

# **THE NEW COVENANT NEWS**



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# SEVEN DETESTABLE THINGS

by Darryl Roe

## Introduction

In the book of Proverbs the writer described seven things about people which he stated are detestable to the Lord. As with all scripture, we should therefore consider these verses very seriously and reverently in order to conform our own lives to the pattern which the Lord requires of us. If we find ourselves actually doing any of these things in our daily lives we would do well to rid ourselves of such behaviour, asking the Lord to help us in our endeavours, in order to carry out his will and not our own.

The book of Proverbs contains many wise sayings, most of which were uttered by Solomon in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. Other wise sayings which came from the writings of David, Asaph, Agur and Lemuel have been added to Solomon's collection, probably about the time of King Hezekiah in 700 BC. In chapter 1 we are told the whole purpose of the proverbs, which is the attainment of wisdom and discipline. Solomon told us this in the opening verses where he stated, *"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight, for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right, and just, and fair ... let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance ... the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline"* (Proverbs 1:1-3,5,7).

Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we need to revere, honour and respect everything the Lord tells us in his holy word. In Ecclesiastes we read, *"Here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man, for God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil"* (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). In other words, we are judged by the deeds that we do, because they show our faith, according to James 2:18, and by our knowledge and attitude toward our great Creator who brought us into this world.

In Proverbs 6:16 Solomon wrote, *"There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to Him"*. In this discussion I will confine our thoughts to the seven things which are detestable to the Lord in order to gain some lessons which we can apply in our own lives as we try to conform our behaviour to what is acceptable to our Creator. These seven things are common in both Christian and non-Christian communities alike, and any tendency towards any one of these may reveal a definite weakness in character which would not be pleasing to the Lord.

## The Seven Things

The first of these seven detestable things is **haughty eyes** (Proverbs 6:17). According to the Macquarie dictionary the word haughty means 'disdainfully proud or arrogant'. The word 'disdainful' means 'to despise, to scorn, or to treat with contempt'. The word 'proud' has the meaning of 'having a high opinion of one's own dignity, importance or superiority'. Do we have any examples of a haughty attitude in the scriptures? Yes we do.

In Isaiah 14 we are told about Lucifer, the morning star, who wanted to make himself like the Most High and ascend above the top of the clouds, to raise his throne above the stars of God and to sit enthroned on the top of the sacred mountain (Isaiah 14:12-15).

In these verses Isaiah wrote, *“How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star (Hebrew - Lucifer) son of the dawn. You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations. You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly; on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’. But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit”* (Isaiah 14:12-15).

Because Lucifer was haughty and proud, wanting to be like the Most High, God threw him out of his heavenly position and down into the darkness of the earth's atmosphere where he and many of his cohort are languishing because they disobeyed God's command to remain as they had been created in the angelic state. In Luke 10 Jesus told us that he saw Satan's fall from grace. His disciples had just returned from a successful mission of preaching and healing throughout Judea; and Jesus warned them not to become overconfident or proud of their own achievements.

The account says, *“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name’. He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’ ”* (Luke 10:17-20).

Jesus would have been referring here to his own pre-human existence with the Father in heaven, for he told his disciples on a number of occasions that he had been sent down to be with mankind in order to sacrifice his life as a ransom for all. Both the apostle John (Revelation 3:14) and the apostle Paul (Colossians 1:15) told us that Jesus was the firstborn of God's creation, who resided in the bosom of the Father and always did those things which

pleased the Father. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus tells us that he was the “*root and offspring of David*” and was God's “*bright morning star*” in contrast to Lucifer who lost that position in the heavens amongst the heavenly sons of God.

The second thing the Lord detests is a **lying tongue** (Proverbs 6:17). Do we have any examples of a lying tongue the scriptures? Yes we do.

In Acts 5 we are told of a husband and his wife who sold their property and took the money to the apostles for distribution to the poor. However, they kept some of the money for themselves and did not tell the apostles the truth.

The account tells us, “*A man named Ananias together with his wife Sapphira also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God’. When Ananias heard this he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened*” (Acts 5:1-5).

Ananias made the mistake of not telling the apostles that he was going to keep some money from the sale for himself. He was not being truthful, and Peter, inspired by God's holy spirit, knew that some money had been pocketed by Ananias for his own purposes. Three hours later Sapphira came in, not knowing that her husband had died. Peter said, “*Is this the price you and Ananias received for the land?*” “*Yes*”, said Sapphira, “*That was the price*”. Peter said, “*How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also*”. *At that moment she fell down at his feet and died*” (Acts 5:7-10).

Neither Ananias nor Sapphira told the truth to the apostles and so they paid the price for their disobedience. The Lord hates a lying tongue, and although he forgives men for their wrongdoing, this was a case where dishonesty might appear very profitable and it could be perceived that the holy spirit could possibly be deceived, so the Lord acted decisively and put them both to death. Some have concluded that Ananias and Sapphira actually sinned against the holy spirit after being fully enlightened and therefore were deserving of the second death, but I personally would not support such a view as we do not know to what extent they had received God's spirit and how much of the truth they had come to understand.

The third detestable thing is **hands that shed innocent blood** (Proverbs 6:17). Do we have an example in scripture? Yes we do.

In Matthew 2 we are told of a king who found himself deceived by wise men from the east, and ordered the slaughter of perhaps dozens of baby boys in and around Bethlehem in Judea.

*We read that “an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up’, he said, ‘Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him’. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said, ‘Out of Egypt I called my Son’. When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then, what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more’ ” (Matthew 2:13-18).*

Herod the Great reigned in Judea for 34 years and maintained his position with crimes of unspeakable brutality, murdering even his own wife and two sons. He was cruel, cunning and cold-blooded. His son Antipas killed John the Baptist; his grandson Agrippa I killed the apostle James and his great grandson was Agrippa II who tried the apostle Paul during his defence of the gospel (Acts 25:23 to 26:30).

The fourth detestable thing is **a heart that devises wicked schemes** (Proverbs 6:18). Do we have an example of this in scripture? Yes, we do.

In the book of Esther we find a man who hated the Jewish people so much that he tried desperately to exterminate them by persuading the Persian King to sign a decree to kill all Jews in the empire, including Esther, the Persian Queen. The story begins with King Xerxes rejecting his first wife Vashti and selecting Esther from a long list of beautiful young women, although he did not know Esther was a Jew.

King Xerxes then promoted Haman, an Amalekite, to the highest position of authority under himself. In time Haman's wicked scheme to exterminate the Jews came by way of the King's decree which could not be revoked. Mordecai, Esther's older cousin and the one who brought Esther up when her parents died, discovered this wicked scheme and pleaded with Esther to approach the King for her own sake and for the sake of the whole nation of

Israel. Only the raising of the royal sceptre could give Esther access to the King and because Xerxes loved Esther he allowed her to come to him on the throne where she finally revealed to him the wickedness of Haman's plan.

Without the King's knowledge Haman had constructed a special gallows intended for Mordecai, but when the King found out about Haman's wicked scheme, he ordered Haman to die on the gallows instead. Mordecai was promoted because he had previously discovered a plot to kill the King and a new decree was written giving every Jew the right to defend himself against an attack. Queen Esther and all Jews throughout the empire were saved from annihilation. The festival of Purim is still celebrated by Jews to this day where they act out the whole story, read from the book of Esther and perform specific hissing sounds when Haman's name is mentioned.

The fifth detestable thing is **feet that are quick to rush into evil** (Proverbs 6:18). Do we have a good example of this in scripture? Yes, we do.

In the book of Samuel we read about Saul, the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin who had been chosen by God because Israel cried out for a king. During Saul's reign the Israelites needed someone brave enough to defeat the Philistine Goliath who was 2.7 metres tall and fully armed with a suit of armour, a spear and a sword. David, the son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah, offered his services and armed with only a sling and five stones, he killed the giant, by which he convinced Saul with his great courage and faith. David brought about a mighty victory over Saul's enemies, but in doing so, Saul's heart condition changed from one of pride to one of jealousy and anger.

The women sang, "*Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands*". Saul tried to have David killed by pitting David against the Philistines and asking him to bring 100 Philistine foreskins back to him from the contest. But David brought 200 foreskins back. When David played his harp to him, Saul threw a spear at David just missing him. Saul then gave orders to kill David at the first opportunity. He sent soldiers to David's house at night but David's wife tricked them and David escaped through the back window.

When David fled with his men, Saul gave David's wife to another man. David went into hiding in the desert and lived in caves with his men, as Saul and his men tried to find him. David discovered Saul asleep in one cave but refused to touch him for Saul was still the anointed king chosen by the Lord. David's turn would come later on. Previously, when Samuel told Saul to destroy all the Amalekites in battle, Saul did not kill their king and kept the best of their flocks and herds for himself making the Lord angry with Saul for not carrying out his instructions.

After a reign of 40 years Saul's day of reckoning finally came as he prepared to face the Philistine armies once more, this time on the plain of Jezreel. When the Lord did not answer Saul's request by prophet or by the priest or by a dream, Saul disguised himself and consulted a woman of Endor, who was able to mysteriously provide an answer supposedly from the lips of the prophet Samuel who had died some years before. *"The Lord will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me"* (1 Samuel 28:19). The next day the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines and Saul died by falling on his own sword.

The sixth detestable thing is **a false witness who pours out lies** (Proverbs 6:19). Do we have a good example in the scriptures? Yes, we do.

When Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and taken before Caiaphas and then before Pilate a number of witnesses were brought forward. These witnesses tried to support the claims of the Scribes and Pharisees by testifying against Jesus. One of their claims is found in Mark 14. *"Some stood up and gave this false testimony against him (Jesus); 'We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days I will build another not made by man' "* (Mark 14:57-58). *"Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent"* (Mark 14:60-61). Jesus knew that the Jews had not understood what he had been talking about and now they had twisted his words around to accuse him of destroying the Jewish temple. What Jesus had actually said was *"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days"*. On that occasion, the Jews replied, *"It has taken 46 years to build this temple and you are going to raise it in three days? But the temple he had spoken of was his body"* (John 2:19-21). Jesus was referring to his own death and resurrection three days later, but no one had understood.

Other false accusations were also made by the Jews. *"We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king"* (Luke 23:2). Jesus' teachings were about personal repentance and reform, not turning the Jews against Roman rule. He did not oppose the payment of taxes to Caesar and while he actually was their Messiah and a king, he did not claim kingship in a military or political sense - as if he was one who opposed the power and might of the Roman Empire. He said that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36).

In John 19:7 we read of the Jews saying *"We have a law and according to that law, he (Jesus) must die because he claimed to be the Son of God"*. The Jews were trying to use the law as a basis for their accusations, for Leviticus 24:16 says *"anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must*

*be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him*". Never, at any time, did Jesus dishonour his Father. God had stated on three separate occasions that Jesus was his beloved Son (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5 and John 12:28), and Jesus had admitted that he had been sent by God. The Jews should have known that their accusations were without foundation.

The seventh and final detestable thing is a **man who stirs up dissension among brothers** (Proverbs 6:19).

Dissension means to differ in opinion or to disagree. The Lord God hates dissension. He likes harmonious relationships where there is no dissension. Do we have some examples of dissension in the scriptures? Yes, we do.

When Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness, the people became dissatisfied with Moses and complained bitterly. When they complained that the waters at Marah were bitter, God showed Moses a tree and told him to throw a stick from it into the water, and when he did so it became sweet (Exodus 15:23-25). While he was away from them on Mount Sinai they took off their jewellery and formed a golden calf and worshipped it, and committed immoral practices (Exodus 32:6). The Lord was angry with them and sent a plague. About three thousand men were killed when the Levites drew their swords and struck them (Exodus 32: 27-28). Although the Lord sent them manna each day they still complained that their situation was miserable, so they were bitten by snakes and many died until Moses set up a copper (or bronze) snake on a pole, which saved them when they looked up to it (Numbers 21:5-9).

Korah and 250 elders rose up against Moses demanding better positions of authority. But the Lord was angry with them and they all lost their lives when the earth opened beneath them and swallowed them up (Numbers chapter 16). When Moses was in Shittim opposite Jericho, Israel's men committed adultery with the Moabite women and worshipped the Baal of Peor, angering the Lord. He sent a plague and 24,000 died as a result (Numbers 25:9). When the twelve spies returned to Moses after exploring the promised land, ten of them complained. Only Joshua and Caleb spoke positively. So the Lord sent a plague and struck down the ten, but he honoured Joshua and Caleb before Moses (Numbers 14:26-38).



## A Review

I have considered seven things that the Lord finds detestable. They are:

1. haughty eyes;
2. a lying tongue;
3. hands that shed innocent blood;
4. a heart that devises wicked schemes;
5. feet that rush to do evil;
6. a false witness who tells lies; and
7. dissension amongst brothers.

These teachings were given in the Old Testament, but, with the understanding that God's character does not vary (James 1:17), these things are still detestable unto the Lord.

Just as natural Israel continued in unbelief and God took away from them their promised land of rest, so we also must learn from the words of Solomon and do our best to avoid the displeasure of our Father in heaven. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, *"See to it that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first"* (Hebrews 3:12-14).



## God's Calling – Is It Fair?

L. Schneider

*"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many of the nobility, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

*"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14).

*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

## **Is God's "calling" fair? Is it just? Is God a "respector of persons"?**

### **Fair**

It might be of interest to note that the English word 'fair' does not appear in the KJV, as relating to ethics, morals, justice, and so on. It is used only in the sense of 'good', in such references as 'good' weather, or 'good' looks, or 'good' crops.

### **The Call**

Apparently no one, of their own volition, can decide to come to God, or enter into the "*narrow way*" (Matthew 7:14) - but must be "*called*" by Him for this purpose.

But, does God call specific individuals? Or is the call more general? If God calls specific individuals to enter the "*narrow way*", then that would seem like favouritism; yet God is "*no respector of persons*" (Romans 2:11).

### **A General Call**

Let us visualise a more general 'call' that might work something like this. In your mental vision, picture God as a magnet, as in John 6:44: "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him ...*" and imagine [at some distance] people walking by.

Some of them have characters of paper, or glass, or rubber, or aluminium, and are therefore not influenced by the magnetic 'pull'. Others, perhaps with characters made of iron, or nickel, or cobalt, feel a 'pull'. They can escape this force by rapidly walking away. But, if they move slightly toward the 'pull', the magnetic 'pull' becomes a little stronger. As they move closer and closer the 'pull' becomes ever stronger. Eventually they see that the way is blocked by Jesus, a conductor or mediator, and he is the **ONLY WAY** to continue to God, the magnet (John 14:6).

Those who will not enter via Jesus do not actually enter the "*narrow way*" at all, but continue on through life with those of 'non-metallic' characters. Going in through Jesus [the gate], leads into the "*narrow way*" ... [the way of transformation –'metamorphosis'] (Romans 12:2).

This would be a more general 'call', and only those who are of the proper 'metallic' character would be influenced and led onward into the "*narrow way*".

But how does one have, or get, this 'metallic' character that is responsive to God? Is it an innate quality depending on one's DNA, or personality, or character? Or does God somehow implant a metallic 'chip' in certain ones to make it all possible? It seems likely that it would be 'faith in God', as in, *"Without faith, it is impossible to please God, but he who comes to him must first believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him"* (Hebrews 11:6). This idea is found everywhere in scripture and is what is needed at every step through life. *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10).

### **A Clarifying Point**

A recent sermon helped to clarify a certain point. There seems to be a 'natural' faith and a 'spiritual' faith. Not all men have the 'natural' faith (2 Thessalonians 3:2); these will be dealt with in the Kingdom age. Those who do have this 'natural' faith may be 'called' by God (as described above). This 'calling' is not to eternal life; it is for entrance into the Christian way, the *"narrow way"*, and then to discipleship *"And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"* (Luke 9:23).

Once in this *"narrow way"*, then, there should follow the gradual transforming of the mind into Christlikeness, and holiness, and righteousness -- success in this ultimately leads to eternal life in the heavens. It is in this *"narrow way"* that we will begin to find the 'spiritual' faith; a faith that must grow and develop under the influence of the holy spirit. *"Faith comes by hearing the Word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

### **A Specific Call**

This call of God has been, on rare occasions, more than something general - it may be directed at a specific individual. One such example would be Paul. While Paul still had 'free choice' in the matter, yet it would have been very difficult to reject the direct personal 'calling' of the risen Lord Jesus. Even so, this was a calling to service, to apostleship, and not to eternal life. Paul, like all Christians, still had to travel the *"narrow way"*, to run the race to the end, to be transformed, 'metamorphosed', by the renewing of his mind, and so on.

In the Old Testament are a number of instances where God made arbitrary choices of certain people. These 'callings' were not to eternal life, but were to service (either by the individuals, or their descendants). Examples are: God choosing Isaac rather than Ishmael; choosing Jacob rather than Esau [while they were yet unborn]; choosing the Israelites

rather than some other people (Amos 3:2). We might also consider the calling of Aaron to be High Priest (Hebrews 5:4), and of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to be prophets, and of *“David my servant”* (Jeremiah 33: 21) to be king.

None of these [living prior to Jesus’ time] ever received the ‘upward calling’ to the *“narrow way”* and the heavenly reward; that is strictly for the New Testament ‘church’, the ‘called-out ones’ (1 Corinthians 1: 9).

It was God's arbitrary decision to limit this ‘upward calling’ to the time period between the first and second advents of Jesus Messiah.

### **Final Thoughts**

During this Gospel, or church, age, God is seeking only those few who exhibit, and can further develop, the quality of faith -- to trust him where they cannot trace him; to believe that God's wisdom is far above their own; to believe that God, and his Son, are in complete control; to believe that God truly is Love. In the next age, the Kingdom age, faith will not be needed so much; rather all people will see mostly by sight -the ‘veil’ or ‘covering’ [of ignorance, superstition, and deception] will be removed.

*“And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations”* (Isaiah 25:7).

*“These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful”* (Revelation 17:14).

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### **A Little Flock**

A little flock, so calls he thee;  
Church of the Firstborn, hear!  
Be not ashamed to own the name;  
It is no name of fear.

Not many rich or noble called,  
Not many great or wise;  
Those whom God makes his kings and priests  
Are poor in human eyes.

Hymns Of Dawn No. 6



# CALLED, CHOSEN AND FAITHFUL

L.E. & M. Buckmaster

***“They shall make war with the Lamb,  
and the Lamb shall overcome them:  
for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings:  
and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”***

(Revelation 17:14)

The words of the text are part of the explanation of the vision of the judgement of the great whore. They come into the matter only incidentally, and are not part of the vision itself. The words of the text which I am going to refer to more particularly are spoken to those who are with the Lamb (the Lord Jesus Christ) when he has his great controversy with the nations, that controversy ending with their overthrow.

The identity of the *“they”* in the verse, they that are with the Lamb, is found in other scriptures, notably in Revelation 14:4, where they are referred to as *“they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; ... being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb”*. This verse would suffice to identify them as the Church. Other passages also speak of the Church in this way as the firstfruits, such as James 1:18, *“that we”* (that is the Church) *“might be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures”*.

In the KJV this verse in James is rendered as a *“kind”* of firstfruits, as though there may be various, or several sorts, or degrees of firstfruits, which I think I may say could not be the case. Firstfruits are firstfruits, and that is all that can be said of them. Other firstfruits are spoken of in scripture; the word is used in other connections. The Lord Jesus is said to be the firstfruits of them that slept in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 20 and 23; and he is the only one who could be so described. Romans 8:23 speaks of the firstfruits of the Spirit; and in the same epistle, in chapter 16 verse 5, we read of the firstfruits of Achaia. Thus, while firstfruits are spoken of in various connections, there is only one kind of firstfruit.

It may be made plainer by using the two words ‘first fruit’, the very first of the crop or harvest. The Diaglott renders James 1:18 simply as *“that we might be a firstfruit”*. And Weymouth has, *“that we might, in a sense, be the firstfruits”*. This seems to give a more understandable thought; that in a particular connection, from a particular aspect, the Church is firstfruits, and as the text says, firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And if I want to be more specific, I may say that of all who have gained salvation and eternal life up to this time, the time when the Lord has his conflict with the kings of my text verse. Those who are with him will be the first to be raised to eternal life. There were others who had, before the Church, gained salvation and life, but they had to give precedence to the Church in the matter of

resurrection, this being the divine intention, so “*they*” spoken of in the text as “*called, chosen and faithful*” are the first of the great harvest which will be gathered from “*the land of the enemy*”. The “*firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb*” (Revelation 14:4)

And having identified those of whom the text speaks in this way, let us consider what we may understand by these descriptive terms: how called; how chosen; how faithful?

### **Called**

The Lord’s followers, the twelve disciples, eleven of whom in turn became apostles, and one of the apostles, who had not been a disciple, Paul, were literally called by him. The first of those who were thus literally called were Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. We read about this in Matthew 4:18-20, “*And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed Him*”.

Very soon after this calling of Simon and Andrew we have the account of the calling of James and John, also brothers, the sons of Zebedee, also fishermen. Verses 21 and 22 of Matthew 4 record that, “*And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him*”. The gospel of Mark also records the calling of these four disciples in chapter one. In Luke 5:10 we have the statement that these two groups, Andrew and Simon and Zebedee and his sons were partners in their occupation of fishermen. Of course, the thing which led the Lord to call these men to him was his knowledge of them; that they were men of faith; they were Israelites indeed, as was Nathanael (John 1:47).

The account in John of the first meeting of Simon and Andrew with the Saviour differs somewhat from the passages quoted from Matthew and Mark. It could well be that the two sets of circumstances recorded by the two evangelists speak of different occasions, but it does not alter the fact that these two disciples were called personally by Jesus to follow him.

Phillip also is recorded as being personally called to discipleship. The account is in John 1:43, “*The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Phillip, and saith unto him, Follow me*”. Of Matthew, too, the account is the same. He related his own call to follow Jesus in chapter 9 verse 9 of his gospel, “*And as Jesus passed forth from thence he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting in the receipt of custom; and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him*”.

Thus these six of the disciples are on record as being called, in person, to the Christian work and life. Concerning the commencement of the discipleship of the other six of the Lord's chosen followers, there is no record. It may be that they were brought together with the others in a similar way; but that they were all selected to be of the twelve is indicated in John 15:16, where Jesus said to them, *"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you"*.

All the reasons for their selection to such an honour may not be clear to us, although it can be said that they were men of faith, and as such would suit the Lord's purpose. That our Lord was able to know this is shown in the incident recorded of Nathanael (John 1:45-51), and as with him, the Lord knew his man. Thus Jesus knew the twelve, even knowing that one of them would so sorely disappoint him. He called them away from their families and from their occupations to follow him.

We may say that all of the twelve were called by Jesus in the same way, whereas the Thessalonians, and indeed ourselves, were called by the gospel. Speaking of salvation, the apostle Paul wrote to them in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, *"Whereunto he called you by our gospel ..."*.

The Lord Jesus came preaching the gospel as stated in Matthew 4:23, *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom"*. Many of the Jews had been looking for just such preaching. They were in expectation, Luke told us, regarding John the Baptist, as to whether he was the Messiah, apparently understanding that the time was at hand for his appearing. We may be sure that the disciples were amongst those who mused in their hearts in this way about John, and so when the twelve heard the Lord's preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom, they were persuaded of its truth, and so were called in response to it as well as by him personally, and willingly cast in their lot with him.

The apostle who had not been a disciple of Jesus during his ministry, but who was also called in a special way, was, of course, Saul of Tarsus. The account of his calling is in Acts 9:3-9.

*"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men*

*which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.”*

Here again we find something which we are not able to understand fully. Why was Saul not a disciple of Jesus with the others? Why was he not called as they were? Why did his calling have to wait? Several possibilities present themselves.

When he came to dwell with men, our Saviour was of humble birth and station. It could be said that he was of the lower classes, and he did not aspire to be anything else. The wisdom of God was in this, of course, but the fact that Jesus was thus lowly in earthly status could be one reason why he had no close contact with Saul of Tarsus, who was of higher birth and status than the humble men who were fishermen. Only a few of the upper class of Jewry were drawn to the lowly preacher from Nazareth, and Saul was not one of them.

Another aspect of the question is that Paul, a pupil of Gamaliel, for such he was, would prove to be a very fitting instrument for God. Just as Moses was made the more ready for his task of leader of the Israelites by his schooling in the royal court of Egypt, so was Paul made ready for his calling to be an apostle with Jesus' gospel. His native powers of mind were able to explain so well the picture and imagery, his knowledge of the type and shadow, of the essentials of the Mosaic law and its worship. Added to this was his own strength of character, and his devotion to the Christian cause which arose from his realisation that he had been unwittingly opposed to the outworking of the love of God set forth in the gospel, centred on the Son of God, of which Paul later became so dedicated an apostle.

The few of the Lord's people who were called in that particular, personal, way, that is, the apostles; were also chosen and faithful. But all other people are called, that is, invited, by the gospel to be followers of Jesus; *“Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

### **Chosen**

With respect to the calling, one of the most well known texts is that in Matthew 20:16; *“For many be called, but few chosen”*. It occurs again in Matthew 22:14. This makes it clear that to be chosen is not the same as being called. If only a few of the called are chosen, the greater number are not.



And there appears to be more than one way in which men are chosen by the Lord. One passage speaks of being chosen before the foundation of the world. *“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world ... Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 1:4,5). This appears to be a reference to the body of believers collectively, and inasmuch as the passage speaks also of predestination, it may be understood to be speaking of the divine purpose concerning the Church as a whole, and not a choosing of individuals. Some have taken these verses in Ephesians to mean that the individual destined for salvation has been chosen to this end from the beginning, and have built up the doctrine that certain ones were predestined to be saved; while all who are not so predestined or chosen are eternally lost.

At one time in the history of the church a considerable body of Christian people held this view, but without having any precise information on the point the number now holding this belief is comparatively small. However, such a doctrine is contrary to the revealed character of God, that he could and would arbitrarily save or condemn. This view is also contrary to the full teaching of scripture about the offer of salvation. The message is clear in that salvation is to *“whosoever will”* (Matthew 16:25); and further, that every member of the race is guaranteed (promised) an opportunity to claim the salvation which is so freely offered to a fallen race. So, this matter of being chosen is not the arbitrary one some have supposed it to be, and, like predestination, must be understood in a different way.

The Lord spoke of Paul as a *“chosen vessel unto me”* (Acts 9:15). He was chosen for a special reason; to fulfil a particular purpose. Paul was not the first to be chosen in this way. Others chosen for a purpose include Moses, Abraham, Bezeleel and Aholiab (builders of the tabernacle), Saul (Israel's first king), David, the judges and the prophets, all chosen by God to have a place in his plan; chosen for differing reasons and differing works, but none for a greater purpose than Saul of Tarsus, who was a *“chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”*.

During his last discourse to the disciples, shortly before the final Passover which Jesus celebrated with them, in the course of which he told them of the comforter to come and of the gift of his peace, he said to them, *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you”*. Seemingly anomalous words; what did the Lord mean? Had there been no choosing on the disciples' part? There had been, but still Jesus' words were true, *“Ye have not chosen me”* (John 15:16). What the Lord's words meant lay in the fact that in the matter of salvation there was no other choice. From the beginning only one Messiah was to come; only one child would be born; only one Son could be given; there is only one Saviour from sin; only one who has the words of eternal life. So there was no other choice with respect to God's purpose through Jesus Christ.

And yet the disciples had made a choice. They had chosen to accept him while most of their fellow Israelites had chosen not to accept him as the Messiah. John stated that *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not”* (John 1:11). They will, of course, have to accept him during the Kingdom Age if they want life, and this is true for both Jew and Gentile.

And so Jesus said, *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you”*. They were simple, unlearned men, these fishermen of Galilee. They were of the common people and, as Mark wrote, the *“common people heard him gladly”* (Mark 12:37), and some of them believed. But more importantly, these Galileans were men of faith; they believed Moses and the prophets and were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah who was to come. They proved their faith by showing themselves to be ready for the master's work, willing to suffer much for his sake. And with that faith went that state of heart and mind which is so pleasing to God and his Son; that willingness of mind and heart to learn and be taught; so he told them *“... I have chosen you”*.

But what about ourselves? Have we been chosen? As with the disciples, we have to make a choice. Believers generally choose when they accept the call of the gospel; because they believe in that message. To such people the Lord has extended his mercy, and offered his promises. But it is not an arbitrary choosing, because the practice of faith is an act of a free will, a will allowed to make a choice. The hearers of the call can accept it or turn from it. But, if, and when, they do make that choice, they in turn are accepted as fitting recipients for all the blessings of the gospel, and if chosen from the many who are called, to inherit all the promises of God, those things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard (1 Corinthians 2:9).

### **Faithful**

Having been called through the gospel and having made the choice to serve God, being faithful is the most important of the three aspects this text speaks of. That this is so is shown in the Lord's promise to the overcomer in Revelation 2:1, *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life”*. From this the implication is clear that if we are not faithful, no crown of life can be expected. And if we have no crown of life, we can have nothing at all.

In Galatians 5 there is a list of the 'Fruits of the Spirit'. One of the fruits included is faith, that is, faithfulness. However, we must show our faith before we are given God's Spirit. It is true, of course, that the operation of the spirit of God can strengthen and increase our faith; and surely does so. In the passage in Galatians 5, the Diaglott and the NEV both use the word 'fidelity' instead of 'faith'. And Weymouth has 'good faith' in this verse. This is in order, because the Greek word 'pistis', usually rendered faith, also has

the meaning of constancy, fidelity, faithfulness. Also the word is rendered as *"fidelity"* in Titus 2:10. Thus the Christian must show this quality, this fruit of the Spirit, if the great prize of the high calling is to be gained. And to show this faithfulness until the course of this life is run, as set out in Revelation 2:10, *"faithful unto death"*.

There are many scriptures urging this fidelity, this faithfulness, on the follower of Christ. Faithfulness is one of the divine attributes. *"Faithful is he that calleth you"* we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:24. The psalmist wrote of the divine faithfulness in Psalm 92:2, *"It is a good thing"*, the passage says, *"to show forth thy loving kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night"*. In the lamentations of Jeremiah we find the same testimony; in chapter 3:22-23 the prophet said, *"It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassion fails not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness"*.

We are reminded of this, too, by the New Testament writers, who also bear witness to God's faithfulness. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:9, told the Corinthians, *"God is faithful, by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his Son"*. And the apostle John gave us one of the most loved and valued of all the sayings of scripture when he wrote, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

As a final thought on the faithfulness of God, we should remember the promise testified by the rainbow, given to man as a sign that no more will the earth be subjected to a flood to destroy all life, as was experienced in the time of Noah. The rainbow is in the nature of a guarantee of the promise given; and it is used in scripture as a symbol of God's faithfulness; of the sureness of his promises. Not that the Lord needed to provide such a guarantee or sign; such is his character that his word never fails.

The bow in the cloud was given for much the same reason that God established his oath with Abraham; a concession to man's weakness at such significant times. Man is not able to give such an unqualified assurance to others, and needing such provisions and arrangements as guarantees and the like, the Lord condescended to the use of such arrangements in his dealings with men; so great is his kindness towards us. The Christian is exhorted to mould his character in that same likeness of faithfulness and kindness.

The Lord Jesus has this quality of faithfulness. Hebrews 2:17 speaks of him as a *"faithful high priest"*. In the book of Revelation there are two references to him as the faithful witness - Revelation 1:5 and 3:14. We know this is true of him even without the testimony of his apostle and the writer of Revelation.

We believe his words when he said to Phillip, *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”* (John 14:9), because he is the image of the invisible God. As Colossians 1:15 says, *“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature”*. While he was on earth the Son was a character likeness (image) of his Father in heaven; now we believe he is an image of his very person, as Hebrews 1:3 declares, *“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person ....”*. The Lord’s followers are admonished to be like him, and if we are found in the character likeness of our Lord and master, we also will be found to be in the likeness of the heavenly Father.

To be faithful includes all our sayings and doings; it is a faithfulness to our fellow man, whether believer or unbeliever, as well as faithfulness to God and our Lord. It is a faithfulness in word. Jesus said. *“Let your communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil”* [or the evil one, as some renderings have it] (Matthew 5:37). James gave the same advice in chapter 5 verse 12, *“swear not”,* he said, *“neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay be nay; lest ye fall into condemnation”*.

It is a faithfulness in time. The Lord is never late in any of his arrangements, nor lagging behind in his promises. Nor should we be, despite unavoidable circumstance which may make us so. But when we plead them to be unavoidable, factors and circumstances which are not really so, we allow our frailty and the evil one, who plays upon our frailty, to trip us up in this, as in other things.

It is faithfulness in deed. Little things count in this matter of our faithfulness. Fidelity is shown by our Lord’s words in Luke 16:10, *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much”*, and something we do well to keep in mind is that it is easier, in the main, to be faithful in the big things than in the lesser ones. This is so, at least partly, because failure in the larger issues of life is made patent to all around us, and we accordingly make the greater effort to avoid it. Whereas to fail, to be unfaithful, in the smaller things is not as noticeable to our fellows. It may not be noticed at all; it may be known only to ourselves, and so we tend to slackness in the lesser things. I believe that this is one of the implications of our Lord’s words just quoted.

We read that the Lord Jesus is *“the faithful and true witness”* (Revelation 3:14), the perfect example for his people to follow. He witnessed faithfully to the truth. The Christian is to be a witness too, both for him and for the truth. The one goes with the other, for he is *“the way the truth, and the life”* (John 14:6). *“Be instant in season and out of season”* Paul wrote to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:2), and the exhortation comes to us, though perhaps in a lesser way for some of us because we do not have the responsibility which Timothy had. And if

we are faithful it should not be a hardship to be a witness for the message of truth, either in word or in deed. We should remember our Lord's words in Matthew 10:32, "*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven*".

The New Testament writers were greatly concerned about this matter of faithfulness because they well understood its importance. Peter, in his second epistle, after exhorting his readers to diligence in cultivating the Christian virtues and saying that this diligence can ensure an entrance into the kingdom, said further, in verse 12 of chapter 1, "*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them*", and in verse 15, "*Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease to have these things always in remembrance*". Surely his intention was to encourage the Lord's people, down through the age, in that faithfulness in all things which can gain for us the crown of life.

Paul said much the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15; speaking of the gospel he had preached to them, he wrote in verse 2, "*By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain*".

There are examples of the faithfulness of God's servants of olden times recorded in the Old Testament, many of them named in Hebrews chapter 11. The importance of this record is to draw and learn the lessons intended by them. We read that it is set down in scripture for our learning (Romans 15:4), and this learning from God's word is part of and the result of this faithfulness which is the foundation of the reconciliation and imputed righteousness God has granted in his faithfulness and mercy.

Thus it becomes clear that while Jesus chose the apostles directly and in person, believers are called by him, not directly, but through the gospel message. Having responded to God's invitation to serve him with a lifetime of faithfulness under the terms of the New Covenant, they may be chosen by God as he continues to "*take out a people for his name*" (Acts 15:14).

**Called** – "*by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

**Chosen** – "*... that ye should shew forth the praises (virtues) of him who hath called you*" (1 Peter 2:9).

**Faithful** – "*... unto death*" (Revelation 2:10) that so we might receive the crown of life.



# Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

## Hebrews 9:15-22

- 15** *And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*
- 16** *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.*
- 17** *For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.*
- 18** *Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.*
- 19** *For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,*
- 20** *Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.*
- 21** *Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.*
- 22** *And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*

Verse 15 expounds that the cause or purpose of the mediator is twofold. Firstly, for the redemption of Israel that was cursed by the terms of the Law Covenant, and secondly, to bestow the eternal inheritance on those who responded to his call under the terms of the New Covenant. Thus, neither covenant was neglected in the change from one to the other.

It was pointed out that this verse gives a similar message to that given in Romans; *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”* (Romans 3:20-26).

In verses 16 and 17 there may be confusion caused by the word “*testament*” being used. This can have the sense of a legal will or testament instead of the meaning of ‘covenant’ or contractual agreement which is more consistent with the context and with other scripture.

God made the first covenant of the Law with men, but as the testator or covenant maker, he did not die. Although Jesus died or was put to death, he did not make a will or testament, but his sacrifice established the second covenant, also made by God with men. In both cases the covenants were sealed with blood, which allows the testator to be regarded as the ‘covenant victim’, the one through whom the covenant is made (Strong 1303).

The following verses show that neither covenant was made without the shedding of blood. The Law Covenant was ratified by the blood of bulls and goats, while the New Covenant was ratified by the blood of Jesus, and verse 22 makes the point that the shedding of blood is necessary for remission of sins. Jesus’ blood was physically shed through his scourging, by being nailed to the cross and when pierced by the centurion’s spear.

However, Leviticus 5:11-13 defines a sin offering for forgiveness without blood, that was acceptable under the law when the sinner was unable to offer an animal sacrifice. This explains the phrase in verse 22 “... *almost all things are by the law purged with blood ...*”. Under the New Covenant the blood of Jesus provides remission of all sins that are confessed with penitence. Another thing cleansed without blood was the offering of silver for atonement (Exodus 30:12-16).

There was discussion about the scarlet wool and hyssop mentioned in verse 19. Both are included in sacrifices under the law according to Leviticus 14:4. David prayed for cleansing with hyssop in Psalm 51:7, and the scarlet nature of sins is compared with the white purity of snow in Isaiah 1:18. Also the Lord on the cross was offered wine-vinegar in a sponge on a stalk of hyssop. These references seem to reflect the symbolism of the sacrifices. It was also noted that other uses of hyssop were to sprinkle the doorposts and lintel with the blood of the lamb at the first Passover (Exodus 12:22), and hyssop was to be used to sprinkle lepers with the blood of a bird at their cleansing (Leviticus 14:2-7). The symbolism of hyssop may indicate that the same authority underlies all these cases.



# NEWS

## Baptisms

It was with great joy that more than 25 people witnessed the baptism of Emily Roe and Jamie Greenhalgh in the Barwon River, in Victoria, on the evening of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2023. A simple and informal service at the Roe campsite, during which Emily and Jamie gave heartfelt testimonies, preceded the immersions, which were followed by light refreshments and a time of fellowship.

## Memorial Supper

The memorial of the Lord's Supper will be on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023. The venue for this service is yet to be determined, so please see our website ([www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au](http://www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au)) or contact us ([info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au](mailto:info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au)).

## Autumn Conference

We have a booking for our annual autumn conference at the Foothills Conference Centre in Mooroolbark for Friday 14<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2023. We look forward to exploring our theme of 'Keeping the Faith'. The program will include talks, devotions, Bible studies and opportunities for informal fellowship. Registration forms will be sent out soon, but feel free to contact us ([info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au](mailto:info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au)) for more information.



### THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is compiled by an editor responsible to the New Covenant Fellowship. The thoughts expressed do not necessarily represent the understandings of all the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words:  
***“Prove all things”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:21).



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