

Articles by Neil Dougal

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Balanced

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It is with affection and appreciation that we examine the life of our blessed Lord, a life well balanced with every possible grace. In writing the Book of the Acts Luke said, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). In this statement he calls attention to two important points, Christ's walk and Christ's talk. Before the Lord Jesus talked to men, He walked before them.

His Balanced Life

The language of Solomon in the Song of Songs (5:15) fittingly expresses the solitary grandeur of Christ's walk, "His bearing is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars" (J.N.D.). It was His walk that fascinated and attracted Peter and Andrew (Matt. 4:18); influenced Matthew (Matt. 9:9); convinced John of His moral suitability to be the Lamb of God's providing (John 1:29); and revealed His supreme attractiveness to those who desired to be His disciples (John 1:36). He was God's perfect Man, the second Man, the Lord from Heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). God's perfect Man was such "who never once walked in the counsel of the ungodly" (this is the force of the Hebrew in Psalm 1:1).

Joseph's coat of many colours has its antetype in Christ, as in it so in Him, every feature was distinct, yet, not one predominated the others. In Christ every moral

excellency was blended in majesty and glory, so exquisitely blended that He is without rival or compeer.

It should be observed that this perfect Man who displayed a balanced life, definitely believed in a balanced diet.

His Balanced Ministry

“The law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). He never employed grace to the detriment of truth; He never maintained truth with the absence of grace. When He offered the woman of Samaria a drink from the eternal fountain, which offer was an act of grace, He charged her, “Go call thy husband,” and that was an application of the truth (John 4:14-16). When the Pharisees brought into His presence a poor woman caught in the act of adultery, in grace He said to her, “Neither do I condemn thee,” but with truth He challenged her, “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

These wonderful features in the life of the Lord Jesus make one feel conscious of how far short he comes in both his walk and his talk. The Apostle Peter tells us that the Lord Jesus left us an example that we should follow His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). Let us endeavour to obey the many exhortations from the New Testament. “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1). “Walk in love” (Eph. 5:2). “Walk circumspectly” (Eph. 5:15). “Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col. 1:10).

As one has said, the Lord has given us a balanced diet according to 1 Corinthians 14:3: edifying ministry to build us up, exhortative ministry to stir us up, and comforting ministry to bind us up.

The gift of the teacher will be in marked evidence as he administers necessary and suitable ministry to meet the current need. Very definitely, we are unbalanced in this particular field today. There is little real edifying and comforting ministry given to the Lord's people, but there is an excessive amount of exhortative preaching. To give exhortative ministry is a serious matter which today some fail to realize. There are certain moral demands upon the person who engages in this particular type of work. First, there must be a humble and prayerful exercise, "For let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Secondly, there must be great wisdom and love toward those for whom the word of exhortation is meant. A cold, callous, or bitter attitude will produce only adverse results. Our blessed Lord Jesus always balanced truth with grace.

Let us notice the attitude of the Apostle Paul: To the carnal Corinthians he wrote, "Now I Paul beseech you by the gentleness and meekness of Christ ..." (2 Cor. 10:1). To the legal Galatians he said, "I have confidence in you through the Lord" (Gal. 5:10). And to the party-spirited Philippians he gave the admonishment, "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2). One can sense the affection and sincerity with which he wrote, the grace and the truth with which he balanced his language.

May the Lord give grace in these closing days in order that we mould our behaviour and ministry according to the high standard set before Timothy, "Be a model of the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12 J.N.D.).

Bought With a Price

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“I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariot” (S of S. 1:9).

A careful analysis of the above Scripture reveals our individual responsibility toward a collective body. No doubt, Solomon penned these words as he recalled his purchase from Egypt’s king, “An horse for 150 shekels of silver” (2 Chron. 1:16-17). The horses that were once the possession of Pharaoh had become the favoured objects of Israel’s greatest king; he had paid the price.

Man by nature and by practice is radically corrupted and irretrievably doomed; yet, God in His sovereign mercy and grace has paid the redemption price, “Not with corruptible things such as silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The sinner once opprobriously held by Satan for the fulfilment of his nefarious plans, through precious blood becomes the purchased possession of the heavenly Solomon Who is over all, blessed forever.

Potentates and men of authority in days of old took special delight in possessing horses that were swift and beautiful. We who were once swift to shed blood should, in our new environment, be swift to do the service of the King of Kings Who loved us even unto death. In order to be acceptable in God’s presence, let us adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, and be conformed more to the image of Christ Who is altogether lovely, the Chiefest among ten thousands.

A company of well trained horses exhibit the attractive characteristics of precision and unity. As they go along, their hoofs produce a steady beat. In Nehemiah's day the people were in step, for all gathered themselves as one man into the street to hear the Word of God (Neh. 8:1). In Acts chapter 1:14, we have a similar display of unity, the people gathered themselves with one accord in prayer and supplication, and in Acts chapter 4:24, they praised God with one accord. Such unity is not without fruit, "For the multitude that believed were of one heart, and of one soul" (V. 32).

May we then give joy to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, by manifesting in our practical lives that principle of godliness, UNITY.

"God will use empty and clean vessels, so let us empty ourselves of self and allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse us, then obey the command "Be filled with the Spirit" and we will be useful in God's holy service.

Christian Service

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It is imperative that every child of God should know the fundamental principles of Christian service. One could mention many portions of the Word of God to show these principles of service, but for practical purposes and an illustration of highest magnitude we shall consider the prophet in 1 Kings 18. In this passage we are introduced to Elijah the Tishbite, who, while engaged in the work of the Most High, manifested in a very spectacular manner both spiritual power and humility. Let us consider these spiritual qualifications as they are seen in the prophet.

The Power of Elijah:

Retrogression like a canker had set in throughout all Israel. The king, Ahab, had repudiated the commandments of the Lord (v. 18). He had also adopted and was perpetrating the perfidious doctrine of Baal. Elijah saw the nation halting between two opinions (v. 21), so, at the risk of his own life, he called the king, the people, and the prophets of Baal, to a contest on Mount Carmel, in order that once and for all it might be fully demonstrated "The Lord He is God" (V. 39).

The contest was staged and the prophets of Baal were definitely and shamefully defeated. This resulted in a tremendous humiliation of the king in the eyes of Israel. Elijah the man of power won the day for his God, and was the means of turning this indecisive people from a

wavering policy to a fixed purpose, for they unitedly and triumphantly acclaimed "The Lord, He is God" (v. 39).

The Humility of Elijah:

Without a doubt the defeat and the destruction of the prophets of Baal caused the people to recognize Elijah as a man of power. They also saw the shame and the confusion of their idolatrous king, and in their minds they naturally would question his lordship and authority. Elijah, with high hopes that the king would foresake his idols and his wickedness, and honour the only true God, immediately sought to restore governmental power into the hands of Ahab, and to place him again in the position of absolute monarch. This he endeavoured to accomplish by doing the humble and menial act of running as a courier before the king from Mount Carmel to the entrance of Jezreel.

In the East this was an ancient custom and it was invariably done by a man of inferior station. He was employed in this capacity to announce the approach of the royal chariot. When we consider the age, character, and office of Elijah, it would appear to be an extraordinary and almost ludicrous undertaking. Nevertheless, Elijah, the man of power, became the man of humility so that the king might regain authority over his people.

For approximately 12 miles this aged veteran with his loins girded ran before the king. What an effect this must have had upon Israel! Under ordinary circumstances this would have been impossible owing to Elijah's years, but he was strengthened for the occasion like every servant of Jehovah because the hand of the Lord was upon him.

Surely this narrative, illustrates that divine service demands men and women of power and of humility who are willing to jeopardize their lives in order that godliness and liberty prevail.

The Preacher

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In Isaiah 55:8, God says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” This is clearly endorsed in the compilation of Holy Scripture. In Ecclesiastes 1:12, Solomon, guided by the Holy Spirit, said, “I, the preacher, was king in Jerusalem.” In the minds of men, a king is greater than a preacher in Jerusalem. But in the mind of our Great God, the preacher has a paramount place in His divine program, superior to that of a king.

How fitting to find a preacher with kingly power, royal prerogatives and regal dignity! There appeared such a man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the Prince of Preachers (Mt. 4:17; 9:35), and Prince of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5).

The Preacher — His Ordination.

His ordination is not of men, but of God. In the religious systems of men, there are many ordained in ceremonial splendour and ritual, appealing to the carnal instinct, and yet, they are estranged and alienated from God; they are still in nature’s darkness. God never intended a man to preach His Word who was not saved by His sovereign grace and who has not the moral requirement for such distinguished service. This is corroborated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:5-7, “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be

testified in due time, whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle.”

The Preacher — His Ministry of Edification (Eccl. 12:9).

This verse indicates that the first essential requisite of a preacher is wisdom. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 10:16, “Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” Wisdom is available from an inexhaustible source, “In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), and He is willing to impart the same to all who approach Him in faith, and whose deportment and demeanour meet with His approval (James 1:5-8). The injunction of a wise preacher is most appropriate here for all God’s people, “Be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col. 1:9-10). In Ecclesiastes 12:9, the preacher gave good heed and sought out and set in order many proverbs. It is demanded therefore of all God’s people and particularly preachers, “Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine, continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16 and 2 Tim. 2:15).

The Preacher — His Ministry of Exhortation (Eccl. 12:10).

According to 1st Corinthians 14:3, ministry is of threefold character; edification, exhortation, and comfort. Edification and comfort ministry is most attractive, but exhortation is not so popular amongst God’s people. Yet, this type of ministry is included in

that which is profitable, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In the Book of Ezekiel, chapter 33, God commends the faithful watchman who blows the trumpet and warns the people of God, but He is strong in His denunciation of those who do not warn God’s people. “Suffer the word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22).

The Preacher and His Congregation.

In the Book of Nehemiah, chapter 8, we have one of the most productive and prodigious convocations recorded in the Word of God. The conduct of the congregation, the respect for the preacher, and the response to God’s word are a pattern and a challenge to any gathering of God’s people today. In verse 1 the congregation was complete, united and searching for the Word of the living God. As we scrutinize verse 3, we observe there was no restlessness or agitation at the prolonged meeting, but their appetite was insatiable as they were attentive to the word spoken by the preacher. Verse 4 indicates they were an active congregation constructing a pulpit of wood for Ezra, and an analysis of verses 5 and 6 reveals they were reverent in their approach to the Word of God and worshipful at the mention of the name of the Lord, the great God. The dignity of Ezra and the Levites, the persuasive and distinct reading of God’s Word was memorable and most productive as the congregation realized the sense of the ministry and understood the things that were read.

It is inevitable that we must lament the conditions that prevail today in contradistinction to the congregation in

the days of Ezra the scribe. Lethargy and apathy seem to characterize the attendance at our meetings.