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REFORMED
THOUGHT
FOR
CHRISTIAN
LIVING

Today's Quick Word 1 Chronicles 23:31b-32

By Bruce Christian

1 CHRONICLES 23:31B-32 - *[The Levites] were to serve before the LORD regularly in the proper number and in the way prescribed for them. And so the Levites carried out their responsibilities for the Tent of Meeting, for the Holy Place and, under their brothers the descendants of Aaron, for the service of the temple of the LORD.*

It is interesting to reflect on these verses in the light of what we read in the Gospels. The 'Priests and Levites' remained meticulously faithful 'regularly in the proper number and in the way prescribed for them' for over twelve centuries until the coming of Jesus, but by and large they missed the whole point of what the true and essential spiritual function was! They should have been among the first to recognise in Jesus, as several of them later did (Acts 6:7), the Messiah figure promised throughout their Scriptures. Jesus' concern for the poor and the outcasts, his teaching about, and demonstration of, the love and grace of God, and his desire and power to forgive sins, should have awakened in their consciences the whole point of the sacrificial system they administered so diligently and carefully.

But instead, they were so busy keeping all the rules and regulations set out in the Torah, the Mosaic Law, that they had no understanding or appreciation of the unmerited GRACE of

GOD on which these things were founded. Jesus exposed their failure so beautifully in his story about the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:25-37) which featured a 'priest' and a 'Levite' 'passing by on the other side' instead of coming to the aid of a traveller in distress.

Hopefully, we learn from all this how careful we need to be not to become so caught up with the 'rules' of our 'religious observance' that we miss the point made by the Prophet Micah: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8). We need to take to heart Jesus' warning: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." (Matthew 23:23-24). Jesus referred to the offenders as 'hypocrites' - 'actors' who wear an outward 'mask' of pretending to be something they are not, but have a heart that is far from being the 'new heart' that he came to bestow on all those who turn to him in repentance-and-faith.

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Today's Quick Word 2 Peter 2:5, 9

By Bruce Christian

2 PETER 2:5, 9 - *If [God] did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ... if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

For those who would like to believe that the 'God' of the NT, a God of 'Love', is of a different character from the 'God' of the OT, a God of 'wrath/judgement', the Apostle Peter's statement is an enigma. Such a view of God is quite illogical and untenable, especially when there are so many OT verses that point to God's unchangeable grace/mercy/love, and so many NT verses, like today's, that point to his consistent divine wrath against sin and his Judgement upon all who refuse his offer of salvation to ALL who take hold of the Saviour in repentance-and-faith.

After all, the whole message of the OT, from the very beginning, is God's promising of a Saviour who would be wounded in crushing Satan's head (Genesis 3:15), and who would die in our place, and then conquer death for us, so that we might go free (Isaiah 53:4-12, etc, etc). Peter reminds us that the world-wide universal Flood in the time of Noah was a demonstration of God's inevitable righteous anger against the sin/rebellion that has possessed Man's heart since Adam, and of his love that

rescues us from it because Jesus bore it on the cross so we don't have to - as he had said in an earlier letter: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24).

The whole message of the NT, summed up in the simple statement, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that WHOEVER believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16), would be meaningless if it were not for the doctrines of 'Eternal Judgement' and 'Substitutionary Atonement'. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law [ie if there was ANY OTHER way of getting right with God], CHRIST DIED FOR NOTHING!" (Galatians 2:21).

"And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? Died he for me, who caused his pain, for me, who him to death pursued? Amazing love, how can it be, that thou, my God, should die for me? No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him, is mine - alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine! Bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the Crown through Christ my own." (Charles Wesley).

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Today's Quick Word Micah 6:8

By Bruce Christian

MICAH 6:8 - *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

Herein lies the secret and the essence of successful and contented godly living in a world that is lost, bewildered and frustrated. In this world, we all live with many pressures and tensions; we are called on to make decisions, and whatever path we choose there will remain ethical dilemmas leaving some of the difficulties unresolved - and, harder still, leaving ourselves open to sometimes harsh criticism from those who might have a DIFFERENT opinion, and who come to a different conclusion about the 'right' way to deal with a problem.

Occasionally, we are able to find a win-win solution; but not always. Through the prophet Micah, God gives us a formula to help us with such predicaments: "He has showed you, O man, what is GOOD." We must keep two things in balance: 'to act justly'; and 'to love mercy'.

Each of these needs to be kept in mind to modify our attitudes and actions to avoid making two equally harmful errors. Firstly, if we only 'act justly' we will become harsh and judgemental, falling into the trap that brought the Pharisees under Jesus' condemnation: spiritual pride and self-righteousness. Secondly if, on the other hand, we only 'love mercy' we will

fail to acknowledge and uphold and reflect the holiness and righteousness that are essential to God's character.

And how do we manage this delicate balancing act? By 'WALK[ING] HUMBLY with our God', letting his Word direct our steps daily, constantly correcting us when we drift to one side or the other. We also NEED EACH OTHER in this, speaking out for the 'mercy' option when someone is being too hard, or speaking out for the 'justice' option if someone is being too soft.

This is where the 'humbly' comes in. The necessary corollary of 'speaking out' is LISTENING, otherwise it doesn't work! Are we prepared to let God correct our biases through the ministry of fellow-believers to us? Are we prepared to admit when we are erring on the side of over-discipline - or of too much mercy? A helpful guide is to look at the life of Jesus in the gospels. A good example of this is his dealing with the Samaritan woman in John 4. He exposed the seriousness of her sin so that she knew she stood condemned before him, but he did it in a way that was pastorally sensitive, freely offering her forgiveness and life - 'living water' which she could drink and be satisfied.

Walking humbly with our God protects us from dealing with each other with a CRITICAL SPIRIT. But this will involve sacrifice and dying to self. After all, the ultimate way in which God HIMSELF combined justice and mercy was on the CROSS!