

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1592



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Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

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

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to 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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Who to Follow?

We recently watched a film about climbers on Mount Everest. In driving snow and caught by cloud, the climbers could not see much more than an arm's length in front of them. They would have stopped, but the conditions were so bad that they had to continue, to reach safety.

With such poor visibility, each climber had to follow the footsteps of the one in front. They could not see to navigate themselves, or to follow a preferred route. Roped together, they were completely dependent on each other. More importantly, they had to rely on the leader to take the right path, to avoid danger and to bring them safely down the mountain.

In the film, one of the leading climbers took the wrong path. Disaster struck. Many fell. And some died. The tragic thing is that it was telling a true story, one re-enacted every year in the world's mountain regions.

Leading Where?

In every part of our life, there are leaders who we can follow: in business, in science, in sport and in the media, to name but a few. In many cases, it doesn't matter. The choice of which footballer's skill to enjoy; which professor's research to follow; whose accounting practice to copy. These are unlikely to affect our lives, so long as we do not take them too seriously or actually try to live by them.

When we consider who we follow in life, the position is very different. There are many in the world who offer themselves as leaders, some more credible than others. Politicians offer a national or world view. Philosophers and reli-

gious heads provide their own answers to ethical and spiritual dilemmas. There is even a growing industry of 'life coaches' who advise on everything from career options to home décor.

Many of these are contradictory. One will say that our priority should be charity work, whilst the next says it should be wealth generation. Should we treat others as they treat us, or how we would *like* them to treat us? Is national interest more or less important than a country's place in the world? Maybe we need a leader to tell us which leader to follow... oh dear!

The Right One to Follow

From the beginning, God demonstrated that He is all-knowing and all-powerful. He created the universe, keeps all life going and guides the lives of men and women. He has made promises, which He keeps; foretold the future through His prophets; and given comprehensive principles and laws to keep people safe and maintain their relationship with Him. This makes Him totally different from the fallible, inconsistent leaders of our world. We can trust Him, rely on Him and be sure that His guidance will never fail or change.

For this reason, God's people were told by Moses in Deuteronomy 8:19 not to follow other gods. Speaking about the nearby nations, he said:

Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise" (Deuteronomy 12:30).

Rather, God said:

You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Deuteronomy 16:20).

By following God and His principles, we are assured of a firm foundation for our lives. While we cannot see the future, He can. The obstacles which will come into our lives may seem insurmountable, but He has the divine view and will help us navigate them. He is not subject to change or disaster.

“Follow Me”

When Jesus came, the Son of God and His representative, he made the same call to men and women.

To the fishermen he said: *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19)*. He called many others from different occupations, like Matthew the taxman (9:9) .



In fact, the call is also a command. If we want to share the hope that God offers, we *must* follow Jesus, thereby following his Father too.

Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34).

He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:38).

If this sounds rather harsh, don't worry, it isn't. Looking at similar words Jesus used in the Gospel of John, we are assured that following him is about comfort and confidence:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand (John 10:27-29).

If anyone serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, him my Father will honour (12:26).

When we follow Jesus, we can see where we are going and that gives us hope and life. The goal is the Kingdom of God. Life's disasters may be avoided or will become manageable with him as our guide, to help us make the right choices for our long term good. With the Bible in our hand, we have constant access to the words of God and their expression through the Lord Jesus.

In Revelation, the Bible describes those who will be in God's kingdom:

These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Revelation 14:4).

In the most famous Psalm, the writer is confident:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life (Psalm 23:6).

Editor

The Jesus of the Bible - 1

Jesus in the Old Testament

In this new series, we consider Jesus Christ as the Bible shows him. In this first part, we begin to consider how he was described in the Old Testament – that section of the Bible written before he was born.

Referring to the Old Testament was a characteristic of the teaching of Christ himself, such as:

These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me (Luke 24:44).

Jesus said things like, “*It is written*”, “*Have you not read?*”, “*The scripture cannot be broken*”, and in prayer to his Father, “*Your word is truth.*”

Foretelling His Life

The Old Testament foretold what would happen to him and his rôle in the future. In it are many predictions about his life. They cover the circumstances and place of his birth; the purpose of his mission; descriptions of his character; how people would reject him; his final entry into Jerusalem; his betrayal; the way his disciples forsook him; the harsh treatment he suffered before being executed; the precise details of his death (written centuries before crucifixion was known as a method of execution); his resurrection from the dead; his ascension to heaven; his rôle there as High Priest; his return to earth; and his kingship of the world.

It is a whole library of information about Jesus Christ, written long before the events took place. Let’s look at some examples.

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey... He shall speak peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zechariah 9:9–10).

Verse 9 is quoted in Matthew 21:5 and was literally fulfilled when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Verse 10 however is one of many passages about his future kingship of the world. It has yet to happen. But the fulfilment of verse 9 assures us that verse 10 will also be fulfilled.

His Birth

Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

This passage was quoted by God’s angel speaking to Joseph about the birth of Jesus in Matthew 1:23.

Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

After Jesus' birth, this passage was quoted to the wise men when they came to find him (Matthew 2:6).

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it... forever (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This passage connects with the angel Gabriel's message to Mary about her conception of Jesus, God's Son. It clearly states he will be king over an everlasting kingdom, reigning on the throne of his ancestor David, in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32-33).

Suffering, Death and Resurrection

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

This passage was being read by an Ethiopian treasurer, when Philip joined him in his chariot and explained that it referred to Jesus. Philip's teaching about Christ from the Old Testament scriptures persuaded the man to believe and be baptised (Acts 8:32).

My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in sheol [the pit], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:9-10).

This psalm predicted that God would raise His Son from the dead, not allow-



ing him to corrupt in the grave. It was used by the Apostle Peter to declare that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead in accordance with God's purpose (Acts 2:25-28).

Returning to the Earth

In that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east (Zechariah 14:4).

This prophecy speaks of Christ's physical return to the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. Acts 1:9-11 describes his ascension to heaven. Two angels reassured the watching disciples that he would return physically and visibly in the same way.

These passages (just a few of very many) show clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ was central to his Father's purpose from the beginning. For a full understanding of him, we need to consult both Old and New Testaments.

Promises to Abraham

In the Old Testament we find important promises that God made, and their central focus is the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's promises to a faithful man called Abraham are found across Genesis chapters 12-22. They predict that:

- ❖ Abraham's name is to be great
- ❖ All nations will be blessed in Abraham and his descendants
- ❖ Abraham and his descendants are to possess the land (Israel) for ever
- ❖ Abraham is to be the father of innumerable descendants
- ❖ Abraham is to be the father of a specific descendant who will conquer all enemies.

This is explained in the New Testament, where Abraham is mentioned over 70 times. In Romans 4:13–22 we can see how important he was, and he is described as *“the heir of the world”*.

In Galatians 3:8 we read that *“the gospel”* was preached to Abraham. The message of this gospel is also explained for us:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ... For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:16, 27–29).

This tells us that the individual seed is Jesus. The innumerable seed is all true believers in Christ. Through belief and baptism into Christ, all can inherit these promises. Without the Old Testament we would have little idea of this.

Promises to David

God’s promise to King David is found in 2 Samuel 7:11–16:

- ❖ David's descendant will be the Son of God

- ❖ David's descendant will build a house for God's name
- ❖ David's descendant will reign for ever from David's throne.



The New Testament confirms that David’s descendant is Jesus Christ. A clause from the promise is applied to him verbatim in Hebrews 1:5. Furthermore, the angel Gabriel’s message to Mary includes this:

You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:31–33).

From this we learn that Jesus is the Son of God born of a human mother and destined to be a king, reigning in Jerusalem for ever.

No wonder the New Testament opens: *“Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1).*

The predictions of Christ’s life, death and resurrection were all accurately fulfilled. We can confidently believe the passages in both the Old and New Testaments, which predict his second coming to this earth to rule for ever in righteousness and peace.

Mark Sawyer

The Reliability of the Gospels - 8

Specifics: Time, Place, Person

The reliability of the Gospels is important to real Christianity, because the Gospels are the main source from which we can learn about the teaching of Jesus and the events of his life.

The external evidence of archaeology, linguistic fossils, undesigned coincidences and the analysis of the names used in the New Testament are all good witnesses to the reliability and accuracy of the Gospel records. In the previous article we saw that the Gospels were written early, in the living memory of many eyewitnesses both friendly and hostile.

To this we can add the internal evidence of specific times, places and people.

If it Were Fiction

There are two possible ways that one might write a Gospel. Either the Gospels are the records of eyewitnesses or they are fictional accounts. If

someone is trying to write a fictional account and pass it off as eyewitness testimony, then it would be prudent to avoid detail in one's descriptions of people, places or events. Readers might well know the people or places better than the writer, and might actually have been present at the time that the event is supposed to have taken place.

This would mean that the account would be exposed as inaccurate or incorrect, and the credibility of the Gospel would be completely undermined.

Additionally, people writing fictional accounts tend not to include irrelevant material. If one were making up a story about a football match it is unlikely that one would include the fact that the referee received a call from his son on his mobile phone in the interval, or that one of the news cameramen was wearing odd socks.

These might be noticed by someone writing a factual account, but it would be unlikely that such details would be invented. In fictional accounts, people like to write such that there are no loose ends.

In the Detail

The accounts in the Gospels and Acts are full of apparently inconsequential details. For example, the description of John the Baptist tells us that:

Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4).



This is not a part of the story; if one leaves it out the account is essentially unchanged. However, the details might have been noticed by someone who had actually seen John. If they were invented, then the person would notice the fact.

Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree (Luke 19:4); there was no need to specify the kind of tree and someone who knew Jericho well might know whether the road in that area had any sycamore trees near it.

At the miracle where Jesus turned water into wine, John tells us that there were “six stone water jars” (John 2:6). This level of detail was unnecessary, but it is included.

No Contradictions

The account of the raising of the widow of Nain’s son gives a very strong set of details. Luke 7:11 tells us that the miracle took place in a named town, the town of Nain. Verse 12 adds to this by telling us that Jesus performed the miracle near the city gate, and that it was at a funeral. This identifies a very specific place and time. The people of the city would have remembered whether a miracle took place at a funeral or not, and would have said so, loudly, when they read the Gospel.

Finally, we read that the event was newsworthy:

And this report about him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region (Luke 7:17).

The point here is that the number of people who would have heard of the miracle was very great. This was an event that would have been known of by hundreds or thousands of people, at least in outline.



All that a sceptical reader would have needed to do in order to discover whether the miracle had really happened as it was described in the Gospel would have been to find an inhabitant of Galilee or Judea at about the right time and ask whether they had heard of it. If two or three people all said that they had never heard of the event, then there would be considerable doubt as to whether it had ever happened. If people from Nain said that the miracle had never occurred, then the Gospel would be completely discredited.

Reliable Records

The point about the Gospels is that there are many tests for accuracy. Besides the external tests of archaeology, linguistic fossils and the frequencies of names, there are internal tests such as the presence of detail in the text, much of it irrelevant. The evidence fits together to show that the Gospels really are the reliable accounts of eyewitnesses.

John Thorpe

Contentment in a Consumer Society

We live in an extraordinary age. Never before has mankind had such knowledge. Never before has man been able to leave the earth, fly over it, and even travel to the moon. It is an amazing era, and there is much for which we should be thankful.

On the other hand, there has been an increase in stress-related diseases, in immorality, greed, drug taking and other sorts of wickedness. In some parts of the world there is great wealth, while both there and elsewhere many go to bed hungry every night.

Yet daily we are urged to be more addicted to the consumer society. "Take out a loan and have that car NOW"; "buy the boat of your dreams, or the holiday of a lifetime"; "join our competition and win a fortune"; "buy a lottery ticket, and it could be YOU who is rich".



In stark contrast, we read about the Lord Jesus, who despite being the Son of God, was so poor that he often had nowhere to sleep. The demands of a consumer society do not mix well with him and all he stands for.

Getting the Right Perspective

Now, with Bible in hand, let us see things in perspective. Consider the futility of man without God. Psalm 49 begins by calling the rich and poor, and everyone all over the world to hear a very important lesson. However rich we may be, none of us can save the other (v7). The Psalmist adds:

He sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others (Psalm 49:10).

The Psalm continues:

Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever... they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish (v11-12).

This is a powerful passage, and pulls no punches, but we know it is true. Grasping after riches cannot bring true happiness. The writer follows with a resounding call of hope:

God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me (v15).

Well-placed Confidence

When we turn to Psalm 146, it shows us where we should place our confidence:

Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever (Psalm 146:3-6).

Which will we choose? To trust in mortal men and women or to take refuge with the mighty being who made everything? Nobody can extend our lives, but God offers eternal life.

The New Testament speaks equally plainly, as in these words of Jesus:

Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15).

Yet getting things is the dominant thought today. If anyone is rich, people long to be like him or her.

Then with piercing logic, Jesus continued to tell this parable:

The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry'" (v16-19).

As far as the man was concerned, life was good, and he was going to have a great future. But he had not thanked God for His provision, and thought only of himself. The crushing answer from God came:

Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? (v20).

Jesus finished with the clear lesson:

So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (v21).

Money Troubles?

Many of us may be anxious about money at times, or even all the time. Jesus continued in Luke 12 to give us reason for a brighter outlook:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? (v22-24).



For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you (v30–31).

The crowning lesson followed:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (v34).

Do we trust in the money we may have in the bank, or the goods we possess? The Lord was emphatic: choose to have your treasure in heavenly things; make God the priority in your lives, not material things.

The apostle Paul follows the same theme and says with great clarity:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out (1 Timothy 6:6–7).

Why strain all through life to be better than our neighbours? Why put every effort into ambition for power and privilege? We entered the world naked and helpless, and will leave it in the same way. No money can stave off death. The finest gold cannot purchase immortality.

Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (v8).

The Christian sees all blessings as having come from a merciful God. We should thank Him daily, realising that all we have belongs to God, who gave it to us in trust. This includes our food, our clothing and the roof over our heads, as well as the love of those near and dear to us. Paul continues to warn his readers:

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (v9–10).



Are we like an overloaded ship which can only sink? We can only answer for ourselves but here is the crucial point: Do we want the lure of wealth, or the blessings of God and eternal life? There is nothing wrong with money in itself but it is deadly if it takes away our awareness of God and our need for Him.

Using Wealth Properly

What if we are rich already? Maybe very few of us consider ourselves rich, but many of us have some goods or wealth.

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy (v17).

The Bible is warning us against the danger that riches can bring. They can

make us feel superior, but they can disappear overnight, as many have found to their cost in recent times. The whole financial world is unstable and unreliable. Far better to put one's trust in God, who can do immeasurably more, and even open our graves at the resurrection.

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (v18–19).

Whatever you have, whatever you do, be rich in good works. Be bountiful to those in need, but do it without letting anyone know. When countries or cities are torn by natural disasters, what should we do? When people we know suffer loss, are we eager to do what we can? If so God will see and smile. Not only this, in doing so we are following the example of Jesus, which is what his Father asks of us.

Sacrifice

There is more, when we turn to the Book of Hebrews:

But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Hebrews 13:16).

The Christian church was to face terrible persecution. Many would have to flee for their lives. Some would be savagely ill-treated, and others killed in horrific ways. The call was to share what they had with each other, and thereby to show the self-sacrificing love of their Saviour. Their money could be a demonstration of the love they felt for members in need. Their

contribution was to be looked on as a privilege. Whilst we all should try to provide for ourselves, we should give what we can:

He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD (Proverbs 19:17).

Contentment

Here is contentment. The Bible not only shows us how brief life is, but points forward to a wonderful future for the God-fearing man and woman. Now let the Psalmist sum up for us with a few well-chosen words:

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness... I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!... Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble (Psalm 119:36, 127, 165).

It is a peace that passes all understanding. It is a peace that overcomes in all the rush and bustle of life. It brings us to adore God who has shown us the foolishness of trying to keep up with the rat race, and has promised what no man can give us – eternal life in His kingdom. What greater contentment could anyone wish for?

So where will we place our confidence and our effort? To work only for the best that life can offer now? Better to respond to the call of the Lord Jesus:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

What an amazing invitation!

Ken Clark

Is it Fair?

My sister is two years younger than I am. When we were little there were obvious comparisons in my mind over the way we were treated by our parents. For example, I considered it outrageously unfair that I had begged for roller skates, and was not allowed them until I was eight, but my sister got some when she was seven. I forget exactly what my father's response was to my precocious complaint, but it was to the effect that I had no right to moan about the way I was being brought up.

Years later I worried about the apparent unfairness of God in respect of people who die without having heard the gospel message. A simple search on the internet suggests that this is a question that many people ask about God and Christianity. The question is of genuine concern, but we must consider it in relation to Bible teaching on the matter.

God has Told us What we Need to Know

The Bible does not give us answers to all the questions we might like to ask, however important we may consider them. Even for Jesus, the son of God, in his ministry there were some things hidden from him, such as the time of his return to earth (see Matthew 24:36).

The Bible states that there are some 'secret things' which are not revealed to us (Deuteronomy 29:29).

We must learn to concentrate on what God has told us rather than wasting time and effort on things we cannot know.

There are some things in the Bible that are difficult to understand. The prophets searched long and hard to comprehend the true meaning of some of their prophetic utterances given by God (see 1 Peter 1:10-11).

However, in contrast, there are many, many things that are difficult to misunderstand. Our need of salvation and the way in which it is offered is utterly unambiguous.

Clear Bible Teaching

The following important teachings are crystal clear, and they are stated repeatedly in the Bible:

There is only one God – the God of the Bible

The LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him... The LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other (Deuteronomy 4:35, 39).

I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me... I am the LORD, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:5, 18).

We all deserve to die because we sin (disobey God)

The soul who sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:20).

Thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

The only way for us to be saved is to believe on Jesus Christ, and to follow him

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life... He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16, 18).

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

We Cannot Argue with God

Whether or not I had a logical argument as a child, I was in no position to remonstrate with my father. One thing I did learn was that there was never any point arguing with him, whether or not he seemed to be right.

God is always right, so we have absolutely no grounds to argue with Him. It is up to us to try to understand His ways, not for Him to justify them to us. We may wonder how His ways are 'fair', but that simply means that we do not understand Him.

In fact, by 'fair' we usually mean treating everyone equally or getting what we deserve. In fact, if God gave us what we deserved we would all be treated the same and we would all perish. Any honest person will acknowledge that they have done wrong things in their life, and this means that they automatically deserve death. God owes us absolutely nothing at all, whereas we owe Him everything.

It is God who defines what is just, and Paul argues strongly that we have no right to argue with God about how

He treats us, alluding to a similar message in the Old Testament.

But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour? (Romans 9:20-21).



The Jews complained that the ways of God were unfair (Ezekiel 18:25). God's response was that it was their ways, not His, that were unfair. It can take a lifetime of prayerfully reading God's word and submitting to His will to come anywhere near understanding God's character, but that is what He asks of us.

The fact that we do know about the Gospel means that we are completely without excuse for not responding to it. Our genuine concern for other people is no reason not to respond ourselves. Please do not use this issue as a reason for not accepting God's offer of eternal life.

Anna Hart

The Ten Commandments in the 21st Century - 4

The Sabbath, and Obeying Parents

4. Remember the Sabbath Day, to Keep it Holy

The fourth commandment takes us back to the week of Creation. In six days, God created the world and everything in it, including mankind.

On the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done (Genesis 2:2).

The Hebrew word here for 'rested' does not mean to be weary. It just means to cease from what you were doing. It is as if God could now enjoy looking at the great world He had brought into being. We read in verse 3 that He set aside the seventh day as special, and made it holy.

The number 'seven' demonstrates completeness in the Bible. After every seventh day, a new cycle of seven days begins again. It is interesting that all over the world, people still divide time into seven days, not eight or ten but seven.

Just as God rested on the seventh day, the Israelites had to stop work on this day, and devote it to God. This rule applied to horses, camels, oxen and slaves as well – see Exodus 23:12. There was also a practical aspect, as they all had to rest and be refreshed. If we continue working day after day without a rest our efficiency drops. We need a day to look forward to, a day

when our blisters can heal and our spirits be refreshed.

There was another, deeper meaning behind the Sabbath. In God's great plan, a day is coming when all the earth will rest. In the Kingdom of God, all mankind will be able to rest from their 'slavery' to sin and death, and enjoy the peace and beauty of God's work. We can see this idea clearly in Hebrews 4:1–4.

Effectively, every week the Israelites were treated to a little taste of the Kingdom of God, as something to look forward to. And we can see now why Jesus so often healed sick people on the Sabbath Day. As the crowds saw the sick and paralysed walk away healed, they could see a picture of the Kingdom of God, with sin and death and illness removed.

So, the Sabbath Day commandment was a wonderful institution. It not only brought relief from hard labour, and a time for talking about God, but it also pointed forward to the great hope of the future.

Christian Observance

Do Christians need to keep the Sabbath Day? Some religious groups believe we should, and they hold their services on Saturdays. What does the New Testament say?

A key point is, what happened when Gentiles (non-Jews) were baptised? In Acts chapter 15, the Christian 'council' in Jerusalem made the decision that

Gentiles were NOT obliged to keep the Law. They wrote a summary of their findings, and they did not say that Sabbath keeping was essential.

More precisely, the Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 2:16 that we should not condemn anyone for NOT keeping the Sabbath.

As the early church developed in the centuries after the time of the Apostles, many customs from the Law were brought back into church services, such as priests and altars and incense and holy days. This was against the ruling of the Apostles.



For the Christian, the first day of the week, Sunday, is more important than Saturday, because that is the day Jesus rose from the dead. We can see that this is the day when Christians met to remember Jesus in breaking bread:

Now on the first day of the week, [when] the disciples came together to break bread (Acts 20:7).

So Christians are not obliged to stop work on Saturday or Sunday. In the western world, both days are normally kept free from work, although this has changed, especially in shops, health-

care and transport. If we have Sundays free, we can be thankful this gives us opportunity to come together to break bread. In fact, every day of the week is an opportunity to serve God and think about Him and His great plan.

5. Honour Your Father and Mother

This commandment moves from God and His plans for the earth to our own homes and families. The Hebrew word for 'honour' carries the meaning that it is imperative that your parents are to be treated with respect. Every Israelite was to give their parents the authority they deserved. Israelites lived in a patriarchal society, where the oldest male in the household was the head of the family. Conversely, even teenage boys were obliged by this law to obey their parents. If they were persistently disobedient, they could even be handed over to a court to be punished – see Deuteronomy 21:18–21.

Honouring parents also meant that you were responsible for caring for them in old age. In a society where there were no state pensions, this was an important part of the social order.

Spiritual Effects

One result of children growing up to respect and obey their parents when they were little was that when they grew up they would be more likely to respect God, their Heavenly Father. Thus the fifth commandment was also linked to the first four, which all relate to our attitude to God.

What does the New Testament say about this? It insists that it is still important in the life of a Christian. Paul quotes the fifth commandment and applies it to Christians.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3).

What about caring for our parents in old age? This, too, is essential for believers. In 1 Timothy 5:4-8 we read that anyone who neglects this duty is not worthy to be called a Christian – that is a strong message!

The Situation Today

That brings us to the present day, because there is a great spirit of rebelliousness in our world. Often we find children disobeying parents, and treating them as equals or worse. Then when the parents get old, their children avoid caring for them, perhaps even failing to visit them regularly.

At the same time, lack of respect at home leads to lack of respect for teachers at school, for managers at work, and for the police. When a society as a whole turns its back on God, one of the first things you notice is that children disobey their parents – see Romans 1:28-32. This is typical of our age, and it will get worse until Jesus returns to teach a better way.



So it is important that we teach our children from a young age to do what they are told, to be quiet when we are speaking to someone else, to be polite, and to obey family rules at home. In doing this we are giving them a good foundation for the future.



More Practicalities

Now we come to a question that is frequently asked on this topic. "Must I ALWAYS obey my parents, especially if I am an adult and still live with them?"

The answer depends on what it is they are asking you to do. If the request is reasonable, for example "please get home before dark", that would obviously be something we would do without question. But if the command was "you must not have anything to do with the Bible!" we would have to disobey. When there is a conflict between what God wants us to do and what other people want us to do, whoever they are, we must obey God first.

So, in summary, the fifth commandment asks us to respect and care for our parents. And it promises us God's blessing if we carry out this duty.

David M. Pearce

Why Not Read the Bible Today?

The Bible claims to be the Word of God. Doesn't that arouse your curiosity? The fact that most people today don't believe that doesn't disprove it. Many didn't believe the earth revolved around the sun until Galileo proved it!

The Bible consists of 66 books which have been preserved miraculously through the ages. Men became martyrs for its sake. William Tyndale was burnt at the stake because he translated the New Testament into English at a time when only the Latin version was available in England.

Accuracy

Many of the Old Testament books are a historical record of the Jews and their surrounding nations and have been proved true by archaeology. Some books are prophetic and can be shown to be accurate down to the last detail.

One example is the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ, as foretold in Isaiah:

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

His crucifixion is prophesied in the Psalms:

For dogs have surrounded me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones. They look and stare at me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. (Psalm 22:16-18).

No human being could have foreseen such events hundreds of years before they took place. The more you read the Bible and delve into its claims, the more convinced you will be that it is of divine origin.



Have Confidence

If so much of the Bible can be proved to be accurate then we can believe its other claims – to have the answer to all our problems now and the hope of a future life in a perfected world.

Maybe you are daunted at the length of the book? Don't be discouraged. There are many aids and reading plans to help. Use the addresses in this magazine if you wish to ask for support.

Do you find the old-fashioned English of the Authorised Version difficult? Try a more modern translation. We can recommend you try the New King James Version for example, which is the version most often quoted in *Glad Tidings*. Another good alternative is the English Standard Version.

The more you read the Bible and investigate its claims, the more convinced you will be that it is indeed the Word of God. Why not take it down from the shelf and start reading now?

Marion Buckler

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