

Getting the Picture

by Hendrik Joubert

Do you enjoy assembling jigsaw puzzles? Consider for a moment how this process progresses from a box full of little pieces into a clear and beautiful picture some choose to frame. Each little part contains important information which adds to the overall picture. I want to suggest that, except for one major difference, the Bible works in the same way. It is a box of pieces which, if properly assembled, reveals the picture of the servant God wants each of us to be. James describes the gospel as the **perfect law of liberty**, and compares it to a mirror into which sinners must look in order to see ourselves as God sees us. From this we may learn what we ought to do in order to complete the picture and be blessed: **But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:25)**

As is the case with the jigsaw puzzle, there are some key pieces which will help us get started in the right direction. The corners and edges often are the first to be assembled. In addition one has a picture to help with the process; however here is where the Bible differs. We need to clear our minds of our own preconceived ideas so that we will be able to see the picture God develops through the Scriptures. One of the corner pieces of this picture is the principle that as sinners, we do not decide on what we should look like: **O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)** Many will ignore this principle with dire consequences: **There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)**

Some pieces may not seem important to us. We may even consider them unnecessary; however we must demonstrate our faith in God by using every piece. Every object in the picture is incomplete unless all its pieces have been added. In the same way our understanding of every subject discussed in the Bible is incomplete unless we used every piece dealing with that subject. Many people will form a picture in their mind based on one, or two passages. This result in a rejection of what the Bible says in other places concerning the same issue.

Take the concept of salvation. Many openly proclaim "**John 3:16 says it all!**" without considering the words God gave through **James (2:14-26)** on the subject of what it means to *believe in* Jesus. This view often amounts to nothing more than a recognition, or admission of the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God in the same way that the devils recognize the existence of God. (**James 2:19**)

In **Romans 10:9** we learn that a sinner has to *confess* Jesus with the mouth, openly expressing that faith in Jesus. And in **Acts 2:38** we have *repentance* as well as *baptism* added to the picture on how one is to be saved. In the apostle Paul's conversion we find a demonstration of the complete picture. He met Jesus and recognized Him as Lord. (**Acts 9:5**) When he asked what Jesus wanted him to do, he would be told by another. (**Acts 9:6-12**)

He immediately changes his ways (repents) and demonstrates this by *praying* and *fasting* for *three days and three nights*. (**Acts 9:9**) The words of Ananias do not fit our picture. After personally meeting the Lord, and fasting and praying, he exhorts Paul to ***call upon the Name of the Lord (Romans 10:13)*** by being baptized so that his sins may be ***washed away*** and be saved. (**Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Hebrews 10:22; Mark 16:16**) In this way the picture develops from the broad principle of *believing* in Jesus to the finer details explaining what sinners should do in order to *express* faith in Jesus, and therefore what He said in person. Instead many work at getting rid of some of the pieces, creating an incomplete picture.

Notice how the pieces idea is apparent in the revelation of the gospel as described in **1Corinthians 13. *For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.*** (**1Corinthians 13 9-10**) Through the gifts of the Spirit God revealed and confirmed the New Covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus. (**Hebrews 2:1-4;**

Although the gifts of the Spirit were crucial for the revelation and confirmation of the gospel, these gifts did not guarantee salvation for those who exercised them. These gifts were only temporary, until the revelation was complete. The Corinthians, like many today, lost sight of what came through the gifts as they fixated on the fact that they could do these amazing things, such as speak a language they never studied – in order to spread the gospel. (**Acts 2:6-12; 1Corinthians 14:22**) These gifts were not a sign of spiritual maturity, as Paul writes: ***And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.*** (**1 Corinthians 3:1**) And in chapters 12 through 14 of this first letter Paul has to explain to them the purpose for these gifts, although they have been practicing them already. After these gifts have stopped faith, hope and love would continue. Even after the Lord returns and faith becomes knowledge and hope is either fulfilled or turns into despair, love will continue throughout eternity.