

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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News

CLEAN EVERY WHIT

Ern Anderson (1916 – 1999)

I wish to draw your attention to the message in John 13:10. *“Jesus saith to him, ‘He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all’.”*

To get the context of these words it is advisable to read verses 1 to 17.

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, ‘Lord, dost thou wash my feet?’ Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter’. Peter saith unto him, ‘Thou shalt never wash my feet’. Jesus answered him, ‘If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me’. Simon Peter saith unto him, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head’. Jesus saith to him, ‘He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all’. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, ‘Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them’.”

My selection of the topic for this paper was influenced by an article I had read in an overseas Christian magazine on the topic of Jesus' conversation with his disciples. The principle expounded in the article impressed me, and it is my desire to share it with you.

Firstly, let us look again at verse 10. “*Jesus saith to him, ‘He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all’.*” The language of the KJV in this instance may have been clear to the translators at the time, but to our present-day ears the intent of the verse is obscure. Fortunately we are living in more enlightened times and have the help of many scholars who have contributed to revealing many previously obscure passages.

The translators of the KJV translated two Greek verbs, which have markedly different meanings, by the same English word ‘wash’. In reality, one of the verbs, ‘loo-o’ (Strong 3068) means ‘to bathe – to get into the water’; and the other verb, ‘nipto’ (Strong 3538) means ‘to wash’, that is, to apply water to the uncovered parts of the body, such as the feet, the hands and the face. To make the sentence more correct, the verse should be rendered, as in the RV, “*He that is bathed needeth not, save to wash his feet*”.

The natural question to ask in the light of this is, why should a man who has just bathed – just washed himself all over – need to wash even so much as his feet? A reply to this will be found in a reminder of the custom of feet washing which prevailed at that time. To illustrate this I will quote an extract from the abridged edition of Smith’s Bible Dictionary on washing of the hands and feet.

‘As knives and forks were not used in the east in scripture times, in eating it was necessary that the hand, which was thrust into the common dish, should be scrupulously clean; and again, as sandals were ineffectual against the dust and heat of the climate, washing the feet on entering a house was an act both of respect to the company and a refreshment to the traveller. The former of these uses, that is, the washing of hands, was transformed by the Pharisees of NT age into a matter of ritual observance, and special rules were laid down as to the time and manner of the performance. Washing of the feet did not rise to the dignity of a ritual observance except in connection with the services of the sanctuary. It held a high place, however, among the rites of hospitality. Immediately that a guest presented himself at the tent door (sic) it was usual to offer the necessary material for washing the feet. It was a yet more complimentary act, betokening equal humility and affection, if the host himself performed the office for his guest.’

A guest, therefore, although he had bathed before leaving his home, would need, by virtue of the open type of sandals worn, to have his feet

washed from the dust and soiling contracted on his journey to his host's house. There it was normal for servants to be in attendance with towels and vessels of water to perform the act, or even, as Smith's Bible Dictionary says, it would at times be performed by the host himself. It was doubtless to this custom that our Lord referred when he said, "*He that is bathed need only wash his feet*".

As read in the first verse of this chapter, this incident occurred at the time of the last Passover feast of which Jesus partook, when he instituted the Memorial. Remember that prior to this feast Jesus sent Peter and John to Jerusalem to make the necessary arrangements for the observance of the Passover. The disciples found the room as the Lord predicted, and they also found that it was furnished and prepared. Doubtless the furnishing of the room consisted also of the necessary vessels, so that they were on hand for Jesus to perform the washing. As the host of the house was not in attendance, nor any servants, it was possible that one of the disciples may have washed the feet of Jesus when they entered, but it is obvious that none took any steps to wash the feet of the others.

Just why this was not done we can only surmise, from the evidence available, that none was humble enough to perform the act. Indeed, as further evidence in Luke's account of the events at this same assembling shows, a dispute arose between the disciples as to "*which of them should be accounted the greatest*" (Luke 22:24). The feeling that 'I am as good as you, and a little better' seems to have ruled them all. Not one of them had yet learnt the lesson, which Jesus had so often taught, that he is the greatest who does most for others, and he the true chief who serves most.

It was to bring this lesson which they had ignored to their attention that Jesus rose from the table, laid aside his outer robe and put a towel about himself, thus appearing among them as one who served, poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel he had placed about him. Apparently the apostles were so astonished at our Lord's procedure, and so keenly felt the condemnation which his action implied, that they knew not what to say, so silence reigned, until it came to Peter's turn.

Peter objected to having his feet washed by Jesus, saying "*Lord, dost thou wash my feet?*" as much as to say, 'It is not appropriate, Lord, that one such as Thou should serve a person of my standing'. Our Lord answered that although Peter did not understand the full meaning of the

matter, he would explain it to him later when he had finished the washing of all. “No”, said Peter, “*Thou shalt never wash my feet*”, meaning that he would not allow his Lord to stoop so low on his behalf. But in this Peter was again mistaken.

Then Jesus said to him, “*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me*”, or “*no portion or share with me*”, as Weymouth translated the words. What he meant was that if you will not allow me, as your host, to wash your feet, you are no guest of mine; no portion, no dish is set on my table for you; you stand outside my circle, outside my fellowship.

The spiritual significance which Jesus had declared his action to possess is partly disclosed in these words, for they cannot be taken literally. It was not literally necessary for Peter’s feet to be washed by his master in order that Peter should have his portion on the table or his part in the kingdom and grace of God. But it **was** necessary that he should submit his will to the will of God, and to learn to take the law from Jesus’ lips. It was necessary that his whole round of activities, symbolised by his feet, should be cleansed and purified.

If we believe into Jesus we also must behave even as he behaved. This was the spiritual meaning of his rebuke to Peter. It was not enough that he should once have given witness by a faithful confession, or that he should still acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Day by day, as the dust of the world, or the worldly self-willed spirit gathered upon him, he needed to be cleansed from it, to have his stains and sins washed away.

Peter did not fully grasp the meaning of Jesus’ words or he would not have uttered his second rash or hasty speech. He was, however, so profoundly impressed by his master’s tone and manner, and so appalled at the thought of having no portion with him, no place at his table, no lot in his kingdom, that he cried out impulsively, “*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and head*”. Wash all that is uncovered, cleanse all that is open to the soiling and contamination of the world.

Peter had missed the more delicate distinction of his Lord’s thought, but his heart was in the right place; he would do and suffer anything rather than permit the links which bound him to Jesus to be severed. And, therefore, Jesus expressed his thoughts more clearly in the words, “*He that is bathed* [he that has once been plunged in ‘*the washing of regeneration*’ (Titus 3:5); he who has become ‘*a new creature*’

(2 Corinthians 5:17)] *needs not save to wash his feet*". This becomes a daily necessity with him, and with every believer.

His feet and his life, soiled by the contact with its dusty paths and its worldliness, must be cleansed if he is to be clean every whit.

When a person first truly believes in God, when they sincerely accept the revelation of God's redeeming love made in and through Jesus, they are spiritually bathed; they are regenerated, renovated, made anew; they become new creatures in him.

In this episode in John 13, while Jesus had not then laid down his life he was about to do so, and as a consequence of his contemplated sacrifice they were already accepted as his disciples; their faith in him and in his Father was already reckoned to them for righteousness; and as soon as Jesus had completed his sacrifice and ascended to his Father's right hand, the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them, testifying fully that the Father had accepted his sacrifice on their behalf.

Thus even then they had a favourable standing with God. Jesus had come from the Father with the glad word of salvation which had been planned, and as they listened eagerly they had embraced that message. So true was this that Jesus was able to say to them, "*Now (or more literally, already) are ye clean (or cleansed) through the word I have given you*" (John 15:3).

They had been with our Lord, under the influence of his love, meekness, gentleness, patience and humility, for more than three years, and had been greatly blessed by the spiritual washing through the word he had expounded to them.

But as they would continue their journey along the narrow way on which Jesus had set them, they would find themselves contacting fresh pollutions; they would be made painfully aware that the old nature was only reckoned dead, and would require a lifelong effort to keep it under. They would experience temptation from such contacts as they would make with the world, or by being brought into collision with evil activity, which would find its way even into the Church. And hence, though bathed, they would need to go again and again to the fountain in which they were first cleansed, the inexhaustible fountain of divine mercy and grace.

This, then is the first lesson suggested by the words, *“He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet”*.

In this lesson the symbolism of Jesus' teaching is made clear. We sin **after** we have believed. We take fresh soils and stains **after** we have been renewed in the spirit of our minds. We need a daily cleansing, though not a daily regeneration. We have the treasure of a new life in an earthen vessel. This new life, begotten of God, the Father, by the incorruptible seed of truth, may be thwarted by the evil and selfish passions, which, in our flesh assert their existence and power. It may be stunted by the pleasures and cares of this world in which we live, by the frets and anxieties that spring from the toil by which we gain our daily bread, by undue attention to our personal interests or to the things of this present world, by the evil tempers stirred in us by contradiction of sinners (or even by the contradiction of saints). Daily, therefore, we need to be washed from these ugly and defiling stains. It is not enough that we were once enlightened and quickened, that we became aware of the heavenly gift and of the powers of the age to come.

Day by day we need to seek the presence of our Lord, who, with basin and towel, stands ever ready to refresh us, cleansing away our travel stains so that we may be akin with him. If we have learned what it means to go day by day to the master for the refreshing of 'feet-washing', it will not be difficult for us to put into practice the second lesson to be noted. It is summed up in verse 15, *“I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”*.

When the Lord first approached Peter who, in astonishment, enquired, *“Lord, dost **thou** wash **my** feet?”*, Jesus replied, *“What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter”*. As soon as the Lord had finished washing the other disciples he made it plain, as described in verses 12 to 15: *“So, after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”*.

Here we have the entire lesson explained. He had rendered them a service which they had apparently held to be too mean and lowly for them to render to each other. He had taught them by his example, and through

them he has taught us, that it is by loving and serving one another that we copy his example, draw near to him and grow like him.

The washing of one another's feet, we may readily see, applies to any and every humble service of life, and every kindness, though especially to those services and kindnesses which would be along the lines of spiritual assistance and comfort. No service needs to be formal, but all motivated by Christian love, the love which is for the benefit of the other party. Any service done or attempted to be done in love, with the desire to do good to one of the Lord's people, we may be sure, has our Lord's approval and blessing.

That the lesson the Lord taught in these words had its desired effect we can have no doubt when we study the record of the lives of the apostles and see how, with much self-denial, they served the establishment of the Church of Christ, of which he was the leader, but yet servant of them all. We too, therefore, can demonstrate that the lesson is not wasted on us by seeking opportunities to serve the members of the congregation of Jesus' followers in all matters, even in both the temporal as well as the spiritual.

We can be, and I am persuaded that many are, constantly on the alert to give such service, and when we see sadness and discouragement, be prompt to give assistance to lift or ease the sorrows. And then we can let them see, by deeds as well as words, our wish to serve them, to figuratively 'wash their feet'.



“LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE”

Some devotional thoughts based on Matthew 5:16

Dawn Smith

As Christians, this is something that we are all mindful of, particularly when we associate in a close environment, or when we are having regular contact with the same people, for example, in a work or social situation.

We can be challenged by this text when we make decisions on what groups or activities we should become involved in, or how we respond when we meet new friends, or our response to idle chatter in social situations or at work.

1 Timothy 4:12 reminds us to *“Be an example to the believers (and unbelievers) in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity”*.

We are warned in Matthew 12:36 *“... that every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgement”*.

This presents us with the challenge to make sure that any remarks we make or actions we take are not misconstrued and held against Christianity. Sometimes even comments we might deem to be positive, or encouraging, can be taken in a different light.

The full reading of the Matthew text of *“Let your light shine”* continues *“so that men may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”*. I suggest that believers might do that - give glory to the Father - but I think it might not necessarily be the response of non-believers to acknowledge God. The opposite could apply - that if we do not let our light shine, we are sending a negative image of Christianity to non-believers.

We are given a rule to follow in Psalm 32:8, - *“I will instruct you and teach you, in the way you should go”*.

So, we are instructed to seek examples in scripture to give encouragement, but with this also comes a warning in 1 Corinthians 3:13; if we fail to follow these examples. *“... each one’s work shall become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.”*

Following these instructions on Christian living challenges us to consider the consequences of standing apart. Are we willing to bear the scorn, or mocking, or just rejection, which loyalty to the truth brings?

1 Peter 4:16, reminds us that *“... if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter”*.

We are given encouragement in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that *“... our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”*.

Matthew 5:11-12 reads *“Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake”*. But this text continues with a *bigger* challenge. *“Rejoice and be*

exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets before you". 'Rejoice' is something many of us have not been able to do when persecution comes our way. Yet, we are given the example of how Paul and the disciples were able to do this under extreme circumstances.

We need to keep reminding ourselves of the advice in Colossians 3:2, to *"Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth".*

One way to help us to face these challenges is to work on keeping our faith strong.

In sharing these thoughts on 'letting our light shine' through our words and actions, it is a reminder of the admonition presented in James that *"faith without works is dead"* (James 2:20,26).

The preface to James in the New King James Version states 'Faith must inspire action. True faith must manifest itself in works of faith. Faith endures trials. Trials come and go, but a strong faith will face them headlong and develop endurance'.

In James 1:4 he said, *"Let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect, lacking nothing"*. The NIV says, *"perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature, lacking nothing"*. One commentator explained it as 'long suffering meekness, striving to stem the tide of human imperfection'.

James continued his instructions in Chapter 1, verse 19: *"So then, my beloved brethren, be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"*. The comment has been made that we have been given two eyes; two ears and only one mouth and we should exercise them in that proportion!

The preface to James continues, 'Faith acts wisely. It gives us the ability to choose wisdom that is heavenly, and to shun wisdom that is earthly. The final word is that through all this, Faith waits patiently for the coming of the Lord!'

So, our challenge then is to *"Keep the Faith"*, as Hebrews 11:6 reminds us: *"... without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"*.



KEEPING THE FAITH

How to practically keep the faith day-to-day.

Andrew Johnstone

What is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 tells us *“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (NKJV). Faith is a combination of knowledge, belief, and trust in God.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says *“and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”*.

What does the Bible say about keeping the faith?

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16).

“Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us” (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Why did Paul write this to Timothy? Let's read from the beginning of Chapter 4 for context.

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have

finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:1-8).

Paul was concerned that it is all too easy for people to lose their faith and wander off the path. How can we be assured that we will be amongst those who receive the crown of righteousness along with Paul?

Five practical ways to keep the faith.

1. Abide with Jesus

“I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

This verse is teaching us not to wander away from Jesus. We have been grafted into the vine through our baptism; our desire must be to continue living a righteous life, being particular who we keep company with. In times of trouble, we need to look to God for resolution of issues that confront us. This is when our faith needs to realise that when we are weak, we can become strong because our Lord is our ever-present help in times of trouble, such as when we are vulnerable to questioning and being challenged.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul wrote, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”.*

Isaiah wrote in chapter 65:24 *“Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear”.* These verses should give us the confidence to pray for guidance and assistance in so many aspects of our daily lives. And as one prayer after another is answered our faith will be made all the stronger.

2. Know the truth

Those who teach us must lead us to the Truth. In John chapter 8:31-32 Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, *“if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”.* Jesus was teaching the Jews that knowing the truth would result in them being free from sin.

Paul wrote to Timothy advising that sound teaching will not be endured but people having itching ears will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings (1 Timothy 3:13 - 4:4). There are so many false teachers and so much false teaching around these days it is difficult to be aware of the latest information or discern what motivates them with their deception.

Consequently, do not entertain the words of false teachers and avoid learning from them. As believers we are instructed in 1 John 4:1; *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world”*. This is an important process as we are warned in 1 Corinthians 11:14-15, *“for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds”*. If we love Jesus, we will keep to his teaching. If we are not led into truth, then we are led into lies.

To know the truth is to be given eternal life, therefore there is nothing more important in this life than knowing the truth. Holding the word of God in our hearts will ensure that we are not led astray or easily deceived and that we have the spiritual resources to combat being taught an error. Jesus taught that the holy spirit would be given to believers to provide recall and comfort. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you”* (John 14:15-18).

3. Keep a clear conscience

“This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Timothy 1:18-20).

A good conscience urges us to do what is right and forbids us to do wrong. It also rebukes us when we have done wrong. Our conscience is a gift from God; however, it can be influenced by our environment, our training, our habits and our education. Paul's admonition to hold on to faith tells us that it is something we must make an effort to cling to and

not relinquish. Paul had experienced a shipwreck on his way to Rome and knew how dangerous that had been. It could have killed him. He used the word shipwreck to highlight the danger of rejecting a good conscience. The use of this analogy would not have been lost on Timothy.

Our faith and our thoughts are closely connected. Our faith and our conscience combined are like a spiritual rudder through life, the two of them together, guide us through life's challenges and tribulations ensuring that we finish the race successfully. Paul warned Timothy about those who taught different doctrines, dwelt upon endless genealogies which promoted speculations but not training in faith. Timothy was to teach about love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. By rejecting this doctrine people make a shipwreck of their faith, and not only their faith but the faith of others as well.

4. Remain in fellowship with other believers

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Romans 1:11-12).

"And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Life is about people. People matter. Remaining in fellowship with each other allows us to teach one another, to be an encouragement and strengthen ourselves to ensure that we remain in the faith. By strengthening each other we become filled with hope and confidence to face life and all its confrontations.

Being cut off from other believers can weaken our faith, especially if we are not determined in our daily walk with the Lord. If we allow bitterness, unforgiveness or small differences to keep us from sharing our faith we are like sheep who leave the safety of the fold. Don't wander away from believers but stay close and stay safe in Jesus' protection.

5. Pass along our faith to future generations

This instruction comes from the Old Testament.

"But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your

children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9), and "He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Psalm 78:5-8).

An important part of keeping our faith is ensuring that it is passed along to the next generation. We may have children and grandchildren; however, God as a spirit being has no human grandchildren. Faith cannot be inherited; it must be passed along to the next generation; it has to be caught like an infection. Each believer's faith must be original, belonging to the believer, and not second-hand as belonging to someone else. Our children need to be taught about God, about creation and about the saving power of Jesus and the future life on earth that awaits those who will inherit it for eternity.

When our children were young, we would encourage them to pray and wait for God's response. We are role models for our children, there is a saying 'more is caught than actually taught'. Children take more notice of what their parents do than what they say. Actions speak louder than words. Jesus' actions are like sermons to his followers.

We also had a daily devotion after the evening meal. All our children were encouraged to learn the first psalm: *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish"* (Psalm 1:1-6).

God knows if we keep the faith in faithfulness to him.



FAITH

Diana Robinson

“Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it” (Hebrews 11:1; New Century Version).

This essentially defines what faith is.

Hebrews 11 discusses a lot of great people of the past for their faith. However, due to time restraints I am taking only Abraham as an example today. We have good information about Abraham and his faith, so I wish to highlight only a few intriguing details of his faith that I found compelling.

Genesis 22:5 reads *“He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey. My son and I will go over there and worship, and then we will come back to you’.”*

God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac, and while he was on his way to the place of sacrifice, he told his servants, “Wait here, and we will come back”, using the plural, if you notice. Instead of saying “I will return”, he said “We will return”. What a sense of assurance. Was Abraham convinced that God would intervene to stop him from killing Isaac before the moment came, or, that Isaac would be brought back to life? One way or another, Abraham seemed to suggest that he expected Isaac to accompany him on the way back.

Also, when Isaac inquired about the lamb to be offered as a sacrifice in verse 8, he was told, *“God will give us the lamb for the sacrifice, my son”* (Genesis 22:8). I believe he was certain that God would spare his child. And, maybe, God himself would give the lamb for the sacrifice, which eventually happened.

Another clue with more details to Abraham's thought process is given in Hebrews. *“It was by faith that Abraham, when God tested him, offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. God made the promises to Abraham, but Abraham was ready to offer his own son as a sacrifice. God had said, ‘The descendants I promised you will be from Isaac.’ Abraham believed that God could raise the dead, and really, it was as if Abraham got Isaac back from death”* (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Reading these verses makes it clear to me that Abraham had a firm belief in God, a clear understanding of who he is and what he is capable of doing, which is exactly the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1. When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the one through whom all of His

promises were meant to be fulfilled as mentioned in verse 18, Abraham could not see how God would keep His word. And yet, Abraham obeyed.

The most essential thing is that he had faith that even if his son had to be sacrificed, God could raise him from the dead, according to verse 19. When Abraham lived, the idea of resurrection was unknown. Yet, he had the belief that anything is possible with God, and he could even raise Isaac from death. Whatever Abraham expected to happen next, he did not hesitate to continue to obey God's command to sacrifice the son he loved. This is not because he thought God wanted a human sacrifice; rather, it was because Abraham trusted God enough to obey, even when he did not fully understand his request.

The attention to detail in the above verses is breathtaking to me. How is it possible to have such a strong faith? I believe it was Abraham's clear understanding of who his God is that enabled him to have such immense faith.

My human thinking then moves on to comparing my faith to Abraham's. Can I even compare this amazing man to my faith? I doubt it! I feel as though I have only 5% of the faith that he had. I consider how I would respond if God asked me to do something similar now. In reality, our lives are full of instances like these. Will I be able to obey God without delay like Abraham? Possibly yes or possibly no. Something to think about.

But, as stated in Ephesians 2:8 *"we must comprehend that faith is a gift from God and not something we can work for"*.

God undoubtedly offers us faith as a gift, just as he did for Abraham, but ultimately it is up to us to put that faith into practice and be like him. Although we can't compare our faith to his, we may learn from these great men of the past about how our faith should be.

"So, then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God", according to Romans 10:17. May God grant us the ability to hear and understand what the word of God has to say so that we can grow in our faith. God's Word might not always make sense to us, but we must still obey like Abraham did.

Through this devotion, I want to emphasise the clarity of Abraham's faith. He was very sure of who his God is. Let's reflect on the promises God has given to us in this wonderful Bible, and clarify our faith without reservation. Let us have clear, firm convictions about who our God is and what He can do, and let them guide our faith.



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 10:1-18

1 *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.*

2 *For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.*

3 *But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.*

4 *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*

5 *Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:*

6 *In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.*

7 *Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.*

8 *Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;*

9 *Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.*

10 *By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

11 *And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:*

12 *But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;*

13 *From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.*

14 *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

15 *Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before,*

16 *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;*

17 *And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

18 *Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*

The repetition of the principle of the change from the Law Covenant to the New Covenant through the first ten chapters of the epistle was for the benefit of the Jews. That replacement of the old by the new was a difficult idea

for the Jews to cope with, partly because the Law Covenant was complex and so binding in its complexity, whereas the New Covenant is simple. Throughout the book of Hebrews, Paul had dealt with different facets of the change to make all its aspects clear to those who heard him at the time.

Paul's thoroughness should also make this principle clear to those who study the epistle.

In verses 1 to 18 of this chapter Paul continued the discussion from chapter 8.

The "*law*" of verse 1 is the Law Covenant. It had only the shadow or just an outline of the "*good things*" which were founded in the New Covenant. The New Covenant was the "*very image*" (KJV) or "*reality*" (NIV) of God's purpose of establishing a better covenant; that is, one which would enable the remission of sins as indicated in verse 18. From the viewpoint of the days of the Law Covenant the good things were "*to come*" (KJV), that is, future to that first contract, whereas from Paul's viewpoint at the time when he wrote to the Hebrews, the good things were "*already here*" (NIV), that is, already established.

The Law Covenant was only a shadow, insubstantial and ineffective with respect to the remission of sins, not even an image or reflection of the New Covenant. The many sacrifices, including the annual sin offerings, could never, that is, not ever, make the Law Covenant effective because of man's imperfection. But Jesus' sacrifice was perfect because it brought the remission of sins, and thus made the New Covenant effective, that is, complete.

The animal sacrifices, of bulls and of goats combined, could not take away sins (verse 4). If they had been effective, and cleansed the consciences of the Israelites, they would have been no longer needed (verse 2). But since they had to be repeated every year, they only reminded the Israelites that they remained sinners (verse 3). The lives of the animals did not correspond to human life, and the animal blood was not equivalent to human blood.

Chapter 9 showed that the blood of animals could not atone for sin as the blood of Jesus could do. The point is repeated in chapter 10 verse 4, and the same contrast is implied in verse 5 with respect to the bodies of bulls and goats, which were not acceptable to God for atonement, as the perfect body of Jesus was. That point applies to Jesus' physical body, not to "*Christ head and body*", as defined in Ephesians 4:15-16, which has a different meaning and has a spiritual application.

For the perfect sacrifice God prepared a perfect human body for Jesus so that it could be offered, and was offered, as a redeeming price for the lives of all mankind, which had been forfeited by the disobedience of Adam. God had no pleasure in the sacrifices under the Law because they were not adequate for redemption, and they were made under duress, as an obligation to him.

But Jesus' sacrifice was made voluntarily in submission to his Father's will and it gave remission of all sins for all time. God's will, or intention, was the redemption of mankind to be achieved through action, which he planned through his son. Verses such as John 4:34 and the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39-42) show that Jesus came to do his Father's will, and that it was his choice to do so, just as it should be our choice to serve him. In verse 7 there is quoted a part of Psalm 40, verses 6 to 8, showing Jesus' willingness to carry out God's plan for mankind. It was noted that the reference to Psalm 40:6 was from the Septuagint. In a prophetic way Psalm 40 contrasts the disobedience of the Israelites with the obedience of Jesus.

In this epistle to the Hebrews, Paul put forward the same argument about sin and its remission several times in order to make clear the essential message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, there was no excuse for the early believers to misunderstand that message, nor any excuse for us to misunderstand the purpose of the New Testament at this latter end of the gospel age.

In the light of Leviticus 3:16 which refers to "*offering made by fire for a sweet savour*", God's displeasure in burnt offerings, in verse 8 was considered. It was made clear that it was not the odour of burnt flesh that pleased God, but the manner in which the sacrifices were made. God was satisfied when that manner was not perfunctory, but of obedience and worship to him in faith. It was suggested that God did not want to enforce the old Law, but he wanted humility and contrition, as illustrated by the different attitudes shown by the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:10. God considers favourably "*him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit*" (Isaiah 57:15).

Verse 9 of Hebrews 10 shows that it was God's will for Jesus to take away the first and establish the second. The question was asked if the "*first*" and "*second*" referred to the sacrifices. It is generally thought that the "*first*" and "*second*" in this verse refer respectively to the Law Covenant and the New Covenant. But this is an inference because the verse does not specify the covenants, and an NIV footnote points out that the subject of the passage is sacrifices, apart from the mention of the Law in verse 1.

However, the purpose of the sacrifices was to establish the covenants. They were dependent upon the sacrifices, and Hebrews chapter 8 shows that the old Law Covenant was replaced by the New Covenant. The purpose of Jesus' first advent was to establish the New Covenant by replacing the Law Covenant, which had served its purpose and was ready to vanish away (chapter 8 verse 13).

The "*will*" of verse 9 is the same "*will*" of verse 10. It was God's will, or intention to replace the first covenant with the second in order to provide a way of redemption and sanctification for believers.

In verse 11 the priests of the Law Covenant had to stand, that is, officiate without rest while making the repetitive sacrifices for the Israelites. On each occasion that they were made, those sacrifices were not complete and the priestly duties were not finished at each offering, whereas, in verse 12, Jesus made one sacrifice for all, forever. His sacrifice was complete and he was able to rest from that work at the ascension when he "*sat down at the right hand of God*". Thus he was both priest and sacrifice.

There were several thoughts concerning Jesus being seated with God. One thought was that being seated is a position for learning, and that Jesus had to learn what he had to do during the gospel and kingdom ages. Another thought was that Jesus was given a position of honour and authority (Matthew 28:18) when seated at God's right hand. When Jesus "*sat down on the right hand of God*" it was not because he had nothing to do. He took that position at his ascension and will remain there until he comes to establish God's kingdom on earth. Being seated may indicate that there was no more sacrifice to be made, not that he was resting. During the gospel age he is helping his Father select his little flock (Acts 15:14), he is mediating on behalf of believers (1 Timothy 2:5), and he is taking action according to his messages to the churches recorded in the Revelation (Revelation 1:11 to 3:22).

Comment was made about the words "*stand*" in verse 11 and "*sit*" in verse 12, and there was a suggestion that standing indicated a position of action, while sitting indicated a position of rest. The priests of the Law Covenant remained standing because their sacrifices were not finished and further action was required; whereas Jesus sat down because his sacrifice was finished. The Greek words for standing ("*standeth*", verse 11), and sitting ("*sat*", verse 12), are quite different, indicating very different situations, and Strong's concordance gives their prime meanings as rendered in the KJV.

In Acts 7:55-56 Stephen "*saw ... Jesus standing on the right hand of God*". If standing is a position of action this may indicate that Jesus takes a special interest in those who are being persecuted, although in the case of Stephen

it was a position of observation since Jesus did not take any action. In Luke 13:25 those standing at the door and knocking to come in are taking action. In Revelation 3:20, where Jesus stands at the door and knocks, the message to the church at Laodicea is to respond to Jesus' action.

In Luke 13:29 those who are accepted into the kingdom will sit down, or "*be settled*" there. In Mark 14:62 "*sitting on the right hand of power*" has the meaning to 'sit down' or to 'reside with'. In Ephesians 1:20 "*set him at his own right hand*" is to 'be seated at', the same word as in Hebrews 10:12.

Since we do not know the meanings of these words with respect to spirit beings, our understanding of their use may be resolved by the phrase "*at the right hand*" which indicates the importance of the position, that is, one of favour and authority, rather than the stance. Jesus was resurrected to be with God, whether or not standing or sitting, both human terms; neither is important.

It was suggested that Jesus may have influenced the revelation of justification by faith to Luther, and the development of the printing press for the promulgation of God's word. But these and other similar developments such as advances in transportation and in communication, which have also increased the spread of the gospel message, could require an unseen presence of the Lord, although his influence, not his presence would have been sufficient for such developments.

Jesus is also "*expecting* (waiting: Diaglott) *till his enemies be made his footstool*" (verse 13). These words come from Psalm 110:1 where "*the LORD (God) said unto my Lord (Jesus) Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool*". They are also quoted in Acts 2:34 and Matthew 22:44. Then in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 25 and 28, Paul stated that "*he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. ... Then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him*".

It would seem that Jesus' reign on earth will not commence until the church is complete. His sacrifice is finished but his work is not finished. He has to have his enemies made to be his footstool, working with the power and authority from God. He has been given all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), but has not yet exercised the fullness of that power. He is not waiting to receive the power, but is waiting for the appropriate time to use it fully. His enemies have been made subject to him, despite their rampant activity, but during the gospel age he is dealing only with the church, watching over believers who have chosen to accept his rule. When he returns he will exercise all power and authority.

Jesus' enemies are God's enemies and he defined them as "*he that is not with me (but) is against me*" (Matthew 12:30), and they include the evil doings of mankind (Matthew 15:19 and Mark 7:21, 22), other religions and false prophets (Matthew 24:11), false Christs (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22), scoffers (2 Peter 3:3), "*science falsely so called*" (1 Timothy 6:20), plus worldliness because "*friendship of the world is enmity with God*" (James 4:4), and death, the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Death, the state of non-existence, is an enemy in direct conflict to God's intention that angels and men were created to live. The fallen angels were not condemned to die, but they will be judged. Death removes God's creatures from him.

In verse 14, those being made holy are the members of the church. The means of their sanctification was completed with Jesus' sacrifice, which brought his redeeming mission to a conclusion. He did not need to be made righteous, nor freed from sin because he was both righteous and sinless. "*He learned* (the meaning of) *obedience by the things which he suffered*" (Hebrews 5:8) and his experience, culminating with his sacrifice, completed his obedience.

Furthermore, verse 14 shows that Jesus' complete sacrifice sanctifies those who accept the terms of the covenant which it established. They are regarded by God to have been made perfect, that is, set free from sin, and are imputed to be righteous. The Diaglott has "*permanently perfected*". The sacrifice was completed when Jesus died, although a believer's sanctification is a continuing process, requiring faithfulness unto death, a requirement that will continue for each individual until the end of the age.

Verse 15 records that the holy spirit inspired Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Peter 1:20-21) to describe the New Covenant even before it was established, and the prophet was thus a witness, or reminder, to the Hebrews, who were living "*after those days*" (verse 16) of the Law Covenant, that is, when the New Covenant replaced the old covenant (verse 9). The timing may refer to Pentecost when the holy spirit was given to the apostles, which agrees with "*those days*" being the days of the Law Covenant.

However, since the context shows that the New Covenant, written in the hearts and minds of believers, was established by Jesus' sacrifice which brought the remission of sins, and therefore no further sacrifice was needed (verse 18), the prophecy had been fulfilled when Paul wrote the epistle, and therefore the timing does not apply only to the end of the gospel age.



NEWS

Autumn Conference

It was a great blessing to be able to meet in person again for our 46th autumn conference at the Foothills Conference Centre in Mooroolbark between Friday 14th and Sunday 16th April 2023. Our theme was “Keeping the Faith”, and the program included talks, devotions, Bible studies and a great deal of joyful fellowship. We enjoyed the company of visitors from South Australia, New South Wales, the ACT and India, as well as regional Victoria.

We have booked the Conference Centre for Thursday 4th to Saturday 6th April 2024, so please reserve these dates in your diaries and consider how you may be able to contribute to the program.

Sunday Meetings

We are continuing our face-to-face meetings on Sunday mornings, as well as offering a Zoom connection for those unable to attend in person. We try to intersperse weekly Bible studies with talks and other presentations every few weeks. All interested persons are welcome, so please contact info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au for details, or the meeting link if you would like to join us.



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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