

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1561



Up in the Air – page 3
The Children of God – page 8
Faith is Not Enough – page 14

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Contents

Up in the Air!	3
The Desire to Find Answers	5
The Children of God	8
Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians	11
Faith is Not Enough	14
Bible Teaching about Repentance	16
King Saul	18

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Up in the Air

Newspapers used to run a competition called “Spot the Ball” when a photograph from a soccer match would be featured with the players looking towards the ball. But the ball itself would have been photographically removed and the challenge was to put a cross on the spot where the ball was located, the winner being the person whose cross was nearest the actual location. The ball itself, of course, would always be somewhere up in the air.

Uncertainty

When we now use the expression “*up in the air*”, few people would think it has anything to do with a photographic competition. Instead they would think of something happening, the outcome of which is uncertain and insecure. There are many such things in human life because we are not able to see the future, in the way that God can. But because we are people and not animals, we do have an awareness of the future and even a hope that there might be life after death. The wise king Solomon, who wrote several of the wisdom books of the Old Testament, said this about human perception:

I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 3:10–11).

God has given us a time-limited existence (Ecclesiastes 3 is all about time), but He has also implanted in



humans a sense of the eternal: an awareness that there is more to life than mere existence.

But nobody knows how things will work out from day to day, which is what makes life fascinating and enjoyable. Otherwise we would just be like puppets on a string, going through the motions of making our own choices but actually fulfilling a pre-determined course of action.

Certainty

Yet there are some things that are pre-determined by God and everything is working towards that fulfilment. Take the role of the Jewish nation. More than a thousand years before Christ was born, the Jewish leader Moses foretold how their future would unfold. Warning them against disobeying God by forgetting to keep His commandments, Moses said that disobedience would mean they would lose their land

and become despised vagrants, wherever they went. He foretold suffering and sorrow for the nation and, sadly, that was just how things worked out for them. But other prophets said that God would never forsake His people but would certainly bring them back to the land that God had long before promised to their ancestors:

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. (Ezekiel 36:24).

“I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,” says the Lord (Ezekiel 37:14).

Assured

For millennia that seemed uncertain. Nobody even thought that it was a possibility as Jews were a troublesome and homeless minority and most nations just wanted to exploit them or get them moved on somewhere else. But God’s promises never fail and when the time was right, they returned to their own land, where they now await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ who will, one day, be accepted by them as their long-awaited Messiah. We know that for certain because God has told us that will happen when:

I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a first-born (Zechariah 12:10).

Notice that God speaks of the piercing of Jesus as if He had been pierced: for Jesus was His Son. It was as if He had been the One who was so cruelly treated (see Isaiah 63:9).

How and When?

Bible readers can discover what is going to happen but opinions are divided about the exact sequence of events and their timing. One thing is quite clear, however: that the return of the Jews to “their own land” and the re-conquest of Jerusalem (in 1967) are both vitally important events. For Jesus promised to return when Jerusalem was once more under Jewish control (see Luke 21:24).

Another development which has excited speculation has been the recent expansion of Russia by the annexation of Crimea, and the support now being given to Russian separatists who are apparently trying to get Russia to do the same with the whole of Eastern Ukraine. Western nations seem unable or unwilling to stop this process and the Ukrainian government is understandably afraid of giving Russia a pretext to invade “to protect Russian (speaking) citizens”.

What excites Bible readers is the knowledge that the Bible predicts just such an expansionist role for Russia and its allies when the Lord Jesus returns as King. Already there are indications that the present Russian government has exactly those aspirations: to challenge, to control, to resist and to act regardless of the counsel and opposition of other nations. Just how the present stand-off will work out remains to be seen. At present, it’s all up in the air!

Editor

The Desire to Find Answers

Everybody has questions they want answered. It's one of those things that bring us all together, whoever we are. We like to know, we want to understand, we explore, we evaluate, and we seek knowledge. Yet it's tough to untangle life's big questions, like:

- ❖ Why do we exist?
- ❖ What do we really hope for? and
- ❖ Why do many people have it really tough and others find life easy?

Experience is a hard teacher, because she gives the test first and the lessons later. So we conclude that life is complicated, though we would prefer it to be simple. As it is, every way we turn some issue or other confronts us. It's no wonder that many just try to escape – seeking peace of mind – into the depths of the countryside or elsewhere. And others just decide not to think about such matters and live life day by day, heedless of what might come afterwards – if anything!

Just Surviving

There is something deep inside us that acts as a defence mechanism. We naturally seek to exist; our concern is centred on the next meal, finding a safe place to sleep, having some money in our pocket and protecting our family. This inner drive is common to all life on the planet; it is the way of things: it is natural, instinctive and inbuilt into all life. The way that humans satisfy it is what sets us apart from all other creatures. We have a far greater awareness of life and the awesome capability to comprehend.



How we go about getting fulfilment differs greatly from person to person. Many people aspire to greatness, for example, but only the few achieve it –

- ❖ famous sports champions,
- ❖ business leaders,
- ❖ war heroes,
- ❖ wise investors,
- ❖ world leaders.

These people also acquire riches as well as greatness. There is a gulf between them and people who sleep rough in the street, and the difference can be hard to explain. All of us have the same basic aptitudes, yet we harness them in quite differing ways. And we are developed by the experiences we share and the environment in which we grow up – whether on a pacific island or a busy city.

Constantly Learning

From our birth to our death our brains are constantly receiving and gaining input. If we think of it in computing terms, the brain is like a super computer which assimilates all this

information during the course of our lives. As the years pass, more and more levels of input feed the mind and this “experience” is exhibited through our actions, words and instincts. The potency of this constant learning capability when combined with background, ethnicity, parents, experiences, intelligence, environment and gene history shapes our characters. That is what makes you what you are. No wonder the Psalmist said:

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well (Psalm 139:14).

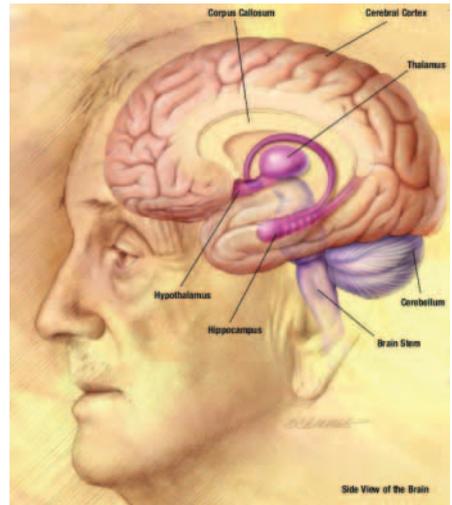
It is the case, however, that we apply what our minds have acquired in many different ways. We often close our minds to new ideas which conflict with what we have learned. We tend to come with pre-conceptions into every new situation and rely on the same mental tools. Of course, we can adapt to change but as we get older this seems to become more challenging. Look, for instance, how the young readily embrace new things; but give them a slide rule and they are lost!

Finding what is Best

Having been given the privilege of life, we make of it what we can and we want answers that satisfy us. If we think deeply, it is not surprising that we ask these questions:

- ❖ Why do we exist?
- ❖ What hope is there?
- ❖ What is the purpose to our lives?

Where do we go to find answers – Wikipedia, Facebook friends, the internet? How about the Bible? It has been around far longer than any other reference book. It describes where we



came from, where the world is going and what to expect our lives to be like. It provides a tangible hope and tells us how God will transform this sorry world into a perfect place to live; releasing it from the depressing cycle of conflict in all its ugly forms. God’s invitation to this future perfect world is free, no strings attached.

There is no catch. God doesn’t work like that or think like that. He simply doesn’t want anyone to miss out on his offer of a perfect life in his never-ending kingdom. All He asks for in return is that we alter our lives to reflect the standards that He requires. We must stop living in a wholly self-centred way but must learn to put absolute trust in Him. It’s His way or no way.

God’s Thoughts

God’s standards are not arduous. The only issue is that human thinking is never the same as God’s thinking and we need to learn, from the Bible, how God views human life and the life to come. This conflict between human and divine thinking takes some

working out in life. The apostle Paul became a fervent follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this is what he said:

I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice ... I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Romans 7:18–25).

Transformation!

This glimpse into Paul's inner struggle tells us that although Paul had accepted God into his life he could not entirely get the old way of thinking out of his head. It takes time for us to replace our prejudices and the way that the world thinks with the message that comes from God, in His Word. A little later in the same letter, the apostle offers this advice:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).

This is a tough call as it makes us think twice in every circumstance we find ourselves in and starts to lead us towards a single-minded outcome – one in which we put the things of God foremost and learn to practise some self-control. This is what the Bible

describes as being a disciple, a dedicated follower of Jesus who made it his life's mission to follow God's purpose. He succeeded, with his Father's help and so can we. But we need to come to God by learning about Jesus and seeking to follow his example. Jesus said:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

By all means weigh up the cost of becoming a disciple, but don't stop there. Weigh up the consequences of not becoming one and you will soon realise there is only one sensible course to follow.

Think about the road you are now on. It leads to a dead end – literally – life will cease and your memory will be forgotten. The other road – God's Way – leads into endless life and promises an idyllic existence in a perfect world. Having untangled life's big questions, grasp hold of what God has promised and progress through life knowing you have a clear vision of perfection.

David Bilton

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The Children of God

*In an earlier article, **John Carter** explained that God has manifested or revealed Himself through angels who were given divine authority and who spoke for God, sometimes in His name. Now he explains what will happen with believers who become members of God's family.*

Equal to the Angels

Jesus spoke of the children of God who would be restored to life at his return by the resurrection of the dead. These, he said, can die no more for they would be *"equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection"* (Luke 20:36).

Such will be a new order of immortal beings who will take charge of the world's affairs and rule the world instead of the angels who have been discharging this duty until the present time. The Lord Jesus and his brothers and sisters will be the rulers.

The difference in the form of their control will lie in this, that the angelic direction hitherto has been an invisible rule, providentially applied. In the Age to come the rule of the Lord Jesus and his associates will be visibly and actively enforced in the eyes of all the world, and there will be no mistaking that manifestation of Divine Power in the earth.

This is the theme of Bible revelation. To go back to the roots of the matter we shall have to turn to Genesis chapter 3, where, after the transgression of man, when he was driven out of Eden, we are told this:

He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24).

God caused the Cherubim to dwell, or tabernacle. They were angelic beings and their duty was not merely to prevent Adam having access to the tree of life; but also to preserve the way to it, in giving to Adam the knowledge of the way so that he, who was death-stricken as a result of disobedience to God's law, might at last attain to life and be made like unto those angelic beings with whom he was familiar.

Good Things to Come

This revelation — that some of Adam's descendants would attain to equality with the angels — is unfolded in succeeding pages of the Bible. As the angels are spoken of as Cherubim, so we find in the types of the Law of Moses, that Cherubim are introduced as symbols of this idea of God-manifestation through an order of beings of Adamic origin.

Everything pertaining to the Law of Moses — the Tabernacle and all its appurtenances and the sacrifices in association with it — were all patterns of things to come. The letter to the Hebrews explains this:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect (Hebrews 10:1).

The cherubic figures embroidered on the curtains and the veil, and the figures upon the mercy seat, were all indications of the fact that God would be manifested through persons foreshadowed by these various features of the Mosaic type.

- ❖ In the vision of Isaiah (chapter 6) in which, as John tells us (John 12:41), Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus, we see the throne of God established on earth. The cherubic figures associated with it are the basis of the symbolism.
- ❖ The same idea is embodied in the first chapter of Ezekiel where again we have a vision of the throne of God and the new order of rulers to be established in the day of the Lord's return.
- ❖ In the book of Daniel (10:5,6) other features appear, and the matter is brought to a focus in the book of Revelation (chapter 4), where the symbols of these chapters in the Old Testament are all combined.

To follow these things up in this article is impossible. They can be understood by patiently pursuing the hints that have been given, reading the chapters carefully and noticing how they are introduced in the book of Revelation, where the explanation is given that these symbols represent the Redeemed, who praise the Lord, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9–10).

There these symbols of God-manifestation are identified with those who will be made equal to the angels, whom John in vision sees exalted in the earth.

Many Sons to Glory

It is evident that God has a wonderful purpose with those members of the human race who will respond to His invitation. The apostle Paul speaks of it in this way:

*For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, **in bringing many sons to glory**, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason he is not ashamed to call them brethren (Hebrews 2:10–11).*

God is bringing many sons to glory, and to do that He has made the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering. Jesus is the one who sanctifies. The many sons are those who are sanctified, and they are all "of one," – of one Father – and because they are all of one Father, all are sons of God. Therefore Jesus is "not ashamed to call them brethren." Here, of course, the term "brethren" means "brothers and sisters" as it does in most places in Scripture.

Paul then cites three passages from the Old Testament which show that the Redeemer and those who are redeemed by him are brethren, before adding:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14).

The Redeemer, who is the Son of God, partook of our nature in order that he might destroy that which has the power of death, and deliver from death all the redeemed. As the apostle says later in Hebrews:

*Now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared **to put away sin** by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26).*

The Abolition of Death

The necessity for the birth of the Son of God is to be found in the weak mortal nature which man possesses because of sin. The basic elements of it are really very simple:

- ❖ Man was placed under law at the beginning, for the development of character.
- ❖ He disobeyed the law and God said he must die, and, passing sentence of death upon him, God said, “dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).
- ❖ Man is in a position in which he is unable to redeem himself, because all who are descendants of Adam are partakers of his death-stricken nature, with such an inheritance of evil that it is beyond their power to live a life of righteousness, and all alike are sinners and all heirs of death.
- ❖ It is beyond man’s ability to destroy the power of death, and unless God helps man, all must be swept away into the tomb.

From the time of the transgression God revealed that He would help man, yet in a way that was not contrary to His own principles or His own character. He made promises at the beginning that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent in the head, while the seed should be bruised in the heel. To the serpent he said:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

This is the first gospel, the first promise concerning One through whom death was to be abolished, but who would suffer death in the process. The seed of the woman (no human father being involved) would be Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we shall see, in every one of the important promises unfolded in the Old Testament Scriptures we find a place given to this essential fact: that the One through whom God is working out His purposes, would be His Son.

That the Son would be the long-promised seed of the woman (not of the man) is confirmed in the New Testament when the apostle Paul declares:

*When we were children, (we) were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, **God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,** (Galatians 4:3–4).*

John Carter

(To be continued)

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

In the letter Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth known to us as 1 Corinthians, the apostle dealt with lots of problems they were having and answered many questions they had asked. The letter concludes with a long explanation about the importance of resurrection in the purpose of God and some personal details.

Now **David Pearce** explains the contents of another letter the apostle wrote, in which he tells us a lot about his personal experiences.

Uncertain Reaction

It is likely that the second letter to the Corinthian believers followed soon after the first. Having sent off his missive, containing some pretty plain speaking, Paul was left worrying what the effect would be.

- ❖ Would the Corinthians take his counsel to heart, and amend their ways?
- ❖ Or would they be offended, and turn their backs on him?

There was only one way to find out, and that was to send a messenger to Corinth from Ephesus. Titus was chosen for this role, which would call for great diplomacy.

Having sent him off, Paul was in an agony of suspense. If only there had been broadband connections, or even text messaging! But these were far off in the future. After a while he tired of waiting for Titus to return with the news, and decided to leave Ephesus in the company of Timothy, his young assistant, and find out for himself. He travelled north to Troas, and found many potential converts there (see 2 Corinthians 2:12,13).

But he shut his eyes to the opportunity to preach, and pressed on



anti-clockwise towards Philippi and Greece. At some point he met up with Titus who was travelling in the opposite direction (probably on same Roman road). It was a thrilling meeting.

Paul was greatly relieved to find that the Corinthians still loved him, and had taken the actions he recommended. But Titus reported there were some who questioned the apostle's authority, and claimed they were apostles just as much as he was.

They particularly criticised his decision to visit Macedonia in the north of Greece before coming to see them. They had expected he would sail directly to Corinth from Ephesus, as he had promised. So Paul sends long-suffering Titus back again to Corinth with a second letter to put matters straight. That is the background to the Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Biographical Detail

Paul begins by describing the relentless persecution he had endured at Ephesus from the Jewish leaders. They had tried by fair means and foul to stop him preaching. At times he had narrowly escaped death. Then he deals with their criticism of his change of plan. He had decided to delay his coming, he said, not because he was the kind of man you could not trust to do what he said, but to allow extra time for his first letter to take effect.

He was glad they had carried out his recommendations, and that they had ejected the immoral brother from the community. As he had heard from Titus that the sinner had now repented, it was their duty, the apostle explained, to receive him back and forgive him.

Letters of Recommendation

Paul's detractors in Corinth had the affrontery to suggest that on his next visit he should bring a formal letter of recommendation with him from Ephesus. This hurt. Surely the Corinthian brothers and sisters were a living testimonial to his claim to be an apostle! In a lyrical passage he criticizes the religious Jews (he had been one himself), who venerated the Ten Commandments and thought they

were permanent.

His work, says the apostle, was to write the good news about Jesus, not on tablets of stone, but on to men's hearts. The Law of Moses admittedly had a glory that could dazzle its readers, like Moses' face after he went into the Tabernacle. But an even brighter glory had now been revealed in the face of Jesus.

The gospel was a brilliant light, sweeping away the darkness of Sin. Sadly, the god of this world (Mammon, or riches) too often blinded the eyes of unbelievers, and left them in the dark. But he must press on, he said, knowing that everything in this life is temporary, and his reward would come at the Judgment seat of Christ.

Suffering for Christ

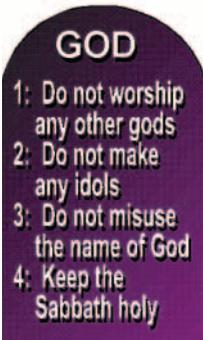
He then reminds them what it had cost him to bring the gospel to them:

In all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings ... (2 Corinthians 6:4-5).

Surely they could see he was a genuine apostle, in that he was suffering so much for the sake of the gospel?

The Jerusalem Fund

In chapters eight and nine Paul returns to the subject of the great Collection for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The Macedonians, with whom he was staying as he wrote the letter, had already saved up a generous donation. The Corinthians had promised a large sum too. They should start saving now, he says, so that they will not have to rush round when he comes. In an important passage about



Christian giving, he insists that God rewards a generous giver, and they would not lose out by being generous.

Paul's Detractors

In conclusion, he deals with his detractors at Corinth. He is too polite to name them. But with their attempts to find fault with him they were undermining his authority, just as the serpent deceived Eve into thinking she should listen to him, not to God. They boasted of their credentials, these super apostles, especially their descent from Abraham.

But if they wanted a contest, he could show his superiority, not by human qualifications, but by the things he had endured for the sake of the gospel. Which of these loud-mouthed boasters had gone off into the unknown for no reward other than the satisfaction of saving men and women from eternal death? Once more he lists some of his adventures:

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths

often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:23–28).

This summary puts us to shame. How great was this man, for whom to live was to live for Christ his Master, and to die was to rest until he saw his face! We must try to follow his example.

David M Pearce

Paul's Experiences

When we read the catalogue of all that Paul had endured, the one thing that must strike us is how little we know about him. When he wrote this second letter, he was in Ephesus. That is to say, we have reached only as far as chapter 19 in the book of the Acts of the Apostles; and, if we try to check this catalogue of endurance (in chapter 11) against the narrative of that book, we find that not one-quarter of it is there.

We see that Paul was an even greater man than perhaps we thought, for Acts merely skims the surface of what he did and put up with.

William Barclay: The Letters to the Corinthians

Faith is Not Enough

Eli had chosen his new car carefully, as he especially wanted one that was reliable. The mechanics had told him “Check the oil, water, and tyres regularly and you should have no problems”.

Eli had great confidence in his car. However, he ignored the advice and even took no notice when a warning light showed on the dashboard. The oil was low and soon after this the engine was damaged. His car became unusable. He had been confident that the car’s reputation was sufficient and had failed to follow important instructions. He only had himself to blame.

Sadly, this is not an uncommon approach to life. As one of the proverbs says:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Proverbs 14:12).

In other words, believing you are right does not make you right. Many people have a very strong conviction that they are ‘saved’ by God, but – like Eli – they may be deluded.

Faith can be dead

Firstly, ‘faith’ on its own is worthless, because it is not proper faith. The apostle James makes this clear.

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works (James 2:17-18); and

Faith without works is dead (James 2:20).



Hebrews chapter 11 lists people deemed ‘faithful’ by God, and in every case this is evidenced by their having done something consistent with their faith. In John chapter 8 there is a discourse between Jesus and the Jews who argue that they are the descendants of faithful Abraham. Jesus retorts:

If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham (John 8:39).

Later, Jesus says to his disciples:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love (John 15:10).

The gospels and New Testament letters are full of instructions about how the faithful disciple should strive to obey God and live in a Christ-like manner. While we can never earn salvation, which is an undeserved gift of God (Romans 6:23), we can forfeit it by not trying to be obedient.

Jesus says that unless we are born again (the first step of which is baptism) we cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

❖ Paul compares the believer’s battle against human nature with a

soldier preparing for battle (Ephesians 6:13-18).

In this letter the believers are described as ‘saints’ – holy ones. But such saints can be unfaithful and disobedient people will be rejected by Jesus when he comes (Matthew 25: 41-46).

Believe the truth

Secondly, faith determines actions, so it is critically important to have the correct faith. The Pharisees had a strong faith and were very zealous, but Jesus described them as ‘fools’ and ‘hypocrites’ despite their dedication (Matthew 23, especially verse 15).

In the time of Jesus the Jews mistakenly believed and argued that they were protected by God because they were descendants of Abraham. This was not what God had said. The Law of Moses made it clear that divine protection was conditional on their obedience (Deuteronomy 28).

This was not a new mistake. In the days of the prophet Jeremiah the Jews in the southern tribes had become so disobedient that God warned them, through Jeremiah, that they were to be taken out of their land into captivity in Babylon. The princes and false prophets refused to believe Jeremiah, ignored the warnings, and treated him dreadfully. The people believed that because the temple in Jerusalem was ‘God’s house’ then He would never destroy it, but Jeremiah judged these as ‘lying words’ (chapter 7:1-14).

False prophets kept contradicting Jeremiah, saying that God had promised peace (chapter 23:16-17). Moreover, some of the Jews who had mixed worship of the true God with worshipping the ‘queen of heaven’ (strictly forbidden under God’s laws),

argued that this false worship did them more good than worshipping God, saying:

“For then we had plenty of food, were well off, and saw no trouble. But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by famine” (Jeremiah 44:17-18).

Of course, Jeremiah’s words came true. Jerusalem was captured and the nation went into captivity in Babylon.

What about Us?

Faith is absolutely essential but is not, in itself, enough. Eli believed that his car was problem-free. By not following the maker’s instructions, and even a warning, his faith was unfounded. Similarly, blind faith that we are ‘saved’ by God because God loves us all and wants us to live forever, is pure fiction. God’s Word the Bible is utterly dependable, and God always keeps His promises.

But God’s promises involve conditions and judgements as well as giving us a true and certain hope. Even receiving God’s blessings like peace, good health and food does not imply that He is pleased with the way we are living. As in Jeremiah’s day, there are many false teachers and we cannot afford to follow them.

It is a matter of life and death to establish, from the Bible, precisely what God has promised and what He asks us to do. It is then up to us to believe Him and to live accordingly.

Anna Hart

Bible Teaching about Repentance

The worst sin ever committed was the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus – God's own Son. Yet God wants to forgive even that, and Jesus himself prayed *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (Luke 23:34).

Israel: God's Vineyard

In a parable (a story with a spiritual meaning), Jesus foretold what was going to happen to the nation of Israel (Matthew 21:33-43). He compared God to a landowner who let a farm out to tenants (meaning the Jewish nation). It was harvest time, so he sent a succession of messengers (meaning the Prophets) to collect the rent (meaning obedience to His law), but the tenants rejected the messengers and killed some of them.



At last the Landowner sent his son (meaning Jesus), but they treated him even worse than the others and killed him too. As a result, said Jesus, the landowner *"will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons"* (Matthew 21:41).

In case the hearers had not understood the teaching of the parable, this explanation was then given:

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (21:43).

The Jewish nation, who had been God's special nation, were in danger of losing their special position as the custodians of God's Kingdom and the privilege would pass to all those people who were prepared to follow Jesus, whether they were Jews or not.

Just What Happened

The parable came true. The Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to the Romans and had him crucified. Then about 40 years later the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and hundreds of thousands of Jews did indeed die 'miserable deaths'. Wonderfully, as God had promised in Psalm 16, Jesus did not remain in the grave. The power of God raised him to immortal life, and the people who had killed him were offered the hope of forgiveness. About six weeks after Jesus' death, his apostle Peter appealed to a huge crowd of men and women in Jerusalem:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the

apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

That day about 3,000 people accepted Peter’s message, repented, were baptized, and were forgiven for their rejection of Jesus (Acts 2:36-38).

Taking God at His Word

Although we were not in the crowd that shouted for Jesus to be killed, we sin in other ways, and everyone who has not believed and obeyed the apostles’ teaching is guilty before God, as those Jews in Jerusalem were. The apostle John wrote:

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10).

Even we human beings are hurt and angry when people refuse to believe us, or admit that they have wronged us, so we can understand what an insult it is to the Creator when men and women refuse to believe Him, and will not admit that they are wrong. God is deserving of our utmost respect and reverence. An Old Testament prophet once rebuked his hearers thus:

“A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?” Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name (Malachi 1:6).

Like so many religious people nowadays, Malachi’s contemporaries thought that God was pleased with ceremonies, and they did what they

thought He wanted in the cheapest way they could. They were so wrong!

“Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?” says the Lord of hosts. “But now entreat God’s favour, that He may be gracious to us” (Malachi 1:8–9).

What God asks of us is that we realize, truly and deeply, how wrong many of our thoughts, words and actions are; that we are genuinely sorry about them; and that we repent. The Bible word ‘repent’ means more than saying sorry, or even being truly sorry; it means ‘a change of mind’ – thinking differently from the way we did before and really wanting to go in a new direction, trying to please God in all that we say and think and do. In modern English we would say that it means having ‘a different mind-set’ whereby our motivation is focussed on pleasing God rather than ourselves.

God’s Response

The prophet Malachi goes on to say that it is when we respond to God’s invitation, He will abundantly bless us:

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him (Malachi 3:16–18).

John Woodall

King Saul

Saul had no expectation of being king for, in his early years, the nation of Israel had no king. For years they had been ruled by a succession of Judges, some of whom ruled only part of the land.

The last of these was Samuel the prophet, who had done much to lead his people back to the ways of God. Unfortunately Samuel's sons had not followed his ways, so now the people demanded a king – to be like the nations around them.

Samuel felt rejected, but God told him that really He was the one who had been rejected. Nevertheless the first king of Israel really looked the part, for King Saul is described like this: *“When he stood among the people he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward”* (1 Samuel 10:23).

Saul's Early Days

Samuel had anointed Saul as king but when it came time to show him to the nation Saul was nowhere to be seen. He had hidden himself *“among the equipment”*. Apparently he did not feel able, or was bashful about his appointment.

After that unusual start, Saul's first real act as King showed a good sense of leadership. The people of Israel were being attacked by the Ammonites who were encamped at Jabesh Gilead. Saul took decisive action and removed the Ammonite threat. Some of his followers wanted to take vengeance on those subjects who had not been enthusiastic when Saul was made king, but Saul would have none of this.

Any act of retribution at this would be only divisive and destructive and would achieve nothing. He said:

Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel (1 Samuel 11:13).

This diplomatic response united the nation, for the twelve tribes often behaved as though they were twelve separate units.

So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they made sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly (1 Samuel 11:15).

Saul and Samuel

This high point was not destined to recur and soon things began to go badly wrong. Saul was due to meet Samuel at Gilgal for a sacrifice, but although Saul and the people arrived Samuel was delayed. With no way of knowing how long it would be before Samuel would arrive, and with people beginning to abandon him, Saul decided to offer the sacrifices himself. He should have known that only priests were allowed to offer sacrifices. This structural separation between priesthood and kingship was to be maintained in Israel until the coming of the Lord Jesus – who is both king and priest.

Samuel arrived just as Saul was making the sacrifice, and he was roundly condemned for what he had done:

Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you" (1 Samuel 13:13–14).

From this point on Saul's grip on the kingdom became weaker and weaker. The people of Israel were to learn that there were qualities which were more important in a king than simply appearance. Saul may have looked the part, but he was unable to be the King the nation needed.

One incident shows this very well. Saul's son, Jonathan, acted very bravely, but perhaps without the caution which might have been expected in the king's son. Saul had decreed that none of his men should eat whilst the battle was in progress; they were to wait until it was over and won. Jonathan however had taken a little honey, and as a result he was energized whilst the rest of the army had become weary.

Saul discovered this and sentenced Jonathan to be killed for going against his oath. But there was an outcry amongst the people, and he was spared. Saul lost face with his family and the people he was supposed to lead. To live like a king you need to behave like a king, and Saul did not do that. He was far too inconsistent and had no real relationship with God.

Saul and David

Young David now appeared on the scene, killing the giant Goliath.

Goliath, the Philistine champion, had been shouting out his invitations to the Israelite army, but none of Saul's soldiers had taken up the challenge. None of them could face this impressive Philistine who was about three metres tall. Even with all their armour and weaponry, the soldiers in Saul's army felt the odds were just too great.

David, who had come to visit his older brothers, who were in the army, took up the challenge. With only a smooth stone washed by the brook and his shepherd's sling, David felled Goliath. Already anointed by Samuel as Saul's replacement, David began to rise in popularity as Saul's popularity declined. God was controlling events to bring an end to Saul's reign and to replace him with David.

Tragic End

After many pointless excursions, Saul died by his own hand, having been gravely wounded by the Philistines in battle. David grieved for Saul and for Jonathan who was killed at the same time.

'Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. ... How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished' (2 Samuel 1:23,27).

The tragedy of that lament is that David was able to say nothing about Saul's relationship with God, because it didn't exist. This critical absence made him unable to live like a king. If we want to live like a king, having a relationship with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, is our first and foremost need.

Mark Sheppard

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