

Thinking Things Through



PUTTING DIESEL INTO A FERRARI

As I write this the football World Cup is in full swing and, in the finest traditions of the competition, England have again been sent packing by their arch-rivals, the Germans. Once again, they will be home before the postcards.

One of the England squad players, the Tottenham Hotspur defender Ledley King didn't actually get to play but still had to be available in case the team manager needed him. Now, Ledley is interesting for all sorts of reasons, not least because he is the only Premiership player who never has to train using a football, given the parlous state of his knees. The only time he gets to kick a ball is when he's actually playing for Tottenham. If you look at Ledley's entry in Wikipedia you will find that he got himself into a spot of bother last year outside a nightclub after having had a few drinks. And then he got tangled up with the police. This is the sort of thing that routinely happens to young footballers but because Ledley was a well-known and successful Tottenham player the incident was reported in the national papers and both Ledley and his manager had to make what you might call "damage-limitation" press statements.

What caught my eye at the time was that as part of his statement the Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp was quoted in the papers as saying: "Footballers should not drink. **You should not put diesel into a Ferrari.**" Harry was obviously suggesting that top-flight footballers, as athletes, would find their performance impaired by drinking alcohol in the same way that a high-performance Ferrari would under-perform if you put diesel into its petrol tank. Now this made some sense. It may be news to you that footballers traditionally have not been the most adventurous or sophisticated creatures in the world when it comes to matters of nutrition and it would not be too much of a cliché to say that they would happily live on a diet of steak, beer and chips. But football is now a multi-million pound industry, and managers and coaches now know the value of proper nutrition to good athletic performance, and so steer their players towards good food and away from alcohol. But Harry's point about putting diesel into a Ferrari resonated with me.

One of the lessons that I think the Bible teaches (which is at variance with the view of the world) is that man is primarily a spiritual creature, made in the image of God. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1: 26 – 27) Now, this is not to deny that we have physical bodies with arms and legs and the need for food and shelter - that is quite obvious. But it also needs to be understood that in our core-selves, in our souls, we are spiritual creatures and that the spiritual core of ourselves needs to be fed and satisfied.

I suggest that things are not quite as they seem in the world. We are constantly bombarded with glossy aspirational advertising messages and newspaper and magazine articles which imply that happiness will be ours if only we acquire this particular job, qualification, car, boat, house or spouse. But if our eyes and hearts are open we will realise that these are empty promises that pander for the most part to the ego, or our pride. Like the heroin addict who wants "just one more score" or the gambling addict who seeks "just one more bet" their promises are empty. They will not do what they promise. They will not fill that God-shaped hole within us. For spiritual satisfaction we have to go to the Word of God.

When Jesus went into the wilderness and was very hungry Satan came to Him and cunningly used passages from Scripture in order to try to lead Him to sin. "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Mathew 4: 3–4) This would suggest to me that it is God's Word that is needed to feed our spiritual selves, and to try to feed ourselves with anything else would be like putting diesel into a Ferrari. It is simply the wrong fuel, or nutrition. We will not know any peace or true happiness until we go to God's Word because that is what we are designed for. To do anything else will cause us to misfire and stall and die, just like the engine. If we try to feed ourselves with earthly or "fleshly" things, the results can be sadly predictable. Saint Paul says: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance". (Galatians 5:19-23)

So, if Christians are feeding themselves as directed by Scripture they should not be involved in too many Saturday night brawls outside nightclubs! But this does beg the question: if this is so clear and obvious then why do more people not just do it? After all doesn't everybody just want to be happy? Are people stupid? It can be argued that people who will not accept Christ are not just wilfully stupid but rather that they are simply blind. When they drive their Ferraris up to the fuel pumps they cannot see that the petrol and diesel hoses are colour-coded green and black. Instead of taking the green hose, which would ensure that their engines ran sweetly, they take the handier black hose which causes them to misfire and die. As Jesus said: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:40)

Like modern athletes and their coaches we must be aware of the spiritual fuel or nutrition required to feed us and keep us well, and which will also see us raised up on the last day. Jesus said: "Verily, verily, I say to you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." (John 6: 53-56)

Also, when Jesus was at the well with the Samaritan woman He pointed clearly to where satisfaction lay: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:13-14)

Many people in history have attempted to create secular societies which they thought would meet all man's needs and thus make him happy. But invariably they fail: from the French revolution and subsequent terror to the October revolution and the rise of Stalin; from fascism to the expansion and current domination of global market capitalism. They have all failed in this regard because they have not taken as a starting point that man is essentially a spiritual creature, and needs to have that aspect of him fed and satisfied in order to live as God intended. For things to operate as designed, diesel cars must have diesel, Ferraris must have petrol. And we must have the Word of God.