

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Message to the Modern World (p.3)

Introduction to the Acts (p.9)

Why did Jesus Have to Die? (p.13)

A monthly magazine written and 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 mankind; 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.

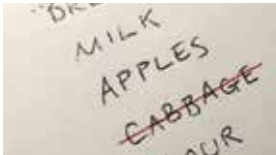
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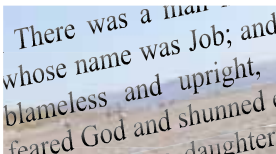
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The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity—Number 248352

Message to the Modern World

THE FRONT COVER shows a ruined temple, which many people believe to be the most perfect building in the world. It's the Parthenon in Athens. It's not very big and it looks quite simple. But one of the secrets of its extraordinary beauty is the highly sophisticated system of 'optical correction' which is built into its every part.

It's said that there are no straight lines in the Parthenon. The columns bulge very slightly in the middle, because if they didn't they'd look too thin. All the 69 columns are leaning very slightly inwards, because if they were absolutely vertical they'd look as though they're leaning out; the base and the lintels are very slightly bowed, so they look straight. The design of this simple building shows astonishing geometrical expertise. Not to mention the technical brilliance of the stone carving throughout, which matches in quality anything that could be produced even with today's technology.

The Speech on Mars Hill

The Parthenon was already 500 years old when the apostle Paul gave his speech in its shadow, which is recorded in Acts chapter 17.

Paul had arrived in the magnificent city of Athens, and been disturbed by the fact that it was filled with shrines and temples

to all kinds of gods. As was his custom, he had set about preaching the Gospel. Athens was a place where people liked hearing new ideas, so it wasn't long before he was summoned to the Areopagus—the ancient court where the city's leaders could hear what he had to say.

Paul got straight to the point:

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything (Acts 17:24–25).

This was a direct affront to the culture of Athens, where for centuries many of the best craftsmen in the world had dedicated their lives to creating all kinds of art and architecture to please its many gods. Paul went on:

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising (v. 29).

The Parthenon was the temple of the city's principal goddess, Athena, whose huge ivory and gold statue sat in splendour in its inner sanctum, and Paul had just dismissed her and all her fellow gods as frauds. This was outrageous. Possibly there was indignant muttering at this point in the audience, but they let him continue:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (v. 30–31).

The Parthenon and the other magnificent edifices of Athens had been built during the hey-day of Greek civilisation, when in many ways the foundations were laid for the modern world. It was the Greeks who invented democracy, logic, and the modern scientific method; the Greeks produced some of the finest philosophers, artists and writers the world has ever seen. Paul dismissed all this as ‘times of ignorance’. When they were doing all this, they didn’t know any better. However, now Paul had arrived and he was preaching the Gospel to them, so they must lay it all aside and sit up and take notice of what really matters.

The Message

Paul’s message to them was this: they must repent—that is, acknowledge that the lives they were leading were wrong in God’s eyes, and turn around. Why? Because there will be a Judgement, in which they will answer for what they have done with their lives. How could they know this was true? Because Jesus Christ was risen from the dead.

You could call this a summary of the Gospel which Paul and his fellow apostles taught: the reality of the resurrection of Christ, the certainty of his return to establish his

Kingdom, and the urgency of the call to action which results from this.

What was the reaction of Paul’s audience?

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed (v. 32–34).

No doubt we only have a summary here of the discussion that went on that day in the Areopagus. There were a few who recognised the truth of what he said, and acted on it. Most didn’t want to know. And down through the centuries this has generally been the response to the preaching of the Gospel.

The 21st Century is very much like ancient Greece in some respects. It is sophisticated, clever, very proud of itself, and filled with all kinds of ‘idols’—that is, objects and pleasures to which people devote themselves.



The message Paul gave to the Athenians is as urgent today as it was then: God *“commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness”*.

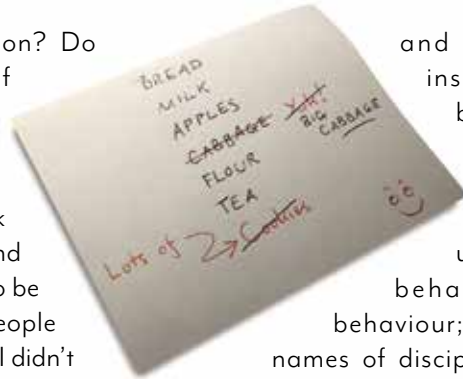
Lists

ARE YOU a list person? Do you organise yourself with the help of a list? Many of us are, and because we like to plan, we may think about the day ahead and then write a list of jobs to be done, places to visit, people to contact, and so on. If I didn't have a list I might waste half the day wandering around, wondering what to do and when to do it. It's just the way some of us are programmed.

In this way, we 'list writers' can keep control of our lives and the things we need to do and the things we want to do (which may not always be the same thing). I'm sure, if you take a moment to think about it, we all keep a list of some sort or another. For example, you would not go food shopping without first having thought about what you need to buy, even if you haven't written the list down.

Now, the Bible is full of lists. It starts off with a list, the order of the days of creation as told in Genesis chapter 1.

The New Testament starts with a list too in Matthew chapter 1, the genealogy of the Lord Jesus. And throughout the Bible are many more lists: more genealogies; materials required for buildings



and clothing; musical instruments; foods to be avoided; foods suitable for eating; sacrifices to be offered to God; unacceptable behaviour; acceptable behaviour; names of children; names of disciples; and now there's another list!

There's one list in the Bible I'd like us to look at more closely and this is in Galatians chapter 5.

Actually there are two lists in this chapter: the first is in verses 19–21 and is a list of things that are sinful which the Apostle Paul warns us not to develop, as those who do them will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The second list is in verses 22–23, and Paul calls it 'the fruit of the Spirit'.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Against all these things 'there is no law'. In other words, we won't be doing anything wrong if we can put them into practice.

But how do we do these things?

● Love

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Believers are loved by God and the Lord Jesus, and must respond to this love by the way they act towards others.

● Joy

When we have love for God and His Word the Bible, then we will have joy because we know that He is in control of this world and will send His son to make it right.

But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy (1 Peter 4:13).

● Peace

Belief in this future Kingdom of God, ruled over by the Lord Jesus, will give us peace in our hearts, at a time when we don't see much peace in the world around us. The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Gentile believers in Rome:

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

● Longsuffering

It's hard to wait for this promised time, but believers need to show patience (that is, longsuffering) and use the time to tell others about the hope they have. Patience is a quality that many of us find hard to achieve at times, but James, the Lord Jesus' brother, gave this analogy to make his point:

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:7-8).

● Kindness

By telling others of the Lord's second coming, and in many other ways, we can show kindness towards not only our friends, but to all those we come into contact with. This advice also comes from the pen of the Apostle Paul:

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

● Goodness

To be 'good' in the eyes of God, which means we will try to keep His commands rather than follow our own selfish desires. The Psalmist declares:

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments... He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man deals graciously

and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion... His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD (Psalm 112:1–7).

Faithfulness

We can try to be faithful by wanting to learn more about God and the Lord Jesus and trusting what is written in the Bible. Hebrews 11 is commonly called ‘the faith chapter’ because it lists many names of men and women whose lives of faithfulness are recorded in the Bible. It concludes with these words:

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from [without] us (Hebrews 11:39–40).

Gentleness

We can be gentle with people in the way we treat them. A good maxim is to always treat other people as you yourself would like to be treated. There was a young man called Timothy whom the Apostle Paul fondly termed his ‘son in the faith’. In one of his letters to Timothy Paul wrote:

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient (2 Timothy 2:24).

Self Control

And finally, disciples must try to control themselves in all that they do, whether that is by keeping control of

their temper, their greed, or the things they say and do. Cars have brakes to control their speed; ships have rudders to control their course; horses have bridles and bits to check their speed and direction. James talks about this in his letter, and compares the tongue to a ship’s rudder and a horse’s bridle.

Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things... And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity... (James 3:4–6).



When a believer is baptised they embark on a life in which they try to follow the perfect example of the Lord Jesus. Cultivating the fruit of the Spirit is a crucial part of that new life. And it’s not just a recipe for a good life now—for those who follow Jesus Christ in their lives now there’s the prospect of eternal life in his Kingdom.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

Jenny Bateman

Job

JOB (pronounced 'Jobe') is thought to have lived around the time of the book of Genesis. The theme of the book is the age-old 'problem of suffering'. God allowed intense suffering to afflict Job—a 'good' man who was well respected by all. But Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar wrongly assumed that his sufferings were punishments for hidden sins. *"Miserable comforters are you all" (16:2)* is Job's assessment of his friends!

A fourth 'friend', the younger man Elihu, is introduced in chapter 32. He was angry with Job *"because he justified himself rather than God"* and with the three friends *"because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job"*.

Many times Job says how he would like to argue, reason or plead with God about his situation. He wishes there was a mediator *"who may lay his hand on us both" (9:33)*.

God's Answer

But finally, in chapters 38–41, we read God's answer to the matter. He reminds Job of his true position before God the Creator. Job is brought to realise that God is right and should be trusted. Job confesses his own unworthiness (even though people had looked upon him as good). His sufferings have helped him to see this point, and he is eventually richly blessed (Job 42:10). If

suffering brings us to a position of humility before God, it will prove to be a blessing in disguise (see Isaiah 66:2).

Job's Satan

The story of Job refers to a "satan" (a word meaning 'adversary'). The Bible never speaks of a supernatural devil. Job's "satan" was probably the human thinking which did not believe that Job's faith could stand up to severe testing—see Job 2:6 and 42:11. It is significant that the second of these verses refers to *"all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him"*.

God, in the end, restores the fortunes of Job and requires the three friends to offer sacrifices, *"for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (42:7)*.

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

- ◆ Job 4:17; 14:10—see Psalm 146:3, 4; Ecclesiastes 9:5; Romans 5:12.
- ◆ Job 19:25—see Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11.
- ◆ Job 38:31–41—see Amos 5:8; Revelation 14:7.

Introduction to the Acts

This is the first in a series in which we examine this fascinating Bible book. Each article in the series will be printed over the centre pages—you might like to pull them out and keep them together.

THE ACTS of the Apostles is the book in the New Testament which tells us what the followers of Jesus did for the next three decades after he was raised from the dead. During this period the Christian community grew from a small group of disciples in Jerusalem to a worldwide movement with congregations in Africa, Asia and Europe.

The Mission of the Apostles

The small group of Jesus' closest disciples were called 'apostles'. After Jesus was raised from the dead there was a period of 40 days in which he taught the apostles and other disciples. At the end of this period he ascended to heaven before their eyes. Shortly before his ascension he outlined the mission of the apostles:

You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

They began their mission just nine days later, after they had received the Holy Spirit to help them. The process of proclaiming the Gospel began in Jerusalem. Their message is recorded in a series of speeches, the first of which was delivered on the

day of Pentecost, 49 days after Jesus' resurrection.

Spread of the Gospel

The opposition to their message from the local religious establishment served to scatter the followers of Jesus throughout the Mediterranean world, taking the Gospel with them as they went. Soon there were congregations as far away as Antioch in Syria and even in Rome.



The message was taken to other towns in Judea by the disciples; the Samaritans heard it first from Philip, one of the apostles, who also explained it to an Ethiopian who was returning home after a visit to Jerusalem.

Preaching to the Gentiles

The most significant development in the early part of Acts was the conversion of Saul, who had been prominent in the persecution of Christian believers but who became the Apostle Paul, probably the



In the 40 years between the resurrection of Jesus and the end of Acts, the Christian community expanded from a handful of close disciples in Jerusalem to a worldwide movement with congregations in Asia Minor, Greece and even in Rome. The Acts of the Apostles records some of the significant events which marked the expansion of the early Christian community.

The first part of Acts covers the activities of Peter, Stephen and Philip, who took the Gospel to the rest of Judea and Samaria. The second part of Acts mainly concerns the work of the Apostle Paul who founded congregations in Asia Minor and Greece and then travelled to Rome under guard.

While Paul was travelling through the Roman world proclaiming the Gospel, other apostles would be doing the same in other areas. However, we know very little of their activities outside the book of Acts.



most effective of the apostles at taking the Gospel to distant places.

Initially though, it was Peter, a close disciple of Jesus, who worked in the coastal areas of Judea.

Peter was the first apostle to baptise someone who wasn't a Jew. This was Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army. The baptism of Cornelius provided another turning point in the way that Christianity was spread.

However, while the apostles approved the baptism of Cornelius, there was some opposition from other disciples. A council was held in Jerusalem which approved Peter's action and paved the way for more intensive missions to the Gentiles (non-Jews).

Paul's Missionary Journeys

After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus attracted opposition from enemies in Damascus and also in Jerusalem, and he was forced to go home to Tarsus; Acts is silent about what he did there. He was brought back to join the disciples in Antioch and from there he went on three long journeys during which he proclaimed the Gospel.

On the first of these journeys, to Cyprus and Galatia, he changed his name from Saul to Paul and began systematically to preach to Gentiles. On the second of the journeys he passed through Galatia and then crossed into Macedonia and Greece, where he established several congregations. This

ended with a stay of more than a year and a half in Corinth.

On his third journey Paul spent more than two years in Ephesus, after which he revisited Greece before returning to Jerusalem. These three journeys are known as Paul's 'missionary journeys'.

After the Acts

In Jerusalem Paul was arrested, and after a two year delay he was sent under escort to Rome, where he remained in custody for another two years. Acts ends at this point, but we can deduce from letters he wrote that he was released soon after and carried out another journey in the Eastern Mediterranean before being arrested in Troas and returned to Rome for trial.

During his journeys Paul wrote several letters to various congregations, dealing with problems which are similar to the problems that disciples still face today. He continued to write in the period after Acts had been completed.

The Acts of the Apostles is important because it gives us a historical framework against which we can understand the writing of the various New Testament letters; even the Gospels fit into this framework. We can also find a series of speeches which summarise the message of the Apostles. This message is very consistent throughout Acts and corresponds in great detail with the teaching of the letters, and of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels.

John Thorpe

Why did Jesus Have to Die?

IF JESUS is the son of God, why did God let him be killed? In fact, why is the death of Jesus central to the Bible's message?

This is a hugely important question, and throughout the Bible there are statements which provide answers to it. Here is one such statement: *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them"* (2 Corinthians 5:19 NASB).*

Now this might leave you with more questions! What do those words mean—'reconciling' and 'trespasses'? Why did the world need to be reconciled to God? How did it involve Jesus Christ? These questions are well worth exploring, as the answers contain the essence of the Gospel message itself.

Reconciliation with God

First let's look at the word 'reconciling'. To be reconciled means to be brought together, for there to be no separation. For example in 1 Corinthians 7:11 the word is used of a husband and wife who were separated, coming back together again. So

* Usually in *Glad Tidings* we use the New King James Version of the Bible (NKJV). This quote is taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). The two Bible versions say the same thing, but this verse reads more easily in the NASB.

God was 'reconciling the world to Himself'. But why was there a separation between the world and God in the first place?

Here we come to the second word, 'trespasses', which means wrong-doing. One of the overarching themes of the Bible is that an emphatic separation has occurred between God and His world; a great chasm exists between the Creator and the people He created. The prophet Isaiah summarises this sombre theme perfectly: *"... Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear"* (Isaiah 59:2).



This hard-hitting rebuke was delivered to God's people living in the land of Judah in the 8th Century BC, but its message is applicable to (almost) everyone who has ever lived: a separation exists between you and God because of your sins. Sins are the things which you do which are wrong in God's sight. It is essential that we accept this harsh truth about ourselves in order to recognise our need for reconciliation. The outcome of this is inexpressibly positive: it involves being at peace with God, and being accepted as one of His children!

This leads to the next question: why do my sins cause a separation to occur between me and God? To answer this question, we need to consider the character of God. He is not a human being like us: mortal, fallible and capable of committing sin. Instead, He is completely different from us: immortal, infallible and incapable of committing sin! This is how the prophet Moses described the character of God: *"His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He"* (Deuteronomy 32:4).



Once we appreciate what God is like, it becomes a lot easier for us to understand why the sins we commit cause a separation between us and God: sin is so contrary to the perfect character of God that it is impossible for us to have an intimate relationship with Him without something or someone to bridge the gap. Thankfully for us, God has 'in Christ reconciled the world to Himself'.

Forgiveness of Sins

What does it mean, *"not counting their trespasses against them"*? And what does this have to do with reconciling the world to God?

If someone you know does something wrong and you 'count it against them' it means you make a point of remembering exactly how they have wronged you, and this will necessarily have an impact on your relationship with them. However, if you do not 'count it against them' you will instead forget whatever it was that they have done to upset you. Another way of saying this is that you will forgive them. Well, this is similar to what God has offered to do for His creation. It is as if God is saying, "If you accept the gift of My son Jesus, I will not count against you what you have done that is wrong in My eyes; I will instead forgive you."

If God were to forgive people for what they have done that is wrong in His eyes—if He were to forgive us our sins (or trespasses, iniquities, transgressions etc.)—then no separation would exist between us and

God. We would be reconciled and be at peace with Him. This is absolutely amazing to consider—it does not matter what we have done or how many times we have done it, God is willing to forgive us! The joyful result of this is expressed perfectly in the words of King David (who lived long before Christ but had faith that God would eventually provide a Saviour to bring about His forgiveness):

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity... (Psalm 32:1–2).

Everything
you've ever
do: 2 wrong



The Righteousness of God

To summarise, God forgiving people for their sins is how He has offered to reconcile the world to Himself. The question ‘What did Jesus Christ have to do with reconciling the world to God?’ can now become ‘What did Jesus Christ have to do with God forgiving people for their sins?’ To explore this question, it will be helpful to continue reading the passage with which we started:

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them... He made him who knew no sin to be

sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21 NASB).

The passage involves two different individuals (God and Jesus Christ) who are both called ‘He’/ ‘him’ so it might be helpful first of all to clarify who is being spoken of each time ‘He’ and ‘him’ are mentioned.

He [God] made him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him [Christ].

What does it mean that Christ ‘knew no sin’? What does Christ being ‘sin on our behalf’ mean? How does this result in someone becoming ‘the righteousness of God’?

Made Sin on Our Behalf

Almost every person who has ever lived has sinned against God. The Apostle Paul sums it up like this: “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). But it is clear from elsewhere in the Bible that there was one exception to this statement: the Lord Jesus Christ. What sets Jesus apart from any man or woman who has ever lived is that he never once did anything that was wrong in the eyes of God—he never sinned. This is absolutely astonishing and becomes even more so through experience—when we attempt to follow Christ’s perfect example and we realise just how frequently we sin. As the sinlessness of Christ is so astounding, it is not surprising it is mentioned in several different places in the New Testament. For example:

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth (1 Peter 2:22).

And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin (1 John 3:5).

Based on the above passages, it is evident that the statement that Jesus ‘knew no sin’ is a further declaration about the sinlessness of Jesus. But if he ‘knew no sin’, what does it mean that he was made to ‘be sin on our behalf’?

If you do something ‘on someone’s behalf’ it means you do it for that person’s benefit or support, or because you are representing their interests.

The punishment for those who sin is twofold: suffering and death. You can read how it all started in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3. Jesus was born with the same nature that we have: a nature that wants to do its own thing regardless of God’s law. But Jesus was wholly obedient, and he surrendered his life as a sacrifice to save us from sin. He died a public and excruciating death, to show us how awful sin really is and to encourage us to turn away from sin and turn to God. He did not deserve to experience the punishments of scourging and crucifixion, but he voluntarily submitted to them in order to save others—Jesus’ life was the embodiment of self-sacrificial love.

Sharing Christ’s Victory

In the act of a sinless man dying, the relationship between sin and death was fundamentally altered. Because Jesus never sinned and instead lived a perfect life, God raised him from the dead to live for ever! Jesus is the first human being to have been made immortal; and now that he has experienced this phenomenal transformation, God is willing to extend His salvation to us as well, even though we ‘have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God’.

When a person is baptised, they are associated with Jesus—both with his death and with his resurrection from the dead. (This is explained in detail in Romans chapter 6.) This allows us to share in his victory over sin and death; we can then rejoice in the hope of eternal life!



By having faith in Christ and by being baptised into him, we can be ‘credited with righteousness’.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is

credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account” (Romans 4:5–8 NASB).

For such believers, God no longer looks at them as disobedient sinners who deserve His wrath but as beloved children who have peace with Him because of what His Son accomplished by ‘becoming sin’ on their behalf. In this sense, believers become ‘the righteousness of God’ (2 Corinthians 5:21): through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Once we have been reconciled to God, we will still sin frequently. However, providing these are sins that are reluctantly committed—sins of weakness for which we ask forgiveness, rather than wilfully choosing to disobey God without asking forgiveness—we can be sure of God’s continual and abounding forgiveness.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:6, 9).

We have looked at some profound topics, such as why the world needed to be reconciled to God, how God’s forgiveness is the means by which He has offered us reconciliation to Him, and how Jesus

Christ is integral to God’s forgiveness and salvation. Though we will no doubt be left with plenty of questions and areas to explore further, the big picture is that God sending His Son Jesus to die is the ultimate expression of His love towards His creation. Christ’s death and resurrection from the dead was the means by which God has offered reconciliation to Him for all who are willing to accept His unspeakably gracious gift. The Apostle Paul summarises the blessed state of the baptised believer in Christ:



For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5: 6–11).

Stephen Blake

Revenge

WHENEVER I look at the shelves of bestsellers I always wonder what the secret ingredient is—what makes these books fly off the shelves? I have to admit, I've given this rather a lot of thought over the years, and I think there is an answer. Whether you agree with me or not, it doesn't matter, just tuck this one away in the back of your mind, and if you are someone who likes to read a novel test it out and see if your book has this magic ingredient.

The magic ingredient of all successful novels is revenge.



It is the protagonist's need for revenge that absorbs you and keeps you turning the pages. Think of a book or story you know well, and see whether I'm right!

Revenge is something we can't normally undertake in our everyday lives and it

seems to me that this creates a great thirst for it, like a pent up longing only satiated for us in the stories we consume.

So if this is true, (and as I said, test it out for yourself when you next watch a film or read a book!) then it tells us something about ourselves doesn't it? It tells us that if we enjoy reading about revenge so much, then perhaps there is part of us that wants revenge, and if given the choice, we might even act on it.

The Teaching of Jesus

It's not a very nice thing to admit to yourself. But if we're honest, we might admit there's some truth in what I'm saying. Jesus too came to this conclusion when he offered advice about how to stop thoughts of revenge in their tracks before they get out of hand:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement' (Matthew 5:21).

Well that doesn't seem like us, does it? We would hardly need to take that advice. Murder couldn't be further from our mind, but notice what Jesus says next:

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. And whoever says to his

brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire (Matthew 5:22).

Each time here Jesus states “shall be in danger of”, as if to say “Ah, you might not murder, but there are these other things that, if you don’t watch out for them, can lead to murder in the end”.

He’s perhaps thinking about Cain who was angry with his brother without a cause, and that anger eventually, left unchecked, led to murder (Genesis 4:8). So Jesus is saying: don’t wait... nip it in the bud before it gets out of hand.

Saul and David

The Bible also has stories where we turn the pages hoping for revenge to take place. King Saul behaved despicably towards his servant David, and we can hardly wait for Saul to get his come-uppance. Yet when David had the opportunity to take revenge on Saul he didn’t do it. Later he explained to Saul:

Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed' (1 Samuel 24:10).

I suggest to you that what David did here was highly unnatural. He was a warrior, trained in combat, and he had taken many lives in battle. To kill Saul would have been an easy matter; yet he didn’t.

The reason that David overcame the temptation to take revenge was because he had never allowed himself to hate Saul in the first place. He had taken each vengeful thought and cast it out of his mind each time it occurred to him. And the way he did this was by forgiving Saul.

At the end of the story Saul does perhaps get his come-uppance, but David does not rejoice. He sings a song of lament showing how utterly empty of malice his mind is toward Saul:

Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. (2 Samuel 1:23).

Robin de Jongh

“ *REPAY no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.* ”

(Romans 12:17–19)

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