

The Rear View Mirror

As a newly-converted Christian or a longstanding member of a Christian fellowship, is your focus on the future or do you linger in the past?

When we drive a vehicle we have to check the rear view mirror from time to time, especially if we are changing lanes, for our safety.

Life is a journey and our past experiences also deserve a good look now and then.

Only as an educational experience, however.

Our major focus must be straight ahead, on where we are going.

Casting long admiring glances in the rear view mirror of life is dangerous to our journey of spiritual growth.

There are very good reasons for this.

Our memories can play tricks on us into believing that our past, without the knowledge and influence of our Creator God, was so much easier, exciting or even more thrilling than it is now.

We will be tempted to follow this delusion and to return to those pleasurable habits and thoughts we have given up for this new way of life.

To think that our past life was better than the present one, is typically human, and we can begin to yearn for what we remember to be the “*good old days*.”

Most likely they were **not** as wonderful as we now remember, for our mind will block off the majority of the unpleasant memories.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 [NIV] “*Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions.*”

Wise King Solomon realised that it was not a good policy to look back on life.

Learning from the past –

What then is the correct balance between our focus on the future and the memories of what we have already experienced?

The Christian Bible, our Handbook For Life, tells us that we should use the past to assist our living the present.

This past view should also include the experiences of other human beings.

We all should learn from other people’s errors, so we don’t then have to experience the consequences ourselves.

The lessons of history are vital if we are to avoid being condemned to repeat its mistakes.

This wisdom certainly applies to our Christian lives.

Romans 15:4 [NIV] *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*

The apostle Paul tells us that the spiritual errors made by ancient Israel were for us to learn from.

1 Corinthians 10:11-13 [NIV] *“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*

One fault that characterised the Israelites, was their habit of looking back with longing, this was especially true of them in times of national difficulty.

Exodus 16:1-3 [NIV] *“The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”*

This was **not** the only time that the Israelites looked back with longing, on their journey towards the Promised Land.

Numbers 11:4-6 [NIV] *“The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost, also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”*

This memory of life in Egypt, was very selective.

Exodus 1:11, 14; Exodus 2:23 [NIV] *“So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.” ... “They made their lives bitter with hard labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labour the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.” ... “During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.”*

Life in Egypt was very harsh.

Unless we are aware of this “*rose-tinted*” view of the past, that our minds generate, the past will become “*a wolf in sheep’s clothing*,” alluring us into false thinking and actions.

Luke 9:62 [NIV] *“Jesus replied, “No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Once we have been convicted of God’s truth and begin to understand the real purpose for life, we should no longer wish to return to the limited human pleasures of our past life.

2 Peter 2:20-22 [NIV] *“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”*

These are not pretty pictures!

Yet this is how the Creator God views our lives if we turn our back on Him and the wonderful future He is planning for us as His created children.

Looking back at Sodom –

When we read the recorded account of what was happening in the Sodomite culture it in many ways reflects part of present-day society. An evil that corrupts and destroys everything around it and God will **not** tolerate it for ever.

2 Peter 2:4-10 [NIV] *“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he 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 he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard), 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. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings;”*

Lot was fighting a losing battle against all this evil corruption inspite of his sincerity.

Christians find themselves in a similar losing battle today, but notice that not all of Lot’s family were behind him in this witness against evil.

Genesis 19:17 [NIV] *“As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”*

The angels who led Lot, his wife and daughters to safety, warned them **not** to look back at their old life in Sodom.

Genesis 19:26 [NIV] *“But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.”*

Lot’s wife disobeyed and looked back and became a preserved example for us to avoid doing the same.

Luke 17:28-35 [NIV] *“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no-one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no-one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”*

In the context of the return of Jesus Christ, this time as Lord and Judge, we are warned **not** to look back on this world but forward to the new world the returning Jesus Christ will create on this planet.

This act of Lot’s wife was more than mere curiosity, but longing for the life found in Sodom.

Ezekiel 16:49 [NIV] *“Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.”*

Sodom’s inhabitants were full of pride, good food and idleness.

Genesis 13:10 [NIV] *“Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, towards Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)”*

The whole of this area was an agricultural utopia.

This was the life that Lot’s wife was looking back at, and **not** wanting to give up.

Giving up the past –

Luke 14:25-26 [NIV] *“Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”*

Christ’s calling demands that we forsake our past ways once and for all.

The true Christian must continue to give up anything in life that comes between them and their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Matthew 19:16-22 [NIV] *“Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man enquired. Jesus replied, “‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’” “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”*

In spite of this young man’s personal effort to please God by keeping the Ten Commandments, he could **not** visualise a future without the riches he had enjoyed in the past.

The object of this rich man’s worship was his riches **not** a future following Jesus Christ.

Matthew 13:18-23 [NIV] *“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”*

Jesus Christ’s explanation of the parable of the sower, highlights the things that are common in human society that we are so reluctant to give up.

1 John 2:15-17 [NIV] *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever.”*

A summary of what this society has to offer that many find too difficult to give up for a life with Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:7-9 [NIV] *“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ*

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

Paul is an example of one who gave up a lot in this society to serve Jesus Christ, his Master.

As every runner in a race knows, if they look back they could lose their pace and even have a damaging fall.

Hebrews 11:24-27 [NIV] *“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.”*

Moses gave up the wealth and prestige of Egypt fixing his eyes on the future Saviour of all humanity, Jesus Christ.

The nation of Israel whom God brought out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, failed to follow his example.

Exodus 14:8-12 [NIV] *“The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. The Egyptians, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops, pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”*

The result of the Israelites looking back after leaving Egypt was panic, and a deluded vision of their previous life in Egypt.

What they were symbolically saying was *“let us go back to a life of sin.”*

God’s command to Israel was very clear.

Exodus 14:13-15 [NIV] *“Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.”*

Stop looking back and go forward relying on God to empower you in your new life, never looking back with longing.

Philippians 3:10-16 [NIV] *“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.”*

Paul expressed this principle well in his personal life.