

Scripture Truth



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Growing older
Living by grace
Rejoice and pray

Moses' face shone
Joseph and his brothers
Seven parables of the kingdom

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Rejoice, give thanks, and pray!

It can't always have been easy for the Philippians, Thessalonians, and Bereans to rejoice. Far from the great centres of Christianity to the east of them, and well aware of Paul's precarious relationship with the authorities, theirs was a fraught situation. Each was comparatively isolated from the others.

All had had only brief visits from Paul, and on that basis had been launched into a life of testimony to Christ with little outside support. Paul would be well aware of all this, but neither in his letter to the Philippians nor in his first to the Thessalonians does he sympathise anxiously with them. Instead, he commands them to rejoice! And in both letters he urges them to give thanks and pray (Philippians 4:4,6,17; 1 Thessalonians 5:16).

We may not find our circumstances easy either. There will be times of difficulty, anxiety, and deep grief. Nevertheless the Scripture bids us also to rejoice! give thanks! and pray! Paul kept the Lord's imminent coming before both the minds of both the Philippian and the Thessalonian believers. Are we too actively "looking for that blessed hope" (Titus 2:13)? If we are, we can surely rejoice, give thanks, and pray!

Early in the morning of 20th April the Lord called to Himself John Rice, for nearly twenty years the producer of this magazine. The formidable range of his Christian service until the late stages of his illness has been recorded elsewhere. Only in these late stages, when I shared some of the checking he did, did I learn just how much work he was routinely doing on this magazine, aside from setting up the pages. His works follow him (Revelation 14:13), but his faith rested entirely on what the Lord had done for him on Calvary's cross. This reality seems more real when we stand at a graveside. Please remember his widow Carol in your prayers.

THEO BALDERSTON

Moses' face shone

Albert von der Kammer

The editor well remembers two brothers from his youth whose faces shone when they spoke of Christ. It made a deep impression on him. To this challenging article he would add, that being truly in the presence of the Lord in private prayer is as needful as in public meetings. How little we know of either.

“Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai... that [he] did not know that the skin of his face shone...” (Exodus 34:29, NKJV).

Moses came out from the presence of the Lord and his face shone. He brought back something of the exalted place where he had just been. He bore on him something of the brilliance of the glory of Him with whom he had just been speaking. We all value the grace of possessing “free access” to the Lord (Romans 5:2), and it is indeed a great thing to go to Him. We “go to Him” not only in our personal prayers, but also when we come together in the assembly. He Himself says to us, that He is present where two or three are gathered together *in His Name* (Matthew 18:20). There we are in His presence, as Moses was when on the mountain.

It is indeed a great thing to go *to the Lord*, but it is no less a thing, to come *from the Lord*. Do we also know something about this? When Moses came from the Lord, the whole people knew it. Are other people able to detect it when *you* come from the Lord's presence? When we have had to do with the great of this world, or have just been involved in important negotiations, we carry away in our appearance, in the tone of our voice, and in our bearing something of what we have been engaged in. But how is it with us, when we come from the presence of the Lord? We were with Him at His Supper, or with Him in a meeting where He has been instructing us – or even with Him in order that wrong might be put right: but did we bring anything away with us that showed where we had been – anything from *Him* in whose presence we had so recently been? If, after meetings of this sort, the Lord Himself were to accompany us, and ask us, as once He asked the two on the road to Emmaus, “What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another?” (cp. Luke 24:17), would not we often have

It is indeed a great thing to go to the Lord, but it is no less a thing, to come from the Lord.

to fall silent, like the disciples who had been discussing who among them was the greatest? They felt the light of His presence: it searched their hearts (Mark 9:33,34). And we? How often does our conduct and speech betray that while we had certainly been at the meeting, we had not been in His presence?

In the Lord's presence we find strengthening and preparation for the tasks He has assigned us. But how can we be equipped for these tasks if we have brought nothing away with us from having been in His presence? If we have had no awareness of the *fact* of His presence, how can we receive anything from the Lord through having been there? We will come away from Him as empty as we went into His presence. We were indeed in the meeting, but we were not in the presence of *the Lord*, we were only with brothers and sisters. And we left full of that experience; it filled our conversation. And even so we might find ourselves paying lip service to having been in the Lord's presence.

If we wish to *be* something for the Lord, we have firstly to go to Him, to learn and to receive from Him. Then we will come out with our beings illuminated by Him. What power resides in the words and behaviour of those who have truly been in the Lord's presence! Abraham came out from the presence of the Lord, and left father's house and father's land to walk the path of faith! And as he left the presence of Melchizedek he bore the marks of the heavenly man, so that he could decline all recompense from the king of Sodom. He needed no reward from this world. In the same way the prophets of the Old Testament came out of the presence of Jehovah, and their lips proclaimed the words that they had heard from *Him*. The aged prophetess Anna came out of the presence of the Lord and spoke of Him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:37f). In the prison in Philippi Paul and Silas came from the presence of the Lord and sang songs, so that from them there shone the glory of the grace of God; and they brought the gospel to a gaoler on the brink of suicide – a gaoler who had maltreated them.

May we all better understand what it is, not only to go *to* the Lord, but also to come *from* Him, so that in us too the brightness of His glory becomes more apparent!

Translated from Handreichungen aus dem Worte Gottes, eds. A. v.d. Kammer & F. Koch, Eighth Annual Volume (1921-22), pp.3-5. Slightly edited.

*As he left the presence of Melchizedek he bore the
marks of the heavenly man*

Growing older

How not to do it!

Jonathan Hughes

Sophocles, the ancient Greek dramatist, is reputed to have said, “No one longs to live, more than someone growing old.” His seems to have been a rather pessimistic view of existence – that death is to be avoided at all costs. It was certainly not the view of the apostle Paul who, in Philippians 1:21, wrote, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Paul presents to us a far more positive view on living, and certainly one that challenges me and my attitude to the recent pandemic. Have I loosely read this verse to mean, “For to me, to live is everything, and to die is to be avoided at all costs”?

Billy Graham is said to have given us an interesting insight into how the Christian is to approach their advancing years, with the words,

“When granted many years of life, growing old in age is natural, but growing old with grace is a choice. Growing older with grace is possible for all who set their hearts and minds on the Giver of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Numerous men and women of the Bible illustrate growing old with grace. However, here I want to consider three examples of men who did not grow old well. Hopefully, the lessons we learn from them will enable us to avoid repeating their mistakes! Specifically, I want to consider three of the kings of Israel and Judah, and seek to learn where growing older went so badly wrong for them. Firstly, we will try to learn from king Solomon – the wisest of men; then from king Uzziah; and finally from king Hezekiah – of whom it is said there was no king like him before or after (2 Kings 18:5).

Firstly Solomon. But before proceeding we need firstly to read Deuteronomy 17:14-17:

“When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart is turned away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” (NKJV)

“Growing old in age is natural, but growing old with grace is a choice”

I wonder if we ever find the books of the Law heavy-going and not very full of encouragement? Perhaps Solomon thought like that, and missed the above passage. In that rather obscure corner of Deuteronomy we get God’s view of how the nation of Israel should be governed in the future. Of course, they would have been far better allowing God to rule, and no other. But God recognised the fact that they would one day ask for a king, and so gave warning as to how kings were to behave. Kings were not to multiply for themselves gold and silver – which speaks of self-sufficiency. They were not to multiply horses – which speaks of self-serving. Nor were they to have many wives – which speaks of self-satisfaction.

Solomon had started so well! In 1 Kings 3:7-9 we read his humble petition to God on becoming king:

“Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

Then in verses 11 – 14 we read that, in answer to this petition, God granted him this, plus two others things – riches, and military power – things that Solomon had never asked for.

“Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honour, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So, if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days”.

*Who had delivered the Israelites from Egypt?
God had. Who had defeated Jericho? God had.*

Riches! Imagine living in a society where silver was as abundant as pebbles on the ground (1 Kings 10:27)! It is difficult to comprehend! But God had also given the three warnings of Deuteronomy 17:14-17, referred to above. On the one hand God gave him riches, and on the other warned him of the danger of being rich. How should Solomon have reconciled the wealth with the warnings? He should have used his vast wealth to the true benefit of his people and to the glory of God. Instead it seems that he used it mainly for financing expensive chariot and cavalry brigades and a stunning palace (1 Kings 4:26-28; 10:16-29). In defiance of Deuteronomy 17:16, he procured from Egypt horses for his cavalry. Who had delivered the Israelites from Egypt? God had. Who had defeated Jericho? God had. Who had killed the giant Goliath? God had, through the arm of a young lad. Yet here was Solomon relying on the military might that his wealth had procured. Similarly, there is a real danger that, as I grow older, I learn from my experiences, and depend on them, rather than on God for each day. I might begin to think that I now know how to be a good husband, father, brother in church: so why bother asking God for help here?

There is no shame in working hard or becoming rich, but there is a grave danger in greed and self-sufficiency. In later life we may have more disposable income and fewer financial responsibilities. Do we take this opportunity to splash the cash on ourselves or increase our bank balances? That pathway leads to spiritual danger. We need to become generous givers and support the Lord's work financially over and above what we may have done in earlier life. How shameful that His work is hampered by lack of funds when so many of us have money sitting in accounts that we have not touched for years! It is good to make sensible provision in our wills so that our finances continue to support His people after our deaths. It is better, so far as we are able, to give away our money now, whilst we are living.

And Solomon also married many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1ff). I don't suppose he woke up one morning and decided on a mass wedding. I suspect, rather, that he woke up and wondered how he had accumulated so many

There is no shame in working hard or becoming rich, but there is a grave danger in greed and self-sufficiency.

wives. Indeed, that is probably just how he viewed his wives – as another of his possessions. Each one led him away from God (11:4). Solomon would allow God to be in His temple, but alongside that Solomon would also worship the gods of the nations. One amongst many is never a position that God will accept, and anything that claims our affections – career, hobbies, position – can all act in the same way as Solomon’s wives did.

Each of us only has one life to spend. As we grow old, let us not waste it on materialistic possessions, position and things that claim our hearts’ affections at the expense of God!

Our next example is king Uzziah. We find his history in 2 Chronicles 26. He was another young man who started well. He was active in the service of God and strengthened the nation of Israel – God’s people – against their enemies. A prophet named Zechariah (not the Zechariah of the second-last book in the Old Testament) obviously had a positive effect on the king. Not only was Uzziah a great warrior-king, he was also technologically capable (v.15).

The same verse tells us that he was marvellously helped “until he became strong”. In the early days, he could see problems and enemies all around, and the godly influence of others anchored him spiritually. However, as he won victory after victory and his achievements stacked up, Uzziah made the fatal mistake of thinking that his successes were the result of his own endeavours.

I wonder how many of us are like that. There is a world of difference between the architect and the sub-contractor. We all have our part to play in the work of God, but we must never forget that it is His work, and He alone is the One who must have credit for anything accomplished by us. Sadly, we read in verse 16, “But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.”

God has only ever intended one Man to exercise both the Priesthood and the Kingship – the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Psalm 110:4). By taking on both of these

roles, Uzziah was presenting himself as that man, and God could never allow that. Uzziah's end was tragic and painful (2 Chronicles 26:20f).

Pride in what we have accomplished, even for God, can so easily take us away from God and cause us to depend on ourselves. Uzziah's downfall was not from some outwardly gross evil. We may on the outside appear to be so respectable, even spiritual, and yet be rotten to the core inwardly; and this is particularly a danger the older we get. We may think we know better than everyone else. We have seen so much of life and feel we have so much wisdom and experience to offer. However, pride can so easily destroy our testimony, so easily and certainly spoil our relationship with the Lord.

Lastly, let us look at the life of Hezekiah. He became king when he was twenty-five years old, and reigned well. So 2 Kings 18:5-7 tells us,

“He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went.”

Idolatry was rife in Judah when Hezekiah became king, and yet through his dependence upon God, he turned the nation back to following Him, re-establishing worship in God's temple, and removing so many of the idolatrous practices from the nation (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 29:20ff).

Later, when Hezekiah became ill, he approached Isaiah again, who tells him that he is about to die (2 Kings 20:1ff). This prompted earnest prayer on the part of Hezekiah, and so Isaiah told him that he would recover and reign for a further fifteen years. The coming judgement of God upon the nation would not come in his lifetime but would fall on his descendants instead. Hezekiah's response was, “Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?” (2 Kings 20:19).

Had Hezekiah's entreaty for his life really been well-advised? Manasseh, a truly awful king, seems to have been born after Hezekiah's illness (compare 2 Kings 20:6 with 21:1). Secondly, during those fifteen years Hezekiah made a foolish treaty with the Babylonians, and showed the Babylonian emissaries

The life of Hezekiah shows that, in a way, it is possible to live too long.

Today, we need believers who hold lightly the things of this life, having exchanged these things for the glories of the world to come.

his treasures, an action which Isaiah said would lead to the eventual captivity (20:14-18). To prevent an imminent national disaster, he invited an altogether greater one that would fall during the time of his descendants. The life of Hezekiah shows that, in a way, it is possible to live too long. Longevity is to be celebrated, but only if it is filled with what is worth celebrating. In the fifteen extra years that he was granted, Hezekiah took short-term decisions that benefited both himself and the nation but left it much weaker in the long term.

Taken at face value, Hezekiah's words quoted above display an awful attitude. They seem to suggest that he was not all that bothered about the impending judgement of God, as it would not happen in his own lifetime! This is certainly an attitude that we too may fall into: as long as things carry on at my church just the way I like them and for my lifetime, then all is well. The fact that this may be driving the next generation away does not seem to register.

We have a choice as to how we respond. We can just carry on and hope that this "Hezekiah" attitude does not impact us too much in our own lifetime – ignoring the spiritual needs of our children and grandchildren. Or we can accept the challenge of leaving our "comfort-zone," and of being a generation that is truly faithful to God in our day. Today, we need believers who study their Bibles, and who hold lightly the things of this life, having exchanged these things for the glories of the world to come. Today, we need believers who are more ready to share the gospel in a more relevant way than our parents' generation.

There is hope, for we believe in a faithful God who will not deny Himself, even in the midst of an unfaithful generation (cp. 2 Timothy 2:13). This is the challenge for those of us who are growing old – that is, for all of us!

May we, by learning from the mistakes of those who have gone before, resolve to avoid repeating them, for His name's sake. Amen.

Joseph and his brothers

Part One: to the dungeon!

F.B.Hole

This series on Genesis commenced in the July, 2017, issue.

“The generations of Jacob” begin with verse 2 of chapter 37 (KJV), and this section is the final section of Genesis. The first verse of the chapter has told us that Jacob “dwelt” in the land in which his father had been a stranger. In this he was moving ahead of God’s purpose, and hence God permitted circumstances to move him and his sons into Egypt, so that everything came to pass that had been predicted to Abraham in chapter 15:13,14. Here we may see a “type” of many a trying experience that intrudes itself into our Christian lives. God intends us to be “strangers” in the world that exists today. If we settle ourselves down and become “dwellers” in it, we may very easily find ourselves carried down into a spiritual Egypt and enslaved therein. So let us take the warning of this Scripture to heart.

“The generations of Jacob” are mainly occupied with the doings of his sons, and more especially with Joseph, to whom, at the age of seventeen, we are introduced in verse 2. It has been said that in him we have the most perfect and complete type of the Lord Jesus to be found in the Scripture, and we believe this to be true. In keeping with this we shall see that no sinful or unworthy action of his is put on record. Thus the value of his life is enhanced as a type, though he was a sinful man like the rest of us.

At the outset he is presented to us as the son specially beloved of his father on the one hand, and as dissociated from the evil ways of his brothers on the other (37:2,3). The former fact was signalized by the “coat of many colours”, and the latter by Joseph bringing to his father the evil report of the doings of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Thus is foreshadowed the unique Sonship of

God intends us to be “strangers” in the world. If we become “dwellers” in it, we may find ourselves carried down into a spiritual Egypt

the Lord Jesus and His refusal of, and separation from, the evil ways of men. As a result a complete breach supervened between Joseph and his brethren. Knowing human nature, it is just what we should expect in such a situation. The more it was manifest that he was specially beloved of his father, the more they hated him. To begin with their hatred affected their conversation – they “could not speak peaceably unto him” (37:4). Later, their hatred flared up into wicked action. But we see at once a type of the One of whom Psalm 69 speaks prophetically, “They ... hate Me without a cause;” and again, “I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children.”

Next there follows the record of Joseph’s two dreams. It is remarkable how large a part was played by dreams in his history, since, before the climax is reached, no less than five are recorded, and every one of them contained a prophecy. Each of them therefore was produced by the finger of God touching the unconscious mind of the sleeper, and marked a Divine intervention, and indeed a revelation of secret things. In this chapter both his dreams were prophetic of his coming eminence and glory, so clearly that his brothers, and his father too, saw at once their meaning. The general drift was the same in both cases, but only the second suggested that his father and mother as well as his brothers would be bowing down to him in a future day.

There was the further difference, in that sheaves are connected with an earthly harvest, whereas sun, moon, and stars are heavenly objects. The sun is a symbol of supreme authority, the moon of derived and associated authority, and Jacob saw at once how applicable this was to the place of father and mother in his large patriarchal family.

The recounting of these dreams fanned the flame of hatred greatly, as we see in verses 5, 8 and 11. His father rebuked him, under the impression that such an event as that indicated by the dream was impossible. Yet it is recorded that he “observed the saying” (v.11), which shows that he could not dismiss it from his mind, and that he recognized that there was more in it than he had thought at first. He had faith in God, even if it was weak; whereas Joseph’s brothers had none.

The application of all this to the great Antitype, our Lord Jesus, is very striking. The Jews, His brethren according to the flesh, hated Him without a cause and rejected Him when He came amongst them, yet the day is coming when they will bow down before Him. But not only this: He is to be the central Object of worship to the heavens as well as the earth, for that which had been secret is now revealed, and we know that God’s purpose according to His good pleasure

Joseph's two dreams not only foretold his own glorious future, but also foreshadowed the supreme glory of Christ.

is to “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). Joseph’s two dreams therefore not only foretold his own glorious future in Egypt, but also foreshadowed the supreme glory of Christ.

With verse 12 a fresh episode begins, in which we see Joseph sent by his father on a mission of kindly interest in his brethren. He sought them and found them in order to express his father’s love toward them. Their response to this was not only hatred but premeditated murder; their crime to be hidden under cover of a lying report. They thought his dreams were but an idle fancy, which they could easily dissipate. They had to learn that the dreams were a revelation of the purpose of God which they could not overthrow. God defeated their evil project by touching the hearts of two of the brothers, Reuben and Judah (37:22, 26). Of the two, Reuben appears in the better light. His purpose was to deliver Joseph ultimately to his father again. Joseph was stripped of the coat which expressed the special place he had in his father’s heart, and cast into a pit in which was no water. Judah supported Reuben in this, but during his absence took the lead in selling him to the Midianite merchantmen for twenty pieces of silver.

Thus, though he did not actually die, Joseph went down into the pit, and was sold as a slave. It is not difficult to see the typical value of all this. As we pass further into the Old Testament we find “the pit” becomes a symbol of death and destruction. In Psalm 69:15 we find prophetic words applicable to our Lord, “Let not the pit shut her mouth upon Me.” The same figure is used in regard to the future deliverance of a godly remnant of Israel, when the prophet said, “By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water” (Zechariah 9:11). In the same prophet also we read the prophetic words, “They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver” (11:12).

Verses 31-35, recount the crafty way in which Jacob was led to jump to the conclusion that Joseph had been killed and devoured by some evil beast. His brothers avoided the telling of a plain lie; they only implied it, and

By goodly raiment Jacob deceived his father: by goodly raiment his sons deceived him.

Jacob fell into their trap. In chapter 27 we have read how Jacob, by wearing Esau's garment, had deceived his blind father, Isaac. Esau's garment is called "goodly raiment" (27:15, KJV), and, as he was the elder, it may have been something very similar to Joseph's "coat of many colours". By goodly raiment Jacob deceived his father: by goodly raiment his sons deceived *him*. As he had meted out, so it was measured to him again. God's government of His people works with great precision.

Meanwhile Joseph had been carried down into Egypt, just as though he had been some article of merchandise, and again he was sold. His purchaser was Potiphar, the captain of the guard (37:36). Thus he was brought into a place of considerable danger, on the one hand, but of nearness to Pharaoh, on the other. Things began to work together for his ultimate good, though this was by no means apparent at the time.

We now have the story of Joseph completely interrupted by chapter 38. It would seem that the deplorable story of Judah is recounted here in order to heighten the effect in our minds of the way Joseph stood firm under temptation of a similar kind. Judah appears to have been amongst the better-behaved of the sons of Jacob, yet the practices that marked him and his family were evil, and evidently accepted as nothing very unusual. We need not dwell upon this, save to remark that the Tamar of this chapter is the first of the women mentioned in the genealogy of our Lord in Matthew 1. Of the four women mentioned, only Ruth had a clean record from the moral point of view, and she came out of an accursed race (Deuteronomy 23:3). Such names would never have appeared in the record had it not been for the grace of God – the grace that triumphs over human sin.

The first verse of chapter 39 picks up the thread from the last verse of chapter 37. We are given the explanation of all the prosperity that Joseph brought to Potiphar's house – "The Lord was with Joseph" – and, that being the case, all that Joseph did prospered. Verses 3 and 4 lead us to remark the striking way in which Joseph's "hand" is mentioned in the story. The Lord being with him,

Here the testing met Joseph day after day, and he was only preserved by his fear of God

He “made all that he did to prosper in his hand”. The consequence of this was that he found favour with his master, and “All that he had he put into his hand” (v.4).

Naturally this was so. Though he did not know the explanation of it, Potiphar found he had made a first-rate bargain when he bought the young Semitic lad, who displayed such skilful powers coupled with God-fearing uprightness and integrity. And not only this ease of mind as to the ordering of his household was enjoyed by Potiphar, but extraordinary good fortune marked all his affairs, both “in the house and in the field”. Consequently, everything was left, “in Joseph’s hand” (39:5,6). Joseph, moreover, had developed into a specially fine specimen of young manhood. Then came a time of fierce and prolonged testing, and we see how great is the contrast with Judah’s action in the previous chapter.

There the sin was committed at once and was hardly recognized as sin. Here the testing met Joseph day after day, and he was only preserved by his fear of God and recognition of the great wickedness of the seduction laid before him. Whether young or old we do well, as we pass through this defiling world, to have continually in our heart this question, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Had he complied he would have sinned against the woman, against Potiphar and against himself, but the controlling and saving thought was “against GOD.” By his steadfast refusal he enraged the woman, and she with cunning artifice concocted a story against him, which, believed by her husband, landed Joseph into prison.

We do well, to have continually in our heart this question, “How then can I do this great sin against God?”

But we are going to see in Joseph's history a striking exemplification of that word written by the apostle Peter in his First Epistle. "If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." (2:20). Joseph was abased for a while, but only that he might be exalted in due time. In the first place we notice that he was put into that particular prison "where the king's prisoners were bound." This proved to be a link in the chain of circumstances that connected him with ultimate triumph. Had it been another prison he would never have met the butler and baker who had offended the king.

Then, in the second place, the LORD was with him as much in the days and place of his adversity as He had been in the days of his comparative prosperity in Potiphar's mansion and estate. In result the LORD showed mercy to him, which took the form of bringing him into the favour of the keeper of the prison, who evidently wielded autocratic power within his own limited sphere. So, in the third place, we find everything in the prison committed to Joseph's hand (39:22). The extraordinary statement is made that, "whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it." The young man cast in as a prisoner becomes the super-efficient deputy of the jailor, and ends by controlling the whole place! We wonder if a situation approaching this has ever been seen in a prison since that day. The keeper was relieved of all work and anxiety. He doubtless took the salary, and Joseph did the work!

Joseph had now tasted the bitterness of both pit and prison. Taken both together, they foreshadow Christ going down into death as a result of the malice of man. But there the power of His hand was felt. The skill of Joseph's hand in the house of Potiphar may remind us of the mighty hand of Christ in His matchless life. But in the closing verses of our chapter we see typified the power of His mighty hand in the dark domain of death.

An abridged and edited version of the article in Scripture Truth 36 (1948-50), pp.268 – 272. The opening section on "The generations of Esau" has been omitted.

*the LORD was with him as much in the days and
place of his adversity as He had been in the days
of his comparative prosperity*

Seven parables of the kingdom

Matthew 13

Theo Balderston

To understand the seven parables of Matthew 13 we need to know the outline of what had happened before the Lord spoke them.

The Lord had commenced His public ministry with the words, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” – the very same words as John the Baptist had used (Matthew 3:2; 4:17, NKJV). The fact that He had been identified as God’s Anointed Messiah by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him, and by the Voice from heaven identifying Him as God’s beloved Son (Matthew 3:16,17), should surely have persuaded the Jewish people that He was in truth the promised King of Israel. Then He had proclaimed the good news of the kingdom throughout Galilee, and He had healed every disease, attracting even huge gentile crowds (4:23ff). The character of His ministry is summed up in 12:18-21 (cp. Isaiah 42:1-4).

Then the Lord (overheard by the crowd) had taught the disciples the conduct appropriate to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5 – 7). In chapters 8 & 9 we read condensed accounts of major miracles that accompanied His proclamation of the kingdom, and chapter 10 records the Lord sending out the twelve apostles to proclaim it, But He warned them of a surly reception, the forerunner of worse experiences in time to come (10:16-39).

This was not the kind of kingdom John the Baptist had been envisaging; and neither (I surmise) had John expected to be languishing in prison. And so he sent two of his disciples to the Lord to confirm that He truly was the Messiah (11:2f). The Lord based His reply on Isaiah 35:5f, where the promise of healings is situated in a chapter speaking of the coming kingdom. He concluded with a rebuke to John’s doubts, “And blessed is the one who is not offended in me”.

At the same time as John was having his doubts, many of the towns of Galilee were refusing the Lord’s message (11:20ff). And the Pharisees were discussing ways of “destroying” Him (12:13), and seeking to smear His exorcisms as works of the devil (12:22-24). The parable of the sower tells us that Lord well knew that His word would be received only by a minority of individual Jews. Therefore the time of the salvation of all Israel, as foretold in Ezekiel 36:14:14ff; 36:16ff; and Zechariah 12 had not yet come, despite the mass baptisms by John in Judea, and large crowds listening to Him and seeking healing.

The end of chapter 12 records the Lord leaving “the house” where He had

been teaching a smaller “crowd” (presumably of Jews impressed by His works and words) in order to speak to a far larger crowd from a boat. He told them the parable of the sower (13:3-9), which was intended to baffle these crowds, regarding whom He cited words from Isaiah’s judgmental commission (Isaiah 6:9, 10). This important passage in Isaiah is also quoted in John 12:40f and Acts 28:26f, both times in connection with Israel’s refusal, as a nation, of the Lord’s grace towards them.

But the Lord did explain the parable of the sower to the disciples (13:18ff), perhaps so that they would not deduce from the refusal of the word of the kingdom by the cities of Galilee (11:20ff) that the word of God had failed. The broadcast-sowing in this parable (13:3) vividly represents the variable reception of both the Lord’s proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (4:23; 9:35), and of the twelve apostles’ evangelism (10:7, 14f).

This parable yields various insights into the reception of the Lord’s ministry; for example, that those who returned home with enthusiastic accounts of it were often given a hard time by their neighbours. But the parable’s basic thrust is that, of those who heard the Lord’s word, only a small minority would truly receive it. However the resulting fruitfulness for God from that minority would be extraordinarily high. (Even “thirtyfold” was far above contemporary crop yields.) Perhaps the implicit reference to harvest-time strictly speaking locates this extraordinary fruitfulness in the coming time of the Lord’s manifest glory.

By the time of the cross probably only several hundred truly followed Him (we have to expand the 120 in the upper room of Acts 1:15 by a guess at the number of real believers who had not accompanied Him on His final journey). The Lord had said prophetically, “I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain” (Isaiah 49:4).

More generally, we can apply this parable to the preaching of a crucified, risen, ascended, and soon-coming Saviour that the apostles initiated. The parable teaches that by such evangelism there are relatively few who will be saved. We should rejoice in the three thousand saved at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), but a conservative estimate of the total number of Palestinian and diaspora Jews attending a feast such as Pentecost would put it at several hundred thousand. To Paul’s bitter disappointment only a minority out of every synagogue where he proclaimed the gospel received it (Romans 9).

Therefore we should not lose heart, even in this epoch of stony-hearted response to the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:16). We should value the hope of the Lord’s generous, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, etc.).

Then the Lord told the parable of the weeds (or “tares”), again in the hearing of

*the servants ask for authority to eliminate
counterfeit believers from the world*

the crowds, and followed it with the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (yeast) (13:24-30). The disciples asked for an explanation of the parable of the weeds (13:36ff), but seemingly the meanings of the other two parables were self-evident to them.

The parable of the weeds was the first of the seven that the Lord expressly introduced with the words, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” (13:24). All the remaining parables are so introduced.

“The field is the world”, so 13:38 tell us. This parable presumes that all seed sown by the Lord will bear good fruit. Its subject is the counterfeit wheat, probably darnel, which looks quite like wheat until the “ear” has appeared. Darnel was apparently a serious problem in wheat-growing till modern machinery became able to separate the seeds of the two effectively.

If we believe in the inspiration and authority of all Scripture we cannot deploy this parable to override 1 Corinthians 5:4-6, Galatians 1:8, and 2 John 9-11, which plainly enjoin excommunication in cases of serious immorality, or of promotion of “another gospel” than that of faith alone in the crucified, risen, and ascended Saviour, or of error regarding the Person of Christ. However in this parable the servants ask for authority to eliminate counterfeit believers *from the world* (13:27, 38). The medieval church burned heretics. Capital punishment must be the power that this parable denies to the Lord’s servants.

The next parable flows neatly out of the parable of the tares. The meaning of the parable of the mustard seed ought to have been self-evident to the crowds, for the tree is a well-known figure of a kingdom in the Old Testament: see Ezekiel 17:22ff; 31:5f; Daniel 4:10-12. The parable therefore teaches that the kingdom of God would grow into a kingdom possessing judicial powers and able to defend itself forcibly. This will of course suddenly happen when the Lord comes again in glory (e.g., Matthew 25:31ff; Luke 19:27). But, seeing that the first, second, fifth, sixth, and seventh of these parables clearly concern the kingdom in this present age before the Lord’s coming in glory, it seems to follow that these third and fourth parables also concern the kingdom in the present age. Therefore the tree represents something that has already happened, namely, that what started

in the New Testament “leaven” is a figure for the insidious spread of bad

as a tiny mustard seed developed into Christendom – the system of rule wherein the church was established by law to the disadvantage of all who did not identify with it, the system which enforced baptism and Christian moral standards by judicial penalties on almost all Europe for many centuries, and that burned heretics. It did not glorify the Lord. We cannot avoid this meaning, even if the disciples would have struggled to reconcile it with, e.g., Matthew 24:44.

We may mourn the passing of Christendom because of the easy life it afforded believers when the laws of the state were approximately aligned with “Christian values”. But our Lord said distinctly, “My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I should not be delivered to the Jews...” (John 18:36).

The parable of the leaven (yeast) tells a parallel story to the parable of the mustard seed. In Matthew 16:6 the Lord instructs the disciples to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees”, by which He meant their doctrine (v.12). In the Old Testament the word “leaven” only ever bears a literal meaning, but in the New Testament “leaven” is a figure for the insidious spread of bad morals (1 Corinthians 5:6), or bad doctrine (Galatians 5:9), and never of the spread of something good. The batch was huge, like the batch baked by Sarah for the LORD God Himself (Genesis 18:6). But this one became leavened. So did the growth of the church even during the apostles’ lifetimes: see the New-Testament epistles.

Leviticus 7:13 and 23:17 are often deployed to argue that in Scripture leaven doesn’t always represent the working of evil. Leviticus 7:13 forms part of additional regulations governing the eating of some of the “peace offering” by a group of worshippers and by the offering priest (“fellowship offering” might be a better name for it). What was offered on the altar must not contain leaven

We may mourn the passing of Christendom but our Lord said, “My kingdom is not of this world”

The mustard seed and the leaven speak of what man has done with the gospel

(Leviticus 2:11). But what was eaten by the priest and lay persons should include both unleavened and leavened bread. This more sensibly typifies that the purity of what was offered on the altar permitted people with sinful natures to have fellowship with a holy God. In other words, the more usual method of interpreting Scripture ought to be applied to Leviticus 7:13 too, namely, the signification of leaven in every other symbolical occurrence of the word in the Bible should govern the interpretation of Leviticus 7:13 too.

Likewise in Leviticus 23:17, where the “wave” offering at the “Feast of Weeks” included two “wave loaves” baked with leaven. These were samples from the ingathering of the harvest, which had been the labour of inherently sinful people; and burnt offerings and sin offerings were offered at the same time to make these offerings from the labour of these inherently sinful people acceptable to a most holy God (vv.18-19).

The parable of the leaven is the central parable of the seven, this perhaps underlining that the numerical expansion of the church even during the first century became mixed with error, as the epistles confirm. The apostles would be less dismayed by this through knowing that the Lord had foretold it.

The Lord then dismissed the crowds and returned to the house. Having explained the parable of the tares to the disciples, He then added three more uninterpreted parables – the hidden treasure, the pearl, and the dragnet. Presumably their meaning, too, was obvious to the disciples.

The hidden treasure and the pearl are commonly interpreted to speak of the earnestness demanded of the seeker if s/he is to “enter the kingdom of heaven”. But, if this is the meaning, why should the man, having found the treasure, hide it again (13:44)? If the “treasure” is the gospel, should the saved sinner not rather proclaim it?

Some argue that the man in the parable was concealing the hoard from the *landowner* so as to swindle him when purchasing the field. These interpreters then understand the parable to mean that the value of salvation far exceeds its cost to the convert. The problems with this are (i) that it would be the convert’s own cleverness that reduced the price, and (ii) that even without the treasure

*The treasure and the pearl speak of what Christ
has done to secure His people*

the field would still cost quite a lot: cp. Genesis 23:16. But fraud need not be implied: foiling thieves till he acquired the field would be a more obvious motive for concealment.

But salvation is free to the sinner. It is much more natural to see the “man” as Christ, who bought the whole world in order to secure His saved-ones (cp. 13:38; 1 John 2:2), and who has left the treasure in this world, comparatively “hidden” in the present form of the kingdom as compared with the glory they will share with Him when He will take possession of the “field” (cp. Colossians 3:4; 1 John 3:2).

Similarly the parable of the pearl of great price has been interpreted as meaning that the would-be believer must renounce all his or her previous beliefs, or sacrifice his or her possessions (cp. Matthew 19:21). And certainly Christians should shed previous beliefs and hold present things lightly (cp. Philippians 3:18f). However, many who come to Christ are, unlike the rich young ruler, very poor – think of Indian Dalits. Rather, this parable is a “twin” with the parable of the hidden treasure, and speaks of how much the Lord Jesus gave to secure what to Him is uniquely beautiful. The price is set out in Philippians 2:6-8; cp. Ephesians 5:25b. The mustard seed and the leaven speak of what man has done with the gospel; but the treasure and the pearl speak of what Christ has done to secure His people, and that is what will triumph in the end.

The final parable – of the dragnet – has obvious similarities to the parable of the dandelion. The difference seems to be that the dandelion mimicked the wheat in their appearance, whereas the parable of the dragnet speaks of openly wicked unbelievers. If the kingdom has already come, why does evil still persist in the world? The kingdom has come in grace, but not yet in judgmental power.

The “old” truths about the kingdom of heaven are illustrated by Isaiah 9:7 and Daniel 2:44; 7:18, etc. The “new” were taught in many places in the New Testament, above all in Matthew 13. Are we able to bring both truths out of the “treasure-house” of Scripture? (13:52)

Living by grace

Paul's Neglected Letter: Galatians 5:7 – 6:5

Theo Balderston

Paul's converts in Galatia had been saved by simple faith in Christ crucified (1:4; 2:16; 3:1). But then "Judaizing teachers" had infiltrated their ranks, insisting that to be saved they also needed to be circumcised. Paul was horrified, and most of the letter is concerned with refuting this error and showing them that by the Spirit who indwelt them they were already sons of God (4:6). But Paul also realised that affirming "justification by faith alone," without further instruction on living their lives without the Law, left his converts exposed to another error, namely, to the unrestrained activities of the flesh within them. ("The flesh" is the fallen nature inherited from Adam that is in every human being.) Perhaps this danger was already manifesting itself in soured relations between those influenced by, and those resisting, the doctrine of the Judaizers (? 5:15).

Rather than them biting and devouring one another, Paul wanted to see "the righteous requirement of the law... fulfilled in them" (Romans 8:4ff). That "requirement" is expressed in Galatians in terms of the last clause of Leviticus 19:18 – "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Galatians 5:14, NKJV). The Lord Himself had spoken similarly (Matthew 19:19; 22:39).

But how is the high goal of loving your neighbour as yourself to be aimed at? Not by placing ourselves again under the Law; more specifically, not by making a distinction between the so-called "ceremonial Law" and "moral Law", and teaching that believers are released from the former, but still subject to the latter. Yet this would be the answer of countless Christian teachers today.

And indeed it seems like a neat means of dealing with indwelling sin. But it is not what Paul says. When in Galatians 5:1 he had warned his Galatian converts to "stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ [had] made [them] free" (NKJV) and not to become "entangled again with a yoke of bondage," he had not been merely warning them against entanglement with the so-called

How is the high goal of loving your neighbour as yourself to be aimed at?

“ceremonial” law, but, rather, against entanglement with the entire Law. This follows from:

- what he says regarding the curse of the Law in 3:13f. This was not just a curse for disregard of what some call “the ceremonial law”.
- his explanation in 3:19-24 of why the Law was ever given (answer: to guard Israel against the grosser errors and immoralities of the gentiles).

from his summing-up of the Law in terms of Leviticus 19:18 (see Galatians 5:14)

– and no doubt other passages in the Letter. It is true that what occasioned the Letter was an issue regarding what many would call the “ceremonial law,” namely, circumcision. But Paul did not seek to argue the Galatians out of circumcision on the grounds that the “ceremonial Law” was now obsolete because fulfilled in Christ, even though the “moral law” still applied to them. One cannot find this way of putting things in the New Testament. Rather, Paul meets the reversion of his converts to the Law in the shape of circumcision by telling them that they ought not to place themselves under the Law at all, because it belonged to this old creation, whereas Christians belong to a new creation (6:15). The “sphere” to which believers belong has changed because of the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (1:4; 2:20). The Law, as a relationship of the believer to God, belonged to the era prior to the death of Christ (3:25). This perspective, that runs through the entire epistle, explains why Paul did not refer his readers to the so-called “moral law” as their guide to righteous living (5:1-3). Indeed, nowhere in all his epistles does Paul refer his believing readers to the Law for their moral guidance. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 he does not refer his readers to the seventh commandment, but to the fact of the Holy Spirit indwelling them (v.8). The only place, to my knowledge, where he cites the Law in support of a moral precept is Ephesians 6:2f, and there he is addressing children who might not be saved.

This did not mean that Paul cut the Law out of his Bible. On the contrary he held that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for... reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). And in 1 Timothy 1:8ff he wrote that “the law is good if one use it lawfully” adding

*The Law belonged to this old creation, whereas
Christians belong to a new creation*

that "...the law is not laid down for a righteous person but for lawless and insubordinate, for ungodly and sinful, for unholy and profane" (W. Kelly). But he did not hold up law-keeping as the believer's means of avoiding sin. Rather, he also wrote that by the cross God had condemned sin in the flesh, in order that "the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us (not, "who attend meticulously to the moral Law's precepts", but) *who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (Romans 8: 4, NKJV).

As already stated, the aim that Paul places before his readers in Galatians is indeed the same noble aim as set before Law-keepers in Leviticus 19:18, namely, loving our neighbour as ourselves. But the means of achieving the aim is not reference to the Law. Rather, Paul's answer is, it is to be achieved by identifying on the one hand what causes us to sin, and, on the other hand, what within us prompts us to righteous conduct. The one, he writes, is "the flesh" in us, which produces "lusts". "The flesh" is the fallen nature within us. The pre-conversion Saul of Tarsus had at one time believed that he had conquered sin. But then he had remembered the last of the ten commandments – "You shall not covet"; and, in recollecting this, he wrote, "Sin revived, and I died" (Romans 7:7-11). That was lust taking advantage of Saul's realisation that sin, after all, had defeated him. Realising that he was, after all, a sinner, was, therefore, no solution in itself. But that was because he was not yet saved (see Romans 8:1ff). Although the believer still has "the flesh" in him or her, s/he is "not in the flesh" (Romans 8:9), and has the indwelling Holy Spirit, who encourages in us characteristics that are His noble "fruit" (Galatians 5:16, 22-25). The word "fruit" indicates both its beneficial character and the gentler spontaneity of its growth. There is no difficulty, Paul says, in identifying the wrong acts that proceed from lust (5:19-21). Likewise the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who had indwelt the Galatian believers since they were saved (3:2), can also be clearly identified.

What Paul teaches here in terms of the flesh and the power of the Spirit, he teaches elsewhere in terms of the "old man" and the "new man" (see Colossians 3:1-10; Ephesians 4:17 - 24).

When Paul traces wrong acts to their sources in lusts, he goes deeper than the moral precepts of God's Law did.

To repeat: Paul is here telling his readers how *they, as believers*, can live so as to please God without (as they had imagined to be necessary) first placing themselves under the Law. This explains certain points in Galatians 5:16-26, that might trouble us. One of these is the point that pagans can display at least some of the traits in 6:22f, and suppress many of the nasty features listed in 6:19-21. He ignored this point because here he is dealing with the lusts and graces that battle *in the hearts of believers*, so the matter just mentioned is irrelevant. Nor is he dealing with the point that other forces than lust might propel the believer into sin: fear of man being an obvious one. He is focussing on “lusts”, because this is far and away the most powerful force propelling Christians into the kinds of wrongdoing that “so easily ensnare us” (cp. Hebrews 12:1).

Notice that when Paul traces wrong acts (Galatians 5:19-21) to their sources in lusts, he goes deeper than the moral precepts of God’s Law did. The Law dealt almost exclusively with actual *actions* (though there are exceptions, notably Leviticus 19:18!). And Paul does not even stop at the lusts that produce the hateful acts, but also identifies their source as “the flesh”, which produces lusts. Likewise he traces right acts back to right dispositions (5:22f), and to the source of these right dispositions, namely, to the indwelling Spirit who causes “fruit” to grow in the believer.

If we include the “and the like” (NKJV) of 5:21, Paul lists twice as many lusts as fruits. This indicates the power and versatility of the inner enemy with which we contend. (And indeed in the seventeenth verse we find an extra, nineteenth, lust: “the flesh lusts against the Spirit...”). Might this indicate that the flesh is especially active in the believer, due to its annoyance at the Holy Spirit having taken up residence in him or her?

Dealing with the flesh within us is no “walk in the park”. The paragraphs above show that Paul himself didn’t imagine it was. Granting that we are indeed believers, Paul indicates three steps necessary if we are to win, even just relatively, in this war.

The first is to recognise that this is indeed an *ongoing* war within us (5:17). The second is to “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (5:24). There has to come a decisive point in our lives where we recognise that all our wrong

*Dealing with the flesh within us is
no “walk in the park”.*

Is it our settled, everyday intention to “walk (prayerfully) in the Spirit”?

desires belong to the “self” that Christ died to rescue us from, and that in Him we have “died” to them too. Recognising this is not easy: so much of our self-esteem is bound up with what we consider to be our strong points, but which may in actuality be outworkings of lusts within, e.g., “selfish ambitions” (5:20). And the battle is not over when this is once recognised. For, though it is a vital battle, it is not the only battle in this war. When I was young there was a tendency to focus on this point alone as the answer to the lusts of the flesh, and gloss over the ongoing battle. On the other hand, though there is an ongoing battle, this starting point – of having “crucified the flesh with its lusts” – is vital to victory. Winning this ongoing battle is the third point. To win in it, we need to be “walking” in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). The essence of Paul’s frequent use of the verb “walk” in relation to the Christian’s conduct is the idea of a deliberately maintained lifestyle.

We have to recognise that in this respect some people have more terrible issues to contend with than others. But the promise here is that the indwelling Holy Spirit will give the enabling to overcome these issues even if they need daily, hourly, watchfulness. Some who will receive the highest honours as “overcomers” (see Revelation 2:7, etc.) in the day of rewards will have “overcome” so well that we never realised the terrible issues that they daily wrestled with.

So this is a real challenge to us: is it our settled, everyday intention to “walk (prayerfully) in the Spirit,” with its necessary corollary, namely, a settled intention not to “walk in the flesh”? If this is our intention, he says, we will be “led” by the Spirit, and His fruit will grow in us. Observing other believers over decades, we can observe this to have happened; it is to be hoped that others can observe the same in ourselves. But the tendency to lapse into the flesh is ever present, and always has to be guarded against (5:26).

Paul takes this further in a sobering conclusion to his list of “works of the flesh”. On the one hand, he writes, “I also told you in time past that those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (5:21). (The literal translation here is “those doing such things”, but one eminent Galatians’ scholar explained the force of this phrase as, “those who are wont to practice...”) When such lustful practices characterise someone bearing the name of “Christian” it

The tendency to lapse into the flesh is ever present, and always has to be guarded against

is not because such people have been saved but have now fallen away from their salvation. It is usually because they were never saved in the first place, but merely paid an outward reverence to the gospel and its precepts. “Carnal”, yet real, Christians may exist, Christians who in this life will one day awaken to their horrible state. But there are far more purely nominal Christians.

In 5:25 Paul concludes the section, as he had begun it (v.16), with an instruction to “walk in the Spirit” if they “live in the Spirit.” The word for “walk” here is not that of 5:16, but a word that literally means to follow a file leader; and here, metaphorically, demands that his readers follow, so to speak, the “footprints” of the Spirit, so that their conduct gives evidence of their claim to “live in the Spirit”.

And, after all the above, Paul has to warn his readers against some elementary works of the flesh (5:26).

At the beginning of chapter 6 Paul commands his readers’ attention afresh with the word, “Brothers.” There may be cases, he says, when the lusts of the flesh will overcome a brother or a sister (the word is *anthrōpos*), and it is up to those who “walk in step with the Spirit” (5:25) – whether brothers or sisters – to restore that person. Paul does not write, “try to restore”; if the backslider is a real believer they will be restored. But some who “walk in step with the Spirit” – will have to facilitate the restoration. G. Christopher Willis regrets the scarcity of such brothers or sisters in our time.¹ Even those who best exemplify the fruit of the Spirit are liable to be tempted.

The work of restoring a failing brother or sister is a matter of bearing their burden with them, and not preening oneself about one’s alleged imperviousness to faults that have stumbled others, but, rather, constantly examining one’s own acts, lest they be the outworking of some unacknowledged lust within (6:2-4).

¹ G. Christopher Willis, *Beautiful Grace: Meditations on Galatians* (Christian Bookroom, Hong Kong, no date), p. 201.

Doing Good

Theo Balderston

“Jesus Christ, Lord of all” was how Peter the apostle introduced the Lord Jesus to Cornelius. But then he added, “who went about doing good” (Acts 10:36, 38, NKJV).

And so should we. Having spent a lengthy epistle warning his Galatian converts against error that compromised justification by faith alone, Paul ended it by instructing them to “Do good to all men,” adding, “especially toward them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

“Doing good” received a bad name at the turn of the 19th /20th centuries when many “modernists” were promoting “do-gooding” as the essence of Christianity, whilst roundly denying the veracity of much of the Bible, and ridiculing the simple gospel of Whitfield and the Wesleys. It is also the case that various Christian “good works” that started off on a “gospel” basis (e.g., the YMCA and Barnardo’s) slipped into non-Christian hands. But it needs also to be said that many who denounced “do-gooding” as the error of so-called liberal Christianity were themselves doing much practical good, and telling no-one about it (rightly so – Matthew 6:3). They were generously, but silently, supporting Christian “good works,” even such done by believers whose practices in various non-fundamental respects these donors deeply disagreed with.

By 2022 liberal Christianity, being meaningless, is definitely dying. We should not be afraid of encouraging each other to do good works (Hebrews 10:24) – practical as well as financial.

The post-apostolic church during the Roman empire seems to have been “zealous of good works”. But it faced the problem that the “good work” most esteemed by the surrounding, pagan society – shouldering civic responsibilities – was one it could not engage in, as it would have involved compromising with idolatry. And the truly good works of Christians today may not always be those most esteemed by the world. In particular, political involvement heightens the risk of compromise with the world’s godlessness. In our priorities, we today can take a lesson from ancient Christianity.



Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
My Lord's coming: hallelujah!
And there isn't any doubt
That He's coming with a *shout!*
My Lord's coming! Hallelujah!

Author unknown

The Importance of God's Word: Meditations on Psalm 119

by Truth for Today team

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This book is an edited compilation of the transcripts of all the talks by Truth for Today, The Bible Explained, which were broadcast during the period September 2017 – March 2020. As several of the speakers referred to the structure of Psalm 119 during their talk, these comments have been collated, condensed, and incorporated into the Introduction of this book.

As many people know, Psalm 119 is the longest of the psalms – it has 176 verses – as well as being the longest chapter in the Bible. Perhaps for that reason all 176 verses are seldom, or never, read completely – either in public or private meditation. It is divided into 22 stanzas (or sections) of 8 verses each, with each stanza corresponding to one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a so-called ‘acrostic’ psalm. For example, in the original Hebrew text, verses 1-8 of Psalm 119 all start with a Hebrew letter ALEPH (English “a”); and so on. The meaning of these Hebrew letters often plays a role in being the dominant theme of the stanza. This was probably a memory aid, as it is a lot easier to memorise things if you can attach them to a simple structure in your mind. Of course, it’s very difficult to reproduce this effect in an English translation!

What is Psalm 119 all about? Really, just one theme – the excellency and value of the Word of God. For Christian believers, the Word of God not only furnishes us with a knowledge of the living God, but it also speaks of the Christ who has revealed Him. In John 1:1-14, Jesus Christ is called “the Word”. He is “the Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13) – the “A-Z” of God.

The above item is available from STP at our address inside the front cover

