

The Archimedean Principle

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When the king summons a consultant to find the answer to a vexing problem, the consultant lives with the problem until he finds a proper solution or until he is relieved of the task or his head. Such was the state in which Archimedes found himself when King Hiero II of Syracuse (Sicily) ordered him to determine whether the king's newly commissioned crown was made of pure gold or whether, as the king suspected, it was alloyed with base metal. Naturally, the king stipulated that the crown not be mutilated in any manner.

Archimedes ate, slept, and bathed with the problem, and its consequences were heavy on his mind. While attempting to escape this pressure in a precursor of the European health spa, Archimedes noticed that his bulk displaced the waters of his bath until some spilled over the sides. From this observation he reasoned that he could put the crown in a basin filled with water and measure the amount of water that spilled. He could then repeat the exercise with an equal weight of pure gold. If the water spilled by the crown was either less or more than that spilled by the sample of pure gold, the crown was an alloy.

Archimedes became so excited by his discovery that he jumped from his bath and rushed from the spa, sans clothing, shouting, "Eureka!"

Today when junior high school students test the truth of specific gravity and the principles of buoyancy, they are not led to a Roman bath nor are they instructed to streak, shouting Greek words. They are led to a laboratory and instructed to submerge in water various objects of known weight — and then measure the displacement. The truth about specific gravity is that the weight of the body divided by the weight of an equal bulk of water is *specific gravity*. The evidence for this truth is not found by observing the dress, gait, or vocabulary of men leaving health spas. It is found in the objective testing of the equation:

$$\text{specific gravity} = \frac{\text{weight of body}}{\text{weight of equal bulk of water}}$$

Archimedes became excited and ran when he discovered that he understood the previously existent fact of specific gravity. Obviously he did not get excited and run in order to discover the truth about specific gravity.

So it is in spiritual matters. The test of one's spiritual perception is not in charismatic ventilation nor in the more unrestrained orders of emotional expression, though some persist in the premise that feeling, or the lack of it, is evidence of one's spiritual condition. Those who are spiritually objective believe that truth exists regardless of human emotion or condition. How else could Abraham or Job or Christ prevail in faith?

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded [not on the basis of my present state or condition, but on the more than adequate preexisting evidence] that he is able" (2 Timothy 1:12).

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Spiritual objectivity admits to the Archimedean principle that truth can be exciting and that its revelation and acceptance can evoke emotional response. But objectivity exposes as fallacious the popular current premise that the excitement of running or shouting can generate truth.

Thus, we are led to the question: What monumental truth is yet to be discovered that will fit the description of the circumstances of many running to and fro, of angels flying through the midst of heaven, and of a loud cry going forth in the earth?

Is the relationship between the everlasting gospel and the idea of a pre-advent judgment worth getting excited about? What is the proper tension between law and gospel, between justice and mercy? Are more than catechistic answers required in order to produce an Archimedean understanding and response? Are there consequences to these questions worth our attention? Do we live with the problem as those commissioned of an omnipotent King? Or do we regard these matters of academic, casual, or episodic interest? With what are we preoccupied?

Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Will contemporary man be excited by the effect on his redemption that awaits his discovery of the covenant relationship between the godhead and himself? Will he avail himself of its benefits? Until he perceives these, will not the running, the flying, and the shouting be vanity?