds with strange ideas and ready-made opinions.

We must be open for discussion. Controversy takes for granted that everyone has had experiences which may contribute something of value to the group. Dialogue perceives that we do not grasp the whole truth, but we search, track, and find some part of it. We must not shut the door on this verse (3:3). We must keep the door of dialogue open. What is dialogue? Dialogue, in a nutshell, is seeking truth. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), philosopher and theologian, a man acquainted with dialogue, said, "An angel perceives the truth by simple apprehension, whereas man becomes acquainted with a simple truth by a process from manifold data."<sup>43</sup>

A monopoly (exclusive possession or control) of study has no place in dialogue. Ideas must be thrown back-and-forth. There is give-and-take for every believer. John Heron is correct to affirm: "Facts are worse than useless unless they are accurate. Inaccuracy does not necessarily mean deceitfulness, but may take the form of not being particular to be exact."<sup>44</sup> Again, he aptly stresses the comparison of views: "It is by comparison of views that we reason our way toward truth. We increase the odds of finding the best solution to a problem by considering alternatives."<sup>45</sup>

Our interpretation of a passage of Scripture must be based upon the historical context. What are the facts presented by the author? **Christians should be able to share their understanding of the facts, right or wrong, as they understand, without fear of being "hacked to death" with a verbal sword.** If not hacked to death, at least we must suffer the dread of excommunication, all in the name of Christ. In conclusion, the following quote from

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<sup>42</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in John Heron, "Time to Talk Things Over," *The Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter* 50 (August 1969): 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Walter Rauschenbush (1861-1834), American reformer and influential in the evolution of Higher Criticism, calls attention to the precariousness of every Bible student:

**We see in the Bible what we have been taught to see there.** We drop out great sets of facts from our field of vision. We read other things into the Bible which are not there. . . . If the Bible was not a living power before the Reformation, it was not because the Bible was chained up and forbidden, as we are told, but because **their minds were chained by preconceived ideas**, and when they read, they failed to read.<sup>46</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

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<sup>46</sup>Walter Rauschenbush, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (London: Macmillan Co., 1912), 45.