

Scripture Truth



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Smashed to pieces
The Apostles' Doctrine
Daring to be a Daniel
Paul's neglected letter: Galatians

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Patience

Patience! The very word has an old-fashioned ring about it. In a month (November) when the world impatiently awaits a vaccine to release it from the tyranny of the corona virus, the word, “patience,” with its overtones of resignation, might seem like a quality that is best binned.

A lot of people, understandably, feel their patience wearing thin: people who anyway have to live on their own; people whose health is compromised by reduced medical facilities; people whose livelihoods grow more precarious by the day; young people whose outlets and activities are cancelled; and so on. Indeed for all of us time seems to tick by at a snail’s pace.

The writer to the Hebrews wrote, “For you have need of endurance [“patience”, KJV], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (10:36, NKJV). He was referring to persecution; but I think the admonition can be applied more generally to all sorts of irksome experiences

“Tribulation produces perseverance [‘patience’, KJV],” wrote Paul, “and perseverance character, and character hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit...” (Romans 5:3). The word translated “character” in the NKJV and ESV, and “experience” in Darby Tr., most generally means “proof” or “provenness”. If the Christian is patient in adversity then this will verify the reality of the new life within him or her, and the Holy Spirit will heighten the heart’s awareness of the love of God; and both of these will enliven hope in the coming day of complete deliverance.

“I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom *and patience* of Jesus Christ...” (Revelation 1:9). John’s own “tribulation”, certainly, was persecution for the gospel, but his addressees were not currently suffering governmental persecution (chapters 2, 3). However they all had their troubles; and “patience” was the form that the kingdom of Jesus was taking for all of them. They all had to learn the Christian-character-forming practice of patience. And we with them. We have the best reason to practise patience because we have hope: we know that the Lord is coming!

T. BALDERSTON

Anchor Points

David G. Pulman

Anchors are important for vessels on water, whether inland waterways or seas and oceans. At the mouths of large rivers it is not unusual to see large ships anchored offshore, waiting for the right moment to enter and offload their cargo. When waiting offshore the captain of the vessel will have ordered the anchor or anchors to be lowered to hold the ship still and prevent drifting. Large sea-going ships will usually have more than one anchor, as a single anchor may be insufficient to cope with changing sea-conditions of tides and currents.

The Scriptures provide the believer with anchor points. They are like foundation stones on which we can rely. In practical ways they enable us to feel assured and secure in our faith, and link us with our Lord Jesus Christ. I am reminded of that old gospel hymn,

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!¹

I would like to bring before you a few Scriptures for consideration and encouragement.

Precious blood: the only foundation for salvation

Let us consider 1 Peter 1:18-19, “knowing that **you were ransomed** [redeemed] from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the **precious blood of Christ**, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (ESV).

Peter, writing to believers scattered over a large geographical area (see 1 Peter 1:1), is seeking to encourage them because of the difficulties they are facing – as outlined in verses 6 and 7. He reminds them of what they

¹ Priscilla Jane Owens (1829-1907); for other verses see no. 208 in *Gospel Tidings Hymn Book* (Scripture Truth Publications, 1982).

*Their salvation has an anchor point
– the blood of Christ*

have believed, and the change that has been brought about in their lives. They have moved from the temporary and corruptible things associated with the temple at Jerusalem to that which is found in Christ, which is greater, and permanent. Verse 5 highlights that they (and we) are kept by the power of God. There is nothing greater in the whole universe.

This is further emphasised in our two verses. Their past religious life was based on “perishable things such as silver or gold.” In contrast Peter now points to what is imperishable and has eternal value – “the precious blood of Christ.” Their salvation has a firm foundation, or **anchor point**, on which to rest secure. The blood of Christ will not deteriorate; His sacrifice has eternal value before the eye of a holy God.

Our blessing, indeed, the blessing of all people in this world, is solely based on the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish, who shed His blood at the cross. Jesus is the only way to eternal blessing, sins forgiven, and peace with God. We come into the eternal blessing of salvation the moment we place our trust in Jesus as the Saviour of sinners.

When difficulties mount up in our daily lives, we might become distressed or downcast. Then we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the difficulties of life will be easier to bear when shared with the Saviour.

Personal Saviour – and I must respond

My next Scripture to consider is John 20:28, “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

Although it is Thomas, one of the Lord’s disciples, who speaks these words, the verse highlights a fundamental point for all of us. We all need to make the commitment that the verse indicates.

I trust that all who read this are believers. If not, then you need Romans 10:9 – “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (ESV).

Being a Christian is not only knowing that you are saved for time and eternity. Rather, having made that decision, then the next step is the commitment indicated by Thomas. I look at this verse in this simple way: “My Lord” – Jesus is the one whom I am to obey, follow, and allow to control my life for His glory. “My God” – Jesus is due the worship and thanksgiving from my heart because of who He is and what He has done to bring me into eternal blessing. Was this in the mind of Thomas when he uttered these wonderful words?

The events surrounding this verse (28) show that the Lord Jesus was personally interested in Thomas, as He is interested in each one of us. Jesus is a **personal Saviour**. He is interested in me.

Persuaded fully – and a life-long commitment: “I know whom...”

My third Scripture is from 2 Timothy 1:12, “For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed; for I know **whom** I have believed, and am [fully] persuaded that he is able to keep for that day the deposit I have entrusted to him.” (Darby Tr.)

This wonderful Scripture is my third anchor-point, where Paul expresses more fully what Thomas had succinctly stated above. Paul often found himself in difficult situations because of his total commitment to the Lord Jesus and the commission the Lord had given him. A life of service which was not a “bed of roses”! The Lord had shown Paul right after his conversion that he would suffer many things for his Lord and Saviour. This in no way deterred Paul.

Paul’s commitment was to a Person whom he knew very well. “I know whom I have believed.” Paul’s relationship with Jesus was based on first-hand experience. This is true for every believer. When we trusted Jesus as our Saviour it was a “face to face” interview, and at that point we were handing over our lives to One who is the Son of God. In addition, Paul emphasises that he was fully persuaded of the ability of Jesus to keep safe

I know whom I have believed

*And this is the record,
that God hath given to us eternal life*

what he had entrusted to Him on that life-changing Damascus day (Acts 9:5-6).

Personal security – and eternal life

The fourth Scripture is found in John 17:3, “And this is **life eternal**, that they might know thee **the only true God, and Jesus Christ**, whom thou hast sent.”

The defence against all satanic opposition – which is aimed at stumbling believers and causing them to fail – is the understanding of the eternal security which is ours. No matter what kind of fiery dart of pain and distress might be sent against us, the shield of faith is sufficient to quench that dart. The moment we believed we received eternal life, based on knowing Divine Persons – the true God, and Jesus Christ. The full gospel involves more than the forgiveness of sins. Receiving eternal life is another part of the grand scope and fulness of the Gospel.

John, in his first Epistle (1:2), writes, “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us” (KJV). John was a first-hand witness of this truth, having been a companion of Jesus for over three years. Towards the end of this same Epistle John again writes (5:11-12), “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” The eternal life we have received is anchored in our Saviour, the Son of God.

A Prepared Home – the Father’s house

The final Scripture is from John 14:3, “And if I go and **prepare a place for you**, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

At one time the expression, “An all-the-way-home Saviour” was often mentioned in the assemblies. We do not seem to hear it so much these days. But this little saying captures a wonderful truth about our

We have a Prepared Home in heaven

salvation. The moment we trusted the Lord Jesus Christ and knew our sins were forgiven, the truth of a heavenly home – the Father’s house – was sure and certain; and it is our eternal destination. The opening few verses of John 14 are precious. A heavenly Father, a promise from our Saviour concerning His return for us, and the final reality of our being with Him forever.

To conclude

Believers have been lifted from the poverty of this world to the prospect of living in the grandest royal palace of all, the Father’s house. We have covered some “anchor points” that steady the ship of our lives, especially in troubling times. Just to repeat them, they are,

- the Precious blood of our Saviour’s sacrifice;
- that He is a Personal Saviour, interested in each one of us;
- that we can be Persuaded fully of His ability to keep us safe;
- that we have eternal life, our Personal security because it is centred in Christ;
- and that at the end of our journey we have a Prepared Home in heaven.

Let me finish with two verses from a lovely hymn: ²

On Christ Salvation rests secure;
The Rock of ages must endure;
Nor can that faith be overthrown
Which rests upon the “Living Stone.”

No other hope shall intervene:
To Him we look, on Him we lean;
Other foundations we disown,
And build on Christ the “Living Stone”.

² By Samuel Medley (1738-99); no. 99 in *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* (Scripture Truth Publications, 1978).

Daring to be a Daniel

Jonathan Smith

A challenging article for younger people in a difficult world.

Paul the apostle wrote to Timothy, “Let no-one despise your youth” (1 Timothy 4:12, NKJV). He didn’t tell Timothy to wait and to grow up a bit. Though you, the reader, may be young, and in natural terms people might not listen to what you say, by your example you can speak to others. “Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (v. 13).

These things can be acted upon if you are young. Society today might encourage us to be a bit like Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up. But Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child”. Some people never seem to progress from that state. But Paul added, “When I became a man, I put childish things away” (1 Corinthians 13:11). There comes a point in life when we realise we are ready for responsibilities, and we can read this verse and say, “I’m not going to stop in the middle of that verse, and ‘never grow up’; I’m going to ‘put away childish things’”. Actually, this remark applies to us all, whatever our age.

So how do we “put childish things away”? To answer this we should look at the first chapter of Daniel. The things written beforehand “were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11, ESV). This chapter has been relevant to young believers in all periods of history, but never so much as today.

Daniel’s boyhood and early teenage years were spent in the city of Jerusalem during the short reigns of the kings Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1,3,6). Both these kings were sons of the godly king Josiah who had instituted a great revival in Judah, acting against idolatry and immorality (2 Kings 22,23). But, despite their father’s example, it is expressly said of these two kings that they “did evil in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 23:32, 37). Sin starts in the heart; these two kings’ hearts, and indeed the people’s hearts, had not changed. Where are our hearts? We need to think about this, particularly when we are young:¹ where do our hearts look for satisfaction?

And so, although the young Daniel grew up in in the kingdom of Judah, he grew up in an environment of sin and degrading behaviour. Does this sound remotely familiar? The people of Judah had been, as we say, “boiled up slowly”

¹ But not only the young! [Ed.]

in this. To many of them, their environment was normality. Like the people of Malachi's day they probably said, "In what way have we wearied [the LORD]?" People might reply just like this today. "How have we offended God?" Malachi replied, "In that you say, 'Everyone that does evil is good in the sight of the LORD'" (Malachi 2:17). They called evil "good" (cp. Isaiah 5:20). How much of this happens today?

Arriving in Babylon, Daniel was introduced to an environment that in some respects was more civilised than the one he had been taken out of. The Babylonians did not practise some of the horrific things, such as child sacrifice, that were happening in Judah. And the four friends were brought into a privileged position because they were judged to have the capability to serve in the king's palace (Daniel 1:4). They were, effectively, being educated for the higher ranks of the king's civil service. Good food was provided for Daniel and his three friends, no doubt with an eye towards their health.

Their situation, then, was nothing like the slavery of Egypt. But in fact they had been brought into a much more sinister situation than enslavement in Egypt. Any young Jew coming to Babylon could have decided to adopt the worldview and practices of the Babylonians, and they would have been fine. There was a way out of persecution: just adapt, change, fit in. That was where "the rubber hit the road" regarding the differences between Babylon and (not Jerusalem, but) what the Bible says. The king's food represented a hidden challenge to the young men who wanted to observe God's word.

In his first epistle Peter distinguishes between suffering for doing wrong, and suffering, or persecution, "for righteousness' sake" (1 Peter 3:13-14; cp. Luke 6:22). Sometimes such "suffering" can be difficult to identify. Applying this to Daniel and his friends: how did they meet this challenge and the latent threat involved in not eating the king's food? For Daniel's small request could well have enraged the king (cp. Daniel 1:10).

We know that they chose not to compromise. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine..." (Daniel 1:8). But what was the problem here? Sometimes life presents us with challenges that are not very clearly marked out. We can't

*We can't always choose the ground
that we must fight our battles on*

always choose the ground that we must fight our battles on. Remembering all the bad things going on in Jerusalem – idolatry, fornication, child sacrifice, Daniel might have thought, “I’d like to make a stand on something like that, something really clear.” But the challenge he actually faced was just a small, minor, niggling thing, to do with food.

The problem with the food was that it might “defile”. The first occurrence of the word “defile” in the English Old Testament is in Leviticus 11:43-44, where the LORD God says, “You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing... I am holy: neither shall you defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” The subject of Leviticus 11 is defining which kinds of *food* are defiling.

I think that Daniel knew this commandment, and he decided that he would keep it. You can imagine some of his Jewish fellow-students (not of course his three friends) saying, “This isn’t that serious; it’s not terrible. We’re not being asked to pass children through the fire, after all.”

And I believe it’s true for all of us – not just the young – that as we go through life we’ll be challenged by something that doesn’t seem a particularly big deal. The challenge might just be a small thing, and we might hear voices telling us, “Just work with it. This isn’t the kind of hill you want to die on. Don’t make Christianity look bad by being difficult.” People might try to persuade you that the Bible is too strict.

Daniel was ready for this kind of thing. He had “purpose of heart” (1:8). If you don’t have purpose of heart, you don’t have anything. And *before* a problem arises, and a challenge comes, you have to be *already* determined to follow the Lord. Understand what the Scriptures are telling you, and follow through. Have purpose of heart.

Daniel was engaged in a fight. Fight? This small protest? It was just a small thing, but it was a big thing to Daniel, because it was the word of God that he was being asked to go against. This “small protest” really set the course of his life.

What did he do? He made a reasonable request. “He requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself...” But in verse 10 the chief of the

*Fight? This small protest?
This “small protest” really set the course of his life.*

eunuchs expressed his disquiet. “I fear my lord the king...” If Daniel and his friends were to look ill-nourished due to their preferred diet, the king might have the chief eunuch’s head off. So the chief eunuch’s reply to Daniel’s request was, in effect, “No.”

So how did Daniel deal with this? Did he say, “Well. I’ve asked, and he said, ‘No’. So we’ll just have to go with it”? Rather, he tried again, this time at a lower level. He stepped away from the chief eunuch who was worried about his own life, and approached the steward who was under the chief eunuch (v. 11), and said to him, “Please test your servants for ten days.”

Daniel had come up with a great suggestion. “Hear me out,” he in effect said, “Just let us do this for ten days.” This was still costly for Daniel to do. He was asking to be treated differently, and worse than the other young men. But he trusted in God, and this was real trust.

I don’t know that Daniel could point to any Scripture and say, “If I follow the Law of God and eat the things He allows I will look healthier at the end of ten days.” But his was a real trust in God, and we can see here a relationship with God that enabled him to make his request to the steward; and then rely on God – trust Him.

So the result came through (vv. 14, 15). The steward consented to the test, “and at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.” In just ten days! That’s beyond the natural; there was a work of God in this, because of Daniel’s faith and trust. God honoured his stand.

“And as for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (v. 17). Indeed we read at the end of the chapter that in wisdom and understanding God caused them to be ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers in the kingdom.



Do we have persecution today? Yes. I think so. It can start in very small ways. Maybe you have a promising friendship that evaporates when your friend or their parents understand that you are a Christian, or that your family is

*Do we have persecution today?
Yes. I think so. It can start in very small ways.*

Christian. Are we going to tell that very young person that this isn't persecution, isn't suffering? It is. Maybe a young person might be the odd one out, at school or in a friendship group, because that young person won't go down a certain route, whether smutty talk, or planning to do something that's definitely wrong, and be openly or privately ridiculed for this. Are we going to tell a young person that this isn't persecution, not suffering for righteousness' sake? For that's what it is. Are you subject to taunts, abuse, or even physical harm because you're a Christian? We know it happens. Is that not suffering, not persecution? Yes, it is. And there are many other examples we could think of in our own lives. You ask yourself the question, "Is this happening for righteousness' sake, because I acted in a certain way because God wanted me to; and this is what happened?" Is that suffering for righteousness' sake? Yes it is.

So, what do we have to do? Are we ready for the times of suffering, as Daniel was? We have to "purpose in our heart" to be ready for such times, as Daniel did. He knew what the word of God allowed him and what it didn't allow him. *Purpose in your heart!* When you look at what the world offers, and it's not in line with what the Bible says, you've got to be ready to say, "No, I will not be defiled." If you're encouraged to *behave* in a certain way, contrary to the Bible, you are ready to say, "No, I won't do that." Similarly, if you're encouraged to *think* in a certain way contrary to the Bible, you have to be ready to make the same reply. Daniel knew the word of God, and purposed in his heart not to defile himself. He knew what the Word of God allowed him, and what it didn't allow him.

And we also follow the example of Daniel to act sensibly, to look for an opening, and trust God for the outcome.

In view of such persecution, the chapter also teaches us, firstly, to find friends, faithful Christian friends, obedient to God. We have friends of two kinds: friends to whom we want to witness, because we want them to come to know the Lord Jesus. But the friendships we can rely on are with Christians who follow the Lord. Daniel didn't have to act on his own, and that was a great

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provision of God. Think of all Daniel had been through at his young age: in all of them he had at least three friends faithful to God.

But, secondly, note that all three of Daniel's friends had set their sail in the right direction, and so were friends who would support and not hinder him. They, too, sought to honour the word of God in their lives. Indeed these other three proved definitely ready to risk their lives for this (Daniel 3).

But, thirdly, whilst, yes, we have to go out and find friends, friends can fail us. So we must remember that we have a Friend, a faithful Friend, who "sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). Think of the One who was called the "Friend of sinners" (Luke 7:34). There came a time when Paul had to write, at the end of his Second Letter to Timothy, "At my first defence no-one stood with me" (4:16). We might have thought that the apostle Paul had enough friends to stand with him at his trial. But, unlike Daniel in this matter, Paul had to make his defence on his own. On his own? Not really so. "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the gentiles might hear" (v. 17). And so Paul was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And he has the confidence to add, "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me to his heavenly kingdom" (v. 18).

When Paul wrote these last words he knew he was going to be executed – see 4:6. So when he said he knew that the Lord would deliver him, he meant that he knew that the Lord would enable him to do all that he had been called to do, in the face of every evil work that would be done against him; and also that the Lord would preserve him to His heavenly kingdom.

So we take the lessons from the first chapter of Daniel and go out to find Christian friends who will stand with us in the time of challenge, of trial. But, beyond all that, we know we have a Friend who sticks closer than a brother, the Friend of sinners, the Friend of me, who alone stood with Paul at his first defence; and that His Friendship is the one that will keep us going, help us through the difficult times, through the challenges, and bring us to His heavenly kingdom. So we learn all the deep lessons of Daniel 1, but seek out above all the Friendship of the Lord Jesus, who sticks with us, closer than a brother.

From a talk at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, Tonbridge.

"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me"

Smashed to pieces

Charles Stanley

I had left Birmingham for Derby in company with a friend, and after we had travelled some distance he gave away a few tracts. I observed an old man reading the one given to him with very marked attention. Though a working man, his wrinkled forehead and careworn face bore marks of mental anguish of no ordinary character. I felt a strong desire to speak to the old man, but could not make a beginning. I mentally offered a short prayer; it was this, “Lord, if it be Thy will that I should speak to this man, cause him to speak to me first.”

I sat still a few minutes, when he put up his finger for me. I went and sat by him. He said, “I want to speak to you.” (If the reader does not know what prayer is, he will perhaps wonder at this.) I looked at his anxious face as he said, “When I was a young man, I read Thomas Paine, Voltaire,¹ and many such; and their writing suited me well then, for I liked to have my full fling in sin. And I had it, both here and far away, across the seas. I travelled both on the continent, and also in South America; and what scenes have I been in! But now” (pointing to his grey hair), “*oh, this remorse!* it smashes me to pieces.” I shall never forget the look with which these words were spoken. Oh, my soul! thought I, how much like hell is the anguish of remorse.

How much like hell is the anguish of remorse

Almost before I could speak, he went on to say, “I think the deceitful ways of those who claim to be Christians make more infidels than all the writings that infidels themselves have written.” “Well,” I said, “if it were not for an old book I have in my pocket, which tells all about that, I should be staggered myself.” “Indeed,” said he; “what book is that?” “Oh,” said I, “it is the Bible; and there is not an evil in the professing church which was not plainly foretold. But you have looked long enough at man; there is nothing in him to heal your broken, smashed heart; I don’t ask you to do this or that to get to God, but I want to tell you, *what God has done to get to you*. I want to tell you what He is, and what He has done, as displayed through the cross of Christ.”

I told him the following anecdote to illustrate this most important difference: A man I knew in Derbyshire was walking in a dangerous mine with a candle in

¹ Well-known eighteenth-century anti-Christian writers. [Ed.]

*The mine was dangerous
and he could not find his way out.
He came to the very place where that brother was.*

his hand,² when a drop of water from the roof fell upon his candle and put out the light. The mine was a very dangerous place, and he, alone and without light, could not find his way out. He remained a long time in this dreary condition, until he became greatly alarmed. Indeed, such was the effect on his mind, that he was in danger of losing his reason. Whilst in this state he thought he saw the glimmering of a light. *It was* a light, and as he fixed his eyes on that light it came nearer and nearer until at last he saw the face of his own brother who had come to seek him. His friends had become alarmed on account of his long absence, and his brother had descended into this pit of darkness to seek and to save him that was lost. “Mind you,” said I, “that brother did not stand at the pit’s mouth calling out, that if his lost brother would only come out of that dark pit, he would then save him – as many falsely represent Christ as doing. No; he came to the very place where that brother was, and who needed his help.” I said to the old man, “You are in the dark pit of sin and death; your candle of youth has been put out; you are beginning to feel something of the fearful solitude of being alone without God. Do you catch a glimmering of the light in the face of Jesus Christ? Fix your eye there. The light will come nearer and nearer, till it shows you the face of a Saviour who does not tell you to come out of the pit first to save yourself, Oh, no! He knew we were too far lost for that. He descended into the very pit of sin and death; He bore sin’s curse and condemnation, that there might be no curse or condemnation for us; and *He alone* can, and does, deliver from sin’s power. He comes to you in the pit; give Him your hand, He will lead you to eternal day.”

There was power in the name of Jesus: a change passed over the old man’s face; the raging storm was calming down; the *goodness of God* was leading him to repentance.³ He had never seen God manifest in the flesh in this way, as the God of love. He had long been trying to get out of the pit, like many others, but had never before seen Jesus coming into it to save him. Our conversation was suddenly stopped – we parted at Derby. I trust we shall meet again at the great and glorious terminus – *the coming of the Lord*.

Charles Stanley, 1821-90. The tract has been abridged and the language slightly modernised.

² Presumably the Derbyshire lead mines, not coal mines!! [Ed.]

³ See Romans 2:4. [Ed.]

The Apostles' Doctrine

David Anderson

This article is worth careful reading and re-reading

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42 NKJV).

The church was formed on the day of Pentecost, when the initial group of one hundred and twenty believers was baptised in the Holy Spirit into One Body (Acts 2:1-3; cp. 1 Corinthians 12:13). Then, following the powerful preaching of the gospel by Peter, another three thousand were added to their company (Acts 2:14-41). Together, they all were called into the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ (cp. 1 Corinthians 1:9). As Luke states succinctly in the verse at the head of this article, their life together comprised:

- the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.
- the breaking of bread.
- and the prayers.

The concept fundamental to this verse is Christian fellowship, more precisely, the apostles’ fellowship; and of this fellowship the apostle John wrote, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

The apostles’ doctrine and the apostles’ fellowship are so intricately linked that they are expressed as one item, the apostles’ doctrine-and-fellowship. Furthermore, the inter-relationship of all the topics in verse 42 is very clear. First, the apostles’ doctrine explains, governs, and regulates the fellowship. Second, the breaking of bread is the fundamental expression of the fellowship. Third, the prayers sustain believers in the good of the fellowship.

What is “the apostles’ doctrine?” At the time of Acts 2:42 it primarily consisted of the entire teaching that the Lord had given the twelve apostles during His earthly ministry, plus the instructions, called “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,” that they had received from their risen Lord during the post-resurrection, pre-ascension period (1:1-3). However, by extension for us present-day-believers, it must mean the total body of Christian truth contained in the rest of the New-Testament, whether written by three of those twelve

What is “the apostles’ doctrine?” The total body of Christian truth contained in the New Testament

apostles, or by two of the Lord's brothers, or by Mark, Luke, or by the writer to the Hebrews, or by the great "apostle out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8) – Paul, who was commissioned by the Lord from heaven. Together, these writings contain "the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), the entire revelation of New-Testament truth, for it was given to Paul to "complete the word of God" (Colossians 1:25 Darby Tr.).

The Lord Jesus taught the twelve apostles, "You call me the Teacher and Lord, and ye say well, for I am so" (John 13:13 Darby Tr.). During His earthly ministry, the Lord astonished the Jews with His public teaching, "for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22, NKJV). When they marvelled at Him, He claimed that His doctrine was not His own but the Father's who had sent Him; and that anyone who wanted to do God's will would be able to verify this claim for himself (John 7:16-17). So then, Jesus taught the apostles "the doctrine of God" (Titus 2:10), the doctrine that originates with God Himself.

The Lord also taught the apostles privately. For example, whilst the first four parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13 were spoken to the general public, their *meaning* was explained only to the disciples when "in the house" (v. 36 & vv. 10-17). And the last three parables in their entirety were told only to the disciples, so that they would become "instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven", and thus able to teach others (v. 52). Elsewhere in his Gospel Matthew uses the word "sayings", to mark out important bodies of the teaching of Christ (e.g., 7:28 & 26:1). The other "similitude parables"¹ that the Lord spoke, as well as His other teachings about the kingdom of God / kingdom of heaven ² in Matthew's Gospel, are also of great importance for the "Christian disciple". Perhaps the most important fact that the apostles were taught by the Lord was that He, the Son of man, had come to earth to suffer, die, and rise again from the dead (e.g., Mark 10:32-34 & 45).³

And after His resurrection the Lord was able to explain the above teaching with greater clarity, and to indicate new depths in the meaning of His death. Luke 24:27 tells of His conversation with two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the

¹ I.e., parables commencing, "The kingdom of God / of heaven is like...": Matthew 18:23-35; 20:1-16; 22:1-14; 25:1-13 & 14-30.

² For example, Matthew 5 – 7 & 18:1-14.

³ There are three recorded occasions, Matthew 16:21-22; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; paralleled by Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34.

*The ascended Lord gave commandments
to the apostles through the Holy Spirit*

scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Later that day, He said to the disciples gathered together in Jerusalem,

“These are the words which 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 in the Prophets, and the Psalms, concerning Me.’ And opened He their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day” (vv. 44-46, KJV).

For the next forty days He continued teaching the apostles these realities as well as those of the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-3). No doubt this teaching would also have been involved in the “doctrine” that the apostles taught those three thousand converts of the day of Pentecost; no doubt it is to be found in the New-Testament writings as we have them.

And the ascended Lord also gave commandments to the apostles through the Holy Spirit, whom, as He had promised, they would soon receive (Acts 1:2, 4-5). In this way He continued to teach His apostles from heaven by the Spirit, for the Spirit was their Helper sent from the Father in Jesus’ name. The Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance everything that the Lord had said to them (John 14:26); and the apostles would be able to assimilate the truth by the same indwelling Spirit of truth (15:26). His role was to guide them into all truth (16:13-14). Finally, the Lord said the Spirit would testify of Him, and so enable the disciples to bear witness to Christ (15:26-27). During the “Upper-Room Discourse” (i.e., John 14-16), the Lord had informed the apostles that the Holy Spirit would help them to:

- remember everything that He himself had taught them (John 14:26). We now have the record of that in the Gospels. They taught the word which they had heard from “the beginning”, i.e., from the Lord Himself (1 John 2:7, 24 & 3:11).
- bear witness to Himself (John 15:26-27). This activity is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.
- understand all truth (John 16:13). Later, this was written down in the New-Testament epistles. (See also section below on the apostle Paul.)

- see into the “things to come” (John 16:13). This is embodied in the prophetic parts of many of the New Testament books, particularly the book of Revelation.

To repeat, then: the Lord’s words “in the days of His flesh”, His further instruction during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension, as brought home to them in force by the indwelling Spirit, together with what the Lord further taught them from heaven through the agency of the same Spirit, and all comprised in the New Testament, formed “the apostles’ doctrine” which, as we have seen, is an essential element in “the fellowship of the apostles.”

The apostles primarily proclaimed the gospel (Acts 2:14ff; 3:12ff, etc.), whose key points concerned sin, the provision of salvation, the need for repentance towards God and faith and in the risen, exalted Saviour, followed by baptism in His Name. “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). They used the Old-Testament Scriptures as their authority: e.g., Peter’s statements in Acts 2:25-28.

However Acts 2:42 concerns another vital aspect of their task, namely, those elements of Christian truth that the apostles taught believers during church meetings. They gave themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). They taught with authority “in church” because they spoke the word of God by the Spirit’s power. Their instructions were authoritative and binding upon all the disciples, so much so that their teachings were called “the decrees to keep” (Acts 16:4, cp. 15:19-29). And they were effective: “the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily” (16:5).

A specific case of this is Paul, who was specifically called to be the apostle of the Gentiles (non-Jewish nations).⁴ He preached the same gospel as the other apostles: “whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:11).⁵ He taught the truths of the faith, truths which he received directly from the Lord in heaven through revelations:

- the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4 & Galatians 1:11-12).
- the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-34).
- the Mystery (Ephesians 3:1-6).
- the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

⁴ Romans 11:13, 15:16; Galatians 2:8; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11.

⁵ He also provided proof of his equal status with the Twelve in 1 Corinthians 9.

Paul taught the truths of the faith ... received directly from the Lord in heaven through revelations

His preaching/teaching was recognised as “the doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:12, KJV). His writings were acknowledged as being Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). In fact, Paul’s stewardship was to “complete the word of God” (Colossians 1:25 Darby Tr.).

Paul’s missionary service reached its zenith in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). In his farewell talk to the elders of that assembly (20:17-38), he outlined the subjects of the Faith, which he called “the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus” (v. 24, NKJV). He had taught the Ephesians about:

- the gospel of the grace of God (v. 24).
- the kingdom of God (v. 25).
- the whole counsel of God (v. 27).
- the church of God (v. 28).

In 1 Corinthians 4:17, he referred to his ministry as “my ways...in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church;” they were the things which he “ordained in all churches” (7:17).⁶ His writings were “the commandments of the Lord” (14:37), and he delivered these “traditions”, which all churches were – and are – are obliged to hold and to follow (11:2).⁷

In his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus he described his teaching as good (1 Timothy 4:6) and sound,⁸ words of truth⁹ which accorded with the glorious gospel (1 Timothy 1:10-11). Primarily, his doctrines were the “words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Timothy 6:3).

The great importance of the apostles’ doctrine in forming the apostles’ fellowship has practical implications for us. Primarily that, like those early believers in Acts 2:42, we must “continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” The early Christians “devoted themselves” to it (ESV). They were “in it for the

⁶ See also: 1 Corinthians 3:10; 11:23-24; 14:36-37; 16:1.

⁷ See W.E. Vine’s comment on 1 Corinthians 11:2 in his *Collected Writings*, (Nashville, Tenn., Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), vol, 2, p. 75. He regards the use of the definite article as indicating apostolic teaching concerning believers in their assembly capacity.

⁸ 1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3 (NKJV, “wholesome”); 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3 & Titus 1:9; 2:1.

⁹ 1 Timothy 2:4,7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5 & 2 Timothy 2:15,18,25; 3:7-8; 4:4 & Titus 1:1,14.

We must “continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine”

long haul” – totally concentrated and committed to it. They “persevered” in it (Darby Tr.). We, too, must give it our full attention and take heed to it (1 Timothy 4:13,16). And we must obey it (Romans 6:17). We must stand fast, and hold, and keep the truths taught us by the apostles (2 Thessalonians 2:15). W. E. Vine states that the use of “the traditions” in this verse means “of Christian doctrine in general”, which, as just stated, all churches were – and are – obliged to hold and to follow (11:2). The phrase “the traditions” as used by Paul also “constitutes a denial that what he preached originated with himself, and a claim for its Divine authority”.¹⁰ Many twenty-first-century believers disregard Paul’s teaching, and its origin with the ascended Lord.¹¹ Therefore we must aim to be those whom He can commend: “You... have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (Revelation 3:8).

Other practical implications are that:

1. We must walk orderly, i.e., by living out the practical requirements set out in the apostles’ doctrine. That necessitates withdrawing from those who will not! (2 Thessalonians 3:6) There are two parts to the apostles’ doctrine: (i) the teaching and (ii) its corresponding practice. “This is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:21).
2. Every Christian is enjoined to hold fast the apostles’ doctrine in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus, by treasuring it in the power of Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:13-14).
3. Bible teachers must be nourished in the apostles’ doctrine (1 Timothy 4:6), so that those they teach are instructed in godliness (1 Timothy 6:3; Titus 1:1 & 2:12). They must faithfully pass on the truth to the next generation of believers (2 Timothy 2:2). Above all, they must recognise that their teaching gift is from the Lord “for the equipping of the saints for the work of [His service], for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

¹⁰ See under “Tradition”, in *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Unabridged Edition* (McLean, Virginia, Macdonald Publishing Company).

¹¹ This is partially because the word “tradition” has unfortunate connotations of something that might have been changed in the process of being handed down. Darby has “directions” (1 Corinthians 11:2) and “instructions” (2 Thessalonians 2:15 & 3:6). The apostle “delivered, i.e., “handled over” what had been “*delivered*” to him by the Lord (cp. Jude v. 3 & 1 Corinthians 11:2 & 15:3 with 11:23 & 1 Timothy 1:11).

Paul's neglected letter

Galatians

Theo Balderston

In my experience Galatians 1-4 are among the most neglected chapters of Paul's letters, in contrast to chapters 5 & 6, which are among the most studied. However Paul's defence of the gospel in these chapters is vital to our understanding of what the gospel is, and why it is the only true gospel.

Galatians was a letter written in a hurry. As is often pointed out, Paul is so keen to get to his point that he skips his usual preliminary thanksgiving for his readers' excellencies (cp. Romans 1:8ff; 1 Corinthians 1:4ff, etc.). Instead, after his introductory greeting (1:1-5), he abruptly turns to what was troubling him. "I am astonished..." (1:6, ESV), he says. What was astonishing him? The fact that they were "...so quickly deserting him who called [them] in the grace of Christ."

These Galatians had not been long converted, and other "teachers" had arrived and were trying to undermine their gospel faith. These erroneous teachers did not admit that their doctrine was "another gospel", but in fact it was (1:6-7). So what were they teaching? The recentness of Paul's contact with them also meant that he did not need to start off by explaining the issue. The Galatian converts could guess what was bothering him as soon as they received the letter. As a result, *we* have to glean what the issue was mainly from the end of the letter.

The problem was this. Certain law-teachers who professed to honour the name of Christ had arrived in Galatia, probably from Judaea, and were claiming that Paul had taught these gentile converts only half a gospel. He ought (so these false teachers said) to have told them that, as well as believing in Jesus, they would need to be circumcised in order to escape the wrath to come. In other words, they would, effectively, have to become Jews – Jews who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. This can be deduced from 5:2: 6:12,13.

Paul was appalled. Was his reaction maybe excessive? Even if it was unnecessary for Christians to "Judaize" in order to be saved, surely taking that extra step of circumcision wasn't so terrible? Wasn't Paul over-reacting? Was he perhaps just jealous that other teachers had also "got the ear" of his converts?

Paul's concern was not (as so often today) that they were needlessly forsaking their indigenous culture, but, rather, his converts' eternal destiny. If you listen to the law-teachers, he said, "You have become estranged from ["severed

from”, ESV] Christ”; they had “fallen from grace.” Indeed, those who went down that route obligated themselves to keep the whole Law . (See 5:3; also 2:16-17; 3:10-14, 18; 4:21-25).

The nub of the matter, therefore, was that the law-teachers’ “gospel” made a work required of gentile converts a condition of salvation. This was not the gospel Paul had proclaimed to the Philippian gaoler: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). No doubt the gaoler would later that night learn in his own home that believing in Jesus meant believing in His atoning death and bodily resurrection, but he would also learn that no work of his could make his salvation surer. God must have *all* the glory in salvation. Similarly, when Paul stated in his Letter to the Romans, “If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (10:9), he did so to underline that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4). Therefore the teaching of the Letter to the Galatians goes far further than the narrow point of whether converts should be circumcised. *All* works done to try to merit God’s salvation in fact prevent salvation. Our salvation is “not of works”, writes Paul to a readership of largely gentile Ephesians (2:9), “lest anyone should boast”. We will all have to meet God, and what will be our justification on that day – the “good works” that we have been partly resting on in this life, or Christ alone?

Paul’s alarm over the Galatians does not mean that the truly saved can forfeit their salvation. No doubt he would have said of them what he said of the Philippians, namely, that “He who has begun in you a good work, will complete it unto Jesus Christ’s day” (Philippians 1:6). However, the deep concern of other believers, and their faithful alerting of misled believers concerning the errors they may have fallen into, are among the means by which God safeguards the souls of those who have truly believed. Those who are truly saved will acknowledge their error and renounce it.



But the foregoing paragraphs have assumed something that Paul’s letter set out to prove. The Galatians had by now heard two “gospels”: but whose “gospel” was right – Paul’s or that of the circumcisionists? Who had the authority to declare the true gospel? The circumcision teachers (Galatians 1:6) seem to have claimed the authority of the church in Jerusalem for what they taught, even claiming the backing of the Jerusalem apostles (1:1). Paul therefore had to show that even Peter was a broken reed as regards this matter (2:11ff). By contrast, Paul’s authority came directly from heaven (1:1, 11f). It was this issue

of *the authority of the gospel* that attracted Luther to this epistle in his controversy with Rome concerning the real gospel. Rome had inserted purgatory between the baptised person and heaven, claiming that works, such as penances, had to be performed to shorten the time spent there. They terrorised the “Christian” population with this teaching, for which they claimed the false authority of Rome, of a pope whose legitimacy rested on a so-called “apostolic succession”, and of the church’s teaching since the days of the (post-apostolic) fathers of the early church. Luther wrote, near the beginning of his great *Commentary on Galatians*,

“...These Jewish-Christian fanatics who pushed themselves into the Galatian churches after Paul’s departure, boasted that they were the descendants of Abraham, true ministers of Christ, having been trained by the apostles themselves, that they were able to perform miracles.

In every way they sought to undermine the authority of St. Paul...When men claiming such credentials come along, they deceive not only the naive, but also those who seemingly are well-established in the faith. This same argument is used by the papacy. ‘Do you suppose that God for the sake of a few Lutheran heretics would disown His entire Church? Or do you suppose that God would have left His Church floundering in error all these centuries?’ The Galatians were taken in by such arguments with the result that Paul’s authority and doctrine were drawn in question.¹”

The question of the *authority* of the gospel message is as vital today as it ever was. Is it only Paul’s opinion? Can it really be that faith in Jesus alone causes us to be “right with God”? Can we say this to unbelievers with the conviction that the authority of God stands behind it? In chapter 1 Paul mainly sets out the high basis of his apostolic authority – the gospel he preached had been given him directly by the ascended Lord Jesus Christ (1:12).² And if we consider how often Paul alluded to his experience on the Damascus road (see too 1 Corinthians 15:8-10; Philippians 3:6-8; 1 Timothy 1:12-16), the total transformation it effected in Paul (Galatians 1:23; 1 Timothy 1:13; Acts 9:20f), and how that experience coloured his letters (see also 2 Corinthians 3:5-8; 4:4ff);

¹ Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* [1535] tr. by T. Graebner; comment on 1:1].

See <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1549/1549-h/1549-h.htm> .

Luther had first lectured on Galatians in 1515-16, publishing these Lectures in 1519. (Michael A. Mullett, *Martin Luther* [London, 2004], p.95.)

² Alternatively, “revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:12) could signify “by Jesus Christ being revealed to me” – i.e., on the Damascus road.

Philippians 3:12-14; 20-21), it is impossible to think he made it up, or had suffered a temporary mental “event”.

In Galatians 2:1-10 Paul states that, contrary to the claims of the circumcisionists, his calling was never disputed by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. In 2:11-21 he recalls how he had confronted the apostle Peter concerning his inconsistency in this matter, and rehearses his answer to Peter in words that powerfully affirm, not only that “his” gospel saves, but also that it takes the believer into new creation. In 3:1-9 he reminds his readers of how the Holy Spirit had, so to speak, certified to them the gospel they had been saved by; and in 3:10-18 he shows in a few words that the [Old-Testament] Scriptures themselves validated it. In 3:19-25, he provides a sufficient – though not a complete³ – answer to the obvious question, “Then why was the Law ever given?”

In 3:26 – 4:7 he shows that in Christ, the true “seed of Abraham,” believers are brought into liberty, whereas dependence on the Law partakes of the slavery characteristic of the present age (4:9). In 4:8-20 he concludes his long defence of “his” gospel by a personal appeal to the Galatians, adding in 4:21-31 an allegorical interpretation of the relationship between Hagar and Sarah to underline the circumcisionists’ error.

Chapters 5:1 – 6:10 essentially answer the obvious question: but how are people not under the law going to live upright lives? The last eight verses of the epistle finally lay bare the true motive of the circumcisionists and reiterate an essential result of believing the gospel – that we are made part of a new creation.

Who were the Galatians?

This question divides scholars. Galatia was a considerable area in central Asia Minor. Its chief city was Ancyra, now the capital of modern Turkey. The word “Galatian” is akin to “Celt” and “Gaul”, because ethnic Galatians were descended from Celtic invaders several centuries before Christ. From early times up until the later 19th century the standard view of commentators was that this epistle was addressed to such ethnic Galatians resident in the centre or north of the province, whom Paul had evangelised at a time not clearly discernible from the Acts. This can be called “the north Galatian hypothesis”.

But in Paul’s time the large Roman province called “Galatia” also included, in its southern part, the cities of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, scenes of Paul’s early missionary labours (Acts 13 – 14). For this reason the inhabitants of these cities could properly be called “Galatians” too. Over the past century the preponderance of scholars has supported the view that the epistle was written to the Christians of Pisidian Antioch, etc., shortly after the

³ Though it needs to be complemented by what he wrote in Romans 7:7.

events of Acts 14, and that it is the earliest of Paul's extant letters. This is the "south Galatian hypothesis."

Which hypothesis is correct? The debate is complex, but not necessary to go into here. The uncertainty regarding this issue does not really affect the teaching of the Letter.



To conclude with some comments on the early verses of the Letter

Galatians 1:1. Paul "hit the ground running". Ancient letters apparently started with the writer's name, and this convention enabled Paul to get immediately to the heart of the issue. Ambassadors must be accredited by their home governments to the country to which they are sent. And Paul's accreditation as an apostle did not rest on some human appointment, but directly from Jesus Christ risen from the dead, and God the Father. The order of Names here presumably hints at the Damascus road, where his commissioning began (see Acts 9:6, 15-16; 22:21).

Verses 3-4. After expressing (as in every letter of his) his desire that they enjoy grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul adds, "who gave himself for our sins...". This expression is unique to Paul: see also Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2, 25; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 2:14. To my mind it is the corollary of another statement of his, concerning "the love of Christ that passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). To Paul it was simply unfathomable why the Lord Jesus should "love him, and give Himself for him", who had been an arch-persecutor of the saints and a blasphemer, to the extent of atoning for these very sins in His own body. All his life long such love remained incomprehensible to him.

The Lord's purpose in giving Himself for our sins was that He "might deliver us from this present evil age." This too is fundamental to the epistle. It is matched, right at the end, by the statement, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." And in chapter 2 he states that he has been crucified with Christ (2:20). Were the Galatian saints really intending to return to something that belongs to the age from whose power the cross of Christ has delivered us?

Verse 5. "To whom be glory for ever and ever." This is a "doxology", and nowhere else in his epistles does Paul include a doxology in the introduction to a letter. With this heartfelt doxology he expresses the essence of the gospel of grace – that all the glory in salvation is God's, and man, the bankrupt sinner, can claim none; but only believe.

Genesis 23

Sarah's burial and its lessons

F.B. Hole

When we start chapter 23 we are carried on about twenty years from the events of chapter 22.¹ Abraham was at Hebron when Sarah died, and her death has significance as a “type” of the great change in the ways of God following the cross and resurrection of Christ. In the next chapter Isaac, the risen seed, is to find his bride, and in this way is typical of the church who is to be united to the risen Christ. But, before Christ takes His church, Israel out of whom He sprang according to the flesh is set aside. The death of Sarah is a type of this severing of the earthly links – albeit only for a time as regards the thing typified. This severance is expounded for us in Romans 11:25-29, as well as the fact that a redeemed and renewed Israel will come into blessing when the present period of the church on earth is over.

But there is another significance to this chapter. The details as to the burial of Sarah take up the whole of it, and we may be inclined to wonder why the story should be given us at such length. We believe it to be with the object of impressing us with the fact that Abraham was truly a stranger and a sojourner in this land which was to be his according to the promise of God. In verse 4 Abraham claims to be this, and makes it his plea, supporting his request for a burying-place in the land.

*Abraham was truly a stranger and
a sojourner in this land which was to be his*

This was indeed a remarkable fact. It was stated in very concise fashion by Stephen, as recorded in Acts 7:5, when he said that God “gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on” (KJV), and this though God had “promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him”. But though Genesis 23 makes the fact of Abraham’s confession

¹ Is this estimate based on Hole’s judgment of the marriageable age of young women in that epoch? See Genesis 22:23. [Ed.]

of his strangership so clear, what is divulged neither here, nor anywhere else in the Old Testament, is the spiritual understanding given by God, which enabled him to take such a course. We have to travel on to Hebrews 11:9-16 to get light on that point.

There we discover that Abraham had expectations connected with a scene which lay not only outside the land of promise but outside the earth altogether. "He sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country", but that was because "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (vv. 9, 10). We further read that he desired "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (v. 16). These facts, which only come to light in the New Testament, disclose to us that these patriarchal men of faith received from God the knowledge of heavenly things. which in their day were not the subject of public revelation.

In Old-Testament times, and up to the cross of Christ, man was under probation, and that probation was in its earlier stages in patriarchal days. The test was as to whether any man could prove himself to be exempt from death as the wages of sin, and thus establish his title to live on the earth. The test reached its conclusion in the rejection and death of Christ, when all men were proved to be lost. The Lord Jesus had come, speaking of "heavenly things" as well as "earthly things" (John 3: 12), and it was when "His life was taken from the earth" (Acts 8: 33), that the heavenly things came into full revelation. To have made public disclosure of the heavenly things before the earthly test was completed would not have been according to the Divine order.

Abraham had left a city of no mean standard of civilization when he turned his back on Ur of the Chaldees. He was now merely a stranger and a sojourner in the very good earthly country that had been promised to him. This was possible for him because he was looking for a city that God would build, and a country that, being heavenly, was better than any earthly country could be.

*"He looked
for a city
which hath
foundations
whose
builder and
maker is
God".*



*He desired
a better
country,
that is, an
heavenly.*

*Abraham
moved
among
them as a
stranger.*



*He did not
meddle
with their
politics.*

The contrast between verses 4 and 6 of Genesis 23 is very striking. The man who confessed himself to be a stranger and sojourner is acknowledged by the children of Heth as “a mighty prince.” Notice, too, that they said “among us,” and not “over us”. Abraham moved among them but, as a stranger, he did not meddle in their concerns or interfere with their politics. Just because he did not, his moral greatness was fully apparent to them. As the friend of God he possessed something to which they were strangers.

Having so favourable a reputation, he was able without difficulty to negotiate the purchase of the burying-place for Sarah. All was concluded in the presence of witnesses according to the customs of that land at that time: and subsequent history shows that the transaction was respected and made sure (e.g. Genesis 50:13). In all this Abraham may well be an example to us, as is indicated in I Peter 2:11, 12. If we, as “strangers and pilgrims”, have our “conversation honest among the Gentiles”, we may, by reason of “the reproach of Christ” (Hebrews 11:26), be spoken against. Yet beholding good works, they will eventually “glorify God” in the day of visitation. There is clearly an analogy between this passage in Peter and this incident as to Abraham.

Sarah died when Isaac was thirty-seven, predeceasing Abraham by thirty-eight years;² and since Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah (25:20), only about three years can have elapsed between the incidents recorded in chapters 23 and 24. At the age of 140 Abraham was old (Genesis 24:1). Also he was “a mighty prince,” (23:6), for the LORD had blessed him in all things.

It was a day when God’s blessing was largely expressed in earthly things, and this was so with Abraham, even though he had been given some knowledge of things lying outside the earth. Isaac was his heir in whom the promise was vested, and it was most important that his marriage should be rightly arranged.

² See Genesis 17:17; 23:1; 25:7. [Ed.]

Footsteps in the Snow: 105 Days of lockdown

by Gordon Kell

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This collection of 105 devotional meditations on a variety of Scriptural subjects, is the fruit of an exercise by the author to share a daily message with others via WhatsApp during the coronavirus lockdown in England.

Gordon writes:

I used to get up very early to write the daily posts which form this book. Every morning I was joined by a friend. On one of the highest branches of the large tree at the bottom of my garden, a blackbird would sit and sing his heart out. It was a joy to listen to this happy bird, and I missed him when he finally moved on.

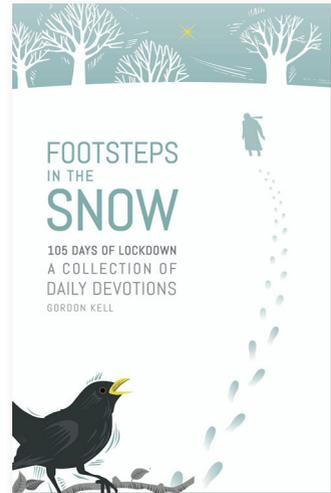
I hope this book puts a song in your hearts as you join me, reflecting on the love, grace and mercy of God and the many, many blessings we discover in Jesus Christ.

A friend told me not long ago that I believed in fairy tales. I knew which football team he supported and suggested that if he had faith in this team, he could hardly accuse me of believing in fairy tales! Faith has never been in short supply. What and who we have faith in are the key questions.

Attempts to discredit faith in Christ have continued for centuries yet here we are and like the apostle Paul we can say,

‘The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20).

I am so thankful we have the opportunity to walk each day in fellowship with God, following our Saviour and living in the Spirit.



A Friend of mine

I live on my own – or so they say,
Then who is it I talk to all through the day?
Who sits with me at every meal,
And who is concerned about how I feel?
A Friend of mine.

There's no one in the house with me—
At least, not as far as they can see,
Then who's stood beside me whilst I peel the veg?
And to Whom am I talking when trimming the hedge?
A Friend of mine.

They say nobody's here when the fire burns low.
Then how is it I often feel the warm glow
Of a friendly presence, a gentle protection,
Who is closer to me than any relation?
A Friend of mine.

At the end of the day when I kneel and pray,
Is there nobody here? (Well that's what they say.)
But I know different, I know someone is here.
That Someone is Jesus whom I hold so dear,
A Friend of mine.

Frank Moore (1893 – 1993). Written after his wife died (1979).
This poem first appeared in Scripture Truth, January 1996.