

Grace & Truth

Youth

Number 6

A pull-out supplement for young people

What do you boast in?

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Do you exaggerate stories to make your own part stand out, or to emphasize the role you played in an event, in order to stir up your hearers' admiration of you? Or do you relate things in such a way that your hearers will give you the praise that really belongs to someone else?

I guess we have all done this at some stage - it is part of human nature to boast and to exalt itself. We love people to think well of us or to admire our achievements; to say, 'what a wonderful person', or 'what amazing accomplishments'.

Moses was not ignorant of this fact. He took great pains to remind the people of Israel that God's goodness to them was not because they deserved it, and the acquirement of the promised land was not as a reward for their worthiness or the prize for their great achievements. In fact, Moses pointed out that their many sins, and the occasions on which they tested God and almost lost their lives, made the gift of the Promised Land all the more amazing. Read Deuteronomy 9 before continuing.

In Deuteronomy 9:6 we read: "Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people."

The gift of God to His people

God had promised to give to the people of Israel the land of Canaan. It was a good and fertile land described as a land flowing with milk and honey. Furthermore, God had chosen this people before the world was created and revealed His choice many years before Moses, when He made a covenant with Abraham, to bless him and his descendants.

All through the time of their captivity in Egypt God had been fulfilling His promise to multiply them: they had numbered seventy people when they entered Egypt; over 600,000 departed with Moses at the Exodus 430 years later!

God was now about to give them the land He had promised them: a land which would provide ample space for them to expand numerically; a land which would provide excellent pasture and cultivation for their sustenance; a land which would provide rest and safety after their years of slavery and wandering.

It was a good land which God was giving to them.

If you are a Christian then God has promised to give you a good gift; it is for all those who believe and trust in Him; for those whom He chose before the foundation of the world to be His people.

This promise is partially fulfilled when He takes the new believer out of his 'Egypt' - slavery to sin; when God frees the Christian from the power of sin in his life and assures him of His forgiveness. But it will be brought to perfect fulfilment at the second coming of Christ, when the promise of an eternal inheritance will become reality for the believer: a place in the new heavens and new earth where complete happiness, holiness and contentment exist untainted by sin.

The response of the people to God

Moses reminded the people of Israel, in no uncertain terms, that they had been rebellious against the Lord since he first knew them. Despite the Lord's promises the people had constantly departed from His ways, ignored His direction and tested His patience.

Moses particularly reminded them of their impatience and rebellion when he was meeting with God on Mount Sinai: their rebellion had been extreme, having made an image to worship just forty days after God had spoken the Ten Commandments directly to them. They had kindled the anger of God and would have perished but for Moses' intercession. Moses contrasted their impatience with God's patience, their unfaithfulness with God's faithfulness.

The people had responded with rebellion despite God's goodness to them.

If you are a Christian, how have you responded to all that God has done for you? Do you trust in God, or do you do things your own way - too impatient to wait on the Lord? We are often not much different from the people of Israel. We frown upon them for the speed at which they departed from God, even when He had shown exceptional

*All the sin of
heathendom, all
the sin of
Christendom, is
but the outgrowth
of one root - God
dethroned, self
enthroned in the
heart of man.*

Andrew Murray

kindness. But what of ourselves? Even if our lives are not outwardly at variance with the ways of God, what of our hearts? And when we meet with spiritual 'success' (e.g. overcoming temptation), how often do we congratulate ourselves rather than giving glory to God?

We are what we are, not because of our righteousness, for we are often, like the people of Israel, a stiff-necked people.

God's faithfulness to His covenant

The people of Israel were on the verge of entering the Promised Land and taking possession of it, and Moses would have them remember that it was a gift from God. It was not a reward for their righteousness, for they were a rebellious people. It was not given to them because they were better than the other nations round about, for Israel were also wicked despite the fact that they had received greater benefits. It was all because of God's covenant with them: He was determined to fulfill what He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and He would be glorified among the nations for His power and patience.

God was giving this good land to His people because of *His* faithfulness, not theirs.

God has covenanted to give to those who trust in Christ eternal life, despite their sin. Many 'good' people will experience eternal damnation while many 'bad' people will receive eternal life because the best deeds of man do not reach God's standards while the worst deeds of man can be dealt with by Jesus Christ. Christ, like Moses, intercedes on behalf of His people - pleading the merits of His death and the covenant of His blood.

Conclusion

God's goodness to us is completely undeserved. As Paul wrote to Titus (3:5): "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us..."

How are we responding to that mercy and the undeserved gift of eternal life? We ought to humble ourselves every day of our lives, to serve God faithfully and to worship Him continually - in all that we do.

Let us not provoke the Lord to anger or grieve His Spirit by boasting in our own goodness or trusting in our own wisdom. Let us rather strive after godliness and live for His glory - not because we earn our salvation by doing so, but because it is the only right response to all that God has done for us.

We are completely in debt to God and to His covenant of grace. We have no righteousness of our own to boast in, and this knowledge should result in humble thanks and dedicated service.

Easter Musings

I was once driving on the outskirts of a town in England when I noticed a crowd of people in a field some little distance from the road. It seemed strange that there should be so many grouped together for no obvious reason. However, as I drove closer I realised I had been mistaken – it was not people I could see, but gravestones, and what I had thought was colourful clothing turned out to be wreaths of flowers.

Yet I was not entirely wrong in my first observation. For these headstones marked the individual burial places of many people – real people who had all now departed this life. Though remembered in the hearts of loved-ones, there were nothing more than brief inscriptions in cold marble to describe to the curious onlooker what once were living people.

One day a small pillar of stone will probably mark my own final resting place. Perhaps the inscription will tell of some great achievement yet to be made at the time of writing this, but that is unlikely. However, I hope that it will have something of importance to say to any passing reader. Perhaps something like this:

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF
ONE WHO HAS ESCAPED THE
POWER OF DEATH AND NOW LIVES,
ANOTHER HAVING DIED IN HIS PLACE**

Certainly a strange epitaph – one guaranteed to raise an incredulous eyebrow and prompt some interesting questions: Is there really a body under this stone? Whose body? How is it possible that someone can die in the place of another?

The observance of life has taught most of us at least one thing: that we are not immortal. Every one of us will die. The suggestion that someone else could be a substitute for us in death seems an irrational dream. We are familiar enough with the idea of substitution in sport – a fresh, fit player goes onto the field in the place of a tired or injured team-mate – but how can this concept be transferred to the issue of life and death?

Crazy though it may seem, I am nevertheless quite convinced that someone has already become my substitute in death: I will not die! Yet I am also convinced that, unless the world comes to an end sooner, one day my body will lie buried in a grave. How can these two apparently contradictory convictions be reconciled? Quite simply: the death for which I have a substitute is what the Bible calls the 'second death'.

It is certain that everyone will die physically. But after death there will be a judgement. Every individual will stand before God, and on the basis of how they have lived their lives they will be given eternal life or unending death. Every one of us deserves the latter; for all have sinned, and the result of sin is death. But my Substitute has promised to take my place on that day of judgement. In this way I will be freed from the death I deserve for my sin, and will receive eternal life on the basis of my Substitute's perfect life. Now that is a substitution worth calling for!

All who want to ensure that they have a substitute in death must call for that substitution now, during life. To wait may mean being too late. And the only one who is able to act as a substitute for sinners is Jesus of Nazareth, because He alone, of all who have walked this earth, was perfect and therefore undeserving of death Himself. Jesus did not die for His own sins on the cross, He died for the sins of His people thereby freeing them from condemnation. You can read more about Jesus' substitution for sinners on page 22 of this issue of the magazine.

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