

A walk with Mr O (48)

Duty : The Forgotten word that changes everything

Mr O, I've been reading Matthew 6:33, where Jesus tells us to seek God's kingdom and righteousness, and then promises that if we do, 'all these things shall be added' to us. But I don't really know what it means.

'Kingdom' can be better translated as 'kingship' or 'rule' Every day we are to focus on living under God's rule. Doing what is right is to be the biggest thing on our mind. In other words, we are to do our duty. If we do, the Lord will take care of all are needs.

Duty? That's a bit of an old-fashioned word! I heard it when I was a child, but it's not something I ever think about today.

Yes, and that's the reason, I believe, that our churches and our country are in such a mess .

So, Mr O, what exactly is duty? How would you define it?

In life there are some things we just have to do – not because we like doing them, not because they are pleasant or rewarding, but simple only because they are right. We do them because we ought to. They are our duty.

Can you give me an example?

The obvious one, which springs to mind, is what Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.' Children have a duty to obey their parents, Full stop. Period. The Lord is kind and he promises to bless such obedience. But even if he didn't, that duty would remain. Why? Because it is right.

You can't have duty, then, unless there is some unchanging standard by which you measure right and wrong.

Exactly. A sense of 'ought' and 'ought in every person. We call it conscience. Conscience exists because we are made in the image of God. But it is not conscience that decides what is right or wrong. Only the Word of God does that. Whatever may be our role or position in life, the Scriptures tell each one of us what duty God requires of us.

So, we all need to know the whole Bible, don't we? But isn't there some simple summary of duty that we can easily remember and carry around with us?

I think you know the answer to that question! In Matthew 22:34-40 Jesus tells us that everyone's duty, in essence, is twofold: we are to love the Lord with the whole of our being, and we are to love everyone else exactly as we love ourselves, Each one of us has to work out what that means in practice in our own life and situation.

But we don't love like that, do we? None of us do. And only the gospel tells us how we can be forgiven and changed. Jesus is the only human who has ever done his duty, and he was punished because we have not done ours. But seeing that he has done that for us, why do saved people have to keep on doing their duty now?

Because right is still right, and wrong is still wrong. The fact that we are saved by the Lord Jesus [Christ doesn't alter that. Surely no one believes that it is all right for Christians to do wrong, and not to be bothered about doing right!

So, the Christian life is a life of duty?

Yes, it is, but there are very few churches that now teach that. We are to wake up every morning determined to do our duty – to God, to our spouse, to our parents, to our children, to our church, to our employer, to our society, to our friends, to our world and to ourselves. We are to be people of integrity – and integrity is a commandment duty.

But what about non-Christians? What is their duty?

Their duty is exactly the same as ours. The difference is that they have not yet repented and believed in the gospel. This is something that God commands them to do; To remain unrepentant and unbelieving is direct disobedience to the Word of God. It is rebellion. It is also to rob yourself of eternal life.
