

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"

Editorial When Two Worlds Collide

I've long held the view that the creation of boundaries of almost any type is ultimately a recipe for conflict of one kind or another. It seems endemic in the nature of mankind that when we organise ourselves into groups, or establish other forms of boundaries, physical, psychological or artificial (as we do in so many aspects of our lives) the opportunity for conflict is never very far away. Over the last few weeks of course we have seen the absolutely devastating effect in the natural world of boundaries as the movement of two tectonic

plates (or at least the movement of one in relation to the other) resulted in the loss of what now seems likely to be 250,000 lives.

Faced with such devastating loss of life, the geographical impact of the earthquake that caused the tsunami is secondary, but nevertheless the statistics are awe-inspiring. It was of course the India (tectonic) Plate slipping under the Burma Plate that caused the earthquake that caused the tsunami. It is believed that the faultline was 750 miles long and that there was a slippage of the India Plate of as much as 50 feet. It is estimated that the energy generated by the earthquake was sufficient to boil 150 litres of water for every person on the earth; the force was such that the earth's surface oscillated by between 20 and 30 centimetres and such that a fractional change in the earth's rotation was caused. Small islands to the south-west of Sumatra are believed to have physically moved 66 feet south-west and the northern tip of Sumatra itself is estimated to have moved 118 feet south-west. Truly when 'two worlds' collide the effects can be devastating.

COLLISION IN OUR WORLD

The idea of the collision of two 'worlds' has exercised the minds of songwriters over the years with groups such as the Bee Gees, Simple Minds and Iron Maiden having recorded songs that speak of the effects of a clash of cultures, religions, races. I won't bore with details of their lyrics, but the fact that a number of groups (and there are other groups and individuals who have recorded songs under the same title) have used the same title perhaps demonstrates an acknowledgement of the reality of potential and actual conflict. The list of 'worlds' that might clash and come into conflict is of course a long and diverse one and in this respect we might find ourselves in several 'worlds' at the same time. Our religious world might bring us into conflict with other religious worlds or indeed the irreligious world; our family world might bring

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us into conflict with other families; our world that is defined by our support for a particular sports team or activity (fox-hunting, for example as a contemporary issue) might bring us into conflict with the supporters of other teams; our home world (maybe as defined by the boundaries of our property) might bring us into conflict with our next door neighbour's world. And so we could go on.

What is certain is that when collision occurs, it usually brings with it conflict, violence or opposition as a result of which people wind up being hurt or damaged either physically, spiritually or emotionally.

Even a relatively cursory review of our world shows the potential for devastating consequences. The collision of religions and cultures in the Middle East has led to the continuing Arab/Israeli conflict and the construction of the long boundary wall between the two communities (ostensibly to reduce terrorist activity in Israel) is a physical demonstration of the divisions between the communities. The killing (70,000 killed and 1.6 million forced from homes by man rather than any 'natural' event) that has occurred in Darfur is happening on ethnic and racial grounds. An international commission is to formally rule on whether the actions have constituted genocide (the deliberate extermination of a race or group). Tensions are acute in many other areas of the world and many ongoing conflicts never make the headlines of our newspapers nor feature in the news bulletins, but are nonetheless real. And these are just the global issues and say nothing of the local and interpersonal collisions that are constantly with us.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

So where is our inspiration in the light of these comments? How, where or in whom can we have hope when we are faced with such an array of collision? Think again for a moment about the Temple in Jerusalem with its highly structured divisions and the ever more narrowly defined groups who were entitled to have access to the different 'court areas' of the temple. It divided Jew and Greek (stranger); Jewish male and female; priest and commoner; high priest and priest. It speaks of separation, division and privilege.

Then reflect on the teaching of Jesus that was, and is still today, designed to sweep away all barriers between men (generic) and between man and God. When the veil of the temple was rent in two as Jesus died, it signalled that direct access to God was available to all penitent mankind and that the old divisions had been obliterated. His teaching had all to do with attitude and the application of Christian principles that placed proper relationships between people at the very heart of the Christian ethic. **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."** Jesus never taught that different groupings should never exist. He acknowledged for example that the master/slave relationship would continue but taught how masters and slaves should respect each other. He never said that male and female should cease to regard themselves as such. But gave explicit teaching about the respect that should exist. He never said that nations would disappear, but did say that, **"all are one in Christ Jesus"** and pointed Christians towards citizenship of a new commonwealth, the commonwealth of heaven.

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

There is nothing that we can do to control the effects of collision in the natural world; we can only exercise due caution in our day-to-day lives to limit accidental collision that can cause pain and suffering. Yet there is a tremendous amount that we can do, in the expression of our Christian principles in our lives and in preaching the gospel of the all-embracing and inclusive love our Lord Jesus Christ, to minimise collision and its effects in the admittedly small part of the world in which we have any influence. **"If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all."** Again, **"Do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good."** In short Christians should be peace-loving people and even when called on to defend and explain our deeply held Christian convictions must do it in a civilised and disciplined way.

And we must continue to make the Gospel known because so long as the world exists Satan will still try to prevent mankind from seeing God. So many still see God as the author of collision rather its antidote. Yet for all who are prepared to accept Jesus and 'turn again' there is the inexpressible joy of knowing that the greatest collision of all time, the cosmic battle between good and evil, has been decisively won in favour of good by God.

The False Doctrine of Success

(Rose M Payne)

A neighbour recently handed me a booklet of daily devotional articles. It was from a "faith only" organisation, but in addition to that there was something very strange about the contents. The word "success" crops up all through the booklet. It appears the editors have copied much of their material from handbooks on "How to be successful", and simply added a reference to Christianity, often turning texts completely on their heads. One startling claim was that when Adam and Eve were told to **"be fruitful and multiply"** in Gen. 1:28, it meant they were to be "successful", whereas anyone can see from the context that they were being told to produce children to populate the earth.

It is as if the editors had decided that everyone wants to be successful (which mostly implies making money), and they could use that desire to promote their brand of Christianity. Wrapped up among more conventional doctrine is the suggestion that people should try to put God to the test. "That usually means giving at a higher level..." and they enclose an envelope for donations to their radio, TV, website, telephone prayer lines and bookselling organisation. Then comes the statement "people see pastors as professional salesmen, but they see *you* as a satisfied customer."

Here is some advice to help readers to grow: "Avoid relationships with people who do not value themselves. Why? Because they are incapable of valuing you! Look for those who enhance you, not inhibit you." This sounds more like psychotherapy than Christianity. Can we imagine any of the great characters in the Bible avoiding people who did not value them? The very idea makes one smile. A bland reply came back from the editors, after I had written to point out the selfishness of this attitude, explaining that the teaching was aimed at people who suffer from low self-esteem because of their circumstances. But if people with low self-esteem accept the gospel, they will find themselves living in a society which does not greatly value Christians and they will need the opposite advice: not to avoid the world, but to try and influence it for good. In any case, is not low self-esteem a good point at which to begin to understand our need of a Saviour? Should not each one of us learn **"Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think"** (Rom. 12:3) and **"But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."** (Phil. 2:3.)

The editors also point out that "success" does not only relate to money, but may include education, career, or Bible study, and will bring "a wealth of contentment and fulfilment." But is not the world also aiming at success in all these directions, except that of following Jesus? **"For after all these things do the Gentiles seek"** (Matt 6:32) and **"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."** (1 John 2:15.) Maybe the writers share the view of the young man who, when asked what was meant by "the world", said it was "a city like Las Vegas." Apparently he thought there was no worldliness in his own neighbourhood!

The King James Version of the Bible only uses the word "success" once (Joshua 1:8), and then it relates to the whole nation, not any one individual. The writers of the booklet have employed thirteen very doubtful modern translations of the Bible. One of their big errors is to use the references to "bearing fruit" as if it meant "working hard at being successful". This is inaccurate, because success mainly benefits the person who achieves it, so this interpretation leads to a self-centred attitude. But the fruit tree gains no benefit from its own fruit, except perhaps a reputation for being a good variety to plant. Some of the fruit may grow into new trees and the rest will form food for other creatures. This is a much better illustration of Christian behaviour. **"You cannot serve God and Money"** (Matt 6:24 NEB) and **"having food and raiment let us be therewith content"** (1 Tim. 6:8).

Word Study MIRACLES, WONDERS & SIGNS

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)

Jesus, during His ministry on earth, performed many miracles. For example, He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, restored hearing to the deaf, turned water into wine, fed the multitudes, walked on water, calmed a stormy sea, cast out demons and raised the dead. We read in Peter's first gospel address: **"You men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know..."** (Acts 2:22). John, towards the conclusion of his gospel record, wrote: **"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name."** (20:30,31). The actual concluding words of his gospel are: **"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."** (21:25). Nicodemus once said to the Master: **"...Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him."** (John 3:2b). John also records for us: **"And many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ comes, will He do more miracles than these which this man has done?"** (7:31). Not even Jesus' enemies could deny His miracles. We read: **"Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we do? For this man does many miracles."** (John 11:47)

DEFINING TERMS

Miracles, wonders and signs are terms to describe the same thing. In the Greek, a miracle is *dunamis*, a wonder is *tera*, and a sign is *semeion*. The first describes a power or a mighty work; the second, the effect of a miracle or a mighty work upon the beholder; and the third, a sign or a token of Divine authority and power. J.W. McGarvey has written: *"...Peter does not mean three classes of actions, but he uses the three terms to describe the same phenomena. He means the miracles of Jesus, which were mighty works, or powers, because wrought by the immediate power of God; wonders, because they excited wonder in those who witnessed them; signs, because they signified God's approval of what Jesus taught in connection with them."* I wish to add here that the context of Acts 2: 22 is important. Alexander Brown in his book *Conversion to God* has an interesting point to make on the matter. *"Jesus was placed within the power of the Jews. He was not fenced off so that they could not approach Him and do with Him as they desired. Neither His miracles nor His extraordinary nature and character were made a means of shielding Him from anything the men of Israel chose to do with Him. He never rescued Himself from their hands by miracle, though an escape from their murderous intent on one occasion is sometimes unnecessarily assumed as a miracle (Luke 4:28-30). No, He was delivered to them, put within their power."*

STATEMENTS ON MIRACLES

Believing in miracles does not produce life. The design of miracles is not to save but to make credible the claims of Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. It is Jesus that saves. Nevertheless, everyone must acknowledge the importance of miracles in the story of Jesus. I share with you some quotations from my notes on the subject. *"It is our contention that if an unbiased committee acting in advance had drawn up a list of the confirmatory acts required to establish the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, taking into consideration the persons and purposes related to his claims, the report would have to include the very type of deeds He performed."* "In general, Jesus performed two kinds of works – intellectual and physical – to excite wonder and to faith in Him as the Messiah." *"The person who controls, violates or suspends any of the laws of physical nature – curing disease by a word, healing the sick, restoring the maimed, raising the dead or dispossessing demons, gives evidence that he is sustained by the hand of Omnipotence."* "I have no problems with the miracles of Jesus. I would have problems with Jesus if it were not for His miracles. What He did to attest His Deity is exactly what I would expect of anyone who claimed to face a sceptical world as the Son of God." *"Miracles are not contradictory to the 'laws of nature' for this would make them contrary to the will of God. They are simply applications of Divine power upon a higher level or plane."* "No one today can deny a miracle. It's too late for that. All they can do now is to doubt the witnesses, or question the evidence."

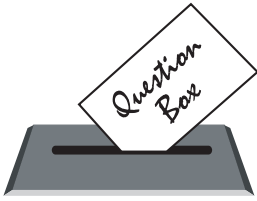
So, brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us not be ashamed of the miracles, wonders and signs Jesus performed to prove His Divine mission. Let us not seek a way to explain them and let us never seek to explain them away. Let us simply accept them and glory in them.

FALSE MIRACLES

The false or fake miracles of Satan should be mentioned here. The great counterfeiter is ever at work to deceive people. He is out to defeat the purpose of God. He is never asleep on the job. We read: **"...even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."** (2 Thessalonians 2: 9,10). **"And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live"** (Revelation 13: 13,14). The phrase "lying wonders" should be especially highlighted. Satan has everything to do with lies. In fact, Jesus once said of him: that, **"he is a liar, and the father of it."** (John 8: 44b) But every miracle performed by Jesus was genuine. The Master has everything to do with truth. In fact, He is the Truth.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

The chief of all the miracles was the resurrection of the Messiah from the dead. This gives hope to all believers everywhere. How did Satan react to it? He concocted a story that was a lie. **"His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept."** (Matthew 28:13) The lie was the result of bribery and corruption. But Peter later declared: "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." (Acts 2:32). I believe the witnesses with all my heart. But, above all, I believe in the risen Lord with all my heart. The result is that I am alive. How wonderful it is to "know Him and the power of His resurrection." (Philippians 3:16)



"Matthew 5:48, states, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect'. The question is: How can we be perfect, like God?"

This question is based on the verse as it stands in the 'Authorized Version', where the first four words suggest that 'perfection' is a goal that we are urged to attain. The later revisions, however, offer us renderings in which the language is not only much plainer and therefore easier to understand, but which also reveal that the verse relates to an imperative – to something that is to be *obeyed* – and is therefore much more daunting!

The Revised Standard Version, for example, reads, ***"You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"***. In other words, what we are facing is not a request or an exhortation, but a command that is as plain as any other command found in the Word of God. What this month's question is asking, therefore, in essence, is this: -

- Can we possibly obey this command, or is it a demand that is too exacting?
- Does it impose upon us a standard that is unrealistic?
- In short; is this something we can never realize this side of Heaven?
- Or is it, perhaps, not meant to be taken seriously?

I suspect that we are inclined to take the latter view! Whenever we encounter difficult verses we are likely to tell ourselves that they are not meant to be taken literally – and then we hurry on to look at something in the scriptures that is less demanding!

Idealistic? Or Perfectionist?

Not surprisingly, Matt. 5:48 has prompted a wide range of interpretations and explanations.

At one extreme there is the 'Idealistic' explanation of those who tell us, *"It is not to be taken seriously"*, whilst, at the other extreme, there is the view of those who teach that believers are required to attain a state of '*sinless perfection*', in which they do not – and even cannot – commit sin. I have met people who have claimed that they have reached a stage in their spiritual growth when they never sin. And, of course, the notion is utterly ridiculous! It is summarily dismissed by the apostle John in 1st John 1:8, which reads-

"If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

And verse 10, ***"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us"***.

You will, however, find that the response that the 'sinless perfectionists' make to this argument is – erroneously - based on 1st John 3:9: -

"No-one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin....."

But, when they use this verse, they fail to recognize that the words '*cannot sin*', in the Greek text, represent the '*aorist tense*', which is the tense that describes something that is '*ongoing, continuing, or incomplete*'.

For this reason, some translations read, '*he cannot keep on sinning*'. In other words, the child of God does not *habitually* sin. Whilst he may be exposed to temptation and may even fall, he does not continue to commit the same sin over and over again. Sin is not his normal way of life. He does not *practise* sin. He does not *live* in sin. And, what is more, when he realizes that he has been '**overtaken in a fault**', to use Paul's words in Gal. 6:1, he knows that, because he is sincerely repentant, he may seek the forgiveness that is always available (1st John 1; 9).

1. Two Important Words.

Look carefully at what the Lord says. He does *not* say, "*You must be sinless as God in heaven is sinless*", because, at that time, He was not discussing either sin or sinlessness.

There are two words in the verse that are supremely important; the words '*Father*' and '*perfect*', and we need to look at them in that order.

First: the word 'Father'.

This is the more important of the two, because '*Father*' is the word that immediately speaks to us of *relationship*. What Jesus tells us in this verse rests on the principle that *every new relationship brings new responsibility*.

Test this statement! Examine it from whatever angle you please. Consider it in connection with any human relationship into which we may possibly enter, and you will find that the principle remains true and unshakeable.

In the 'Sermon on the Mount, from where our text is taken, Jesus has been speaking to His disciples about their relationship to the heavenly Father. He has said, in effect, "God is your Father, and because this is so it follows that you bear the responsibility of children, to be like your Father".

Notice, that He says, '*as your heavenly Father*', or '*like your heavenly Father*'. He presents the Father as our model, our example. Now, this is the essence of true worship. It has been said that '*the sum of true religion is to imitate the God whom we worship*'. This is why Paul wrote: - "**Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children**". Eph.5: 1.

Second; the word 'perfect'.

There are four New Testament words which have been translated by this word, and, unfortunately, we often make the mistake of failing to understand its true, biblical meaning.

How often have you heard it said, '*There is nothing perfect in this world!*' Such expressions have become almost proverbial, and we are inclined to accept them as though they express an infallible truth – which they do not!

There are things in this world that are '*perfect*' in the sense that they cannot be improved upon. And there are certain matters in which we may become perfect, if we have the desire.

Think about the meaning of that word. We all know the meaning that we attach to it today. The modern definition of '*perfect*' means, '*without flaws or faults*'. But, when the New Testament was written, the word had a quite different meaning.

In Matt. 5:11, '*perfect*' is the translation of the Greek word '*teleios*', and means, '*full-grown, mature, or complete*.' Sometimes it means '*an end*'.

- i) Do you remember the story of The Rich Young Ruler who came to Jesus asking about eternal life? He had done so very much and was admirable in so many ways, but he was conscious of a lack in his life. Jesus said to him, **'If you want to be perfect...'** In other words, *'If you wish to be complete...'*
- ii) **Referring to Teachers And Teaching, James 3:2 uses the same word when it reads,** *'We all make mistakes, but if any one makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man'*. **This means fully mature in this respect.**
- iii) 1st Cor. 2:6 reads, *'Yet among the mature (Greek- 'perfect') we do impart wisdom.'*
- iv) Other passages to look at are Heb.5: 4 and 1st Cor.14: 20, and, especially, 1st Cor.13: 10. *'But when the perfect comes...'* The word, again, is *'teleios'* – *'the complete'*. (Incidentally, ask yourself if this verse can possibly refer to the Lord Jesus Himself, as some people suppose!)

In all of these passages the word *'perfect'* does not mean, *'perfect'* in the sense of *'sinless'*, but means *'fully-grown, mature, or complete'*, so, with this in mind, let us return to Matt. 5:48 and look at it in its original context.

The verse in its proper setting.

You will notice, I am sure, that Jesus speaks these words as He deals with the Christian law of forgiveness. He is speaking about Love, and we must, once again, pay special attention to the name He uses for God. It is the name *'Father'*. He is saying that, as a Father, God is our example, our model in the exercise of love, and, as His children, we must be complete, full-grown, mature, in this aspect of our own character.

He is saying, in effect,

"It is easy for you to love those who love you! But for you who call God 'Father', the standard is much higher. I say that, because of the love of your Father, and with His help, you must not only love your friends, but those, also, who even hate you. And when you have reached the point where you can love those who are unkind to you, or speak evil about you, or treat you badly, you will, in this aspect of your character, be like your heavenly Father. You will have become spiritually mature. Perfect!"

You see, then, that the principle presented by the Lord Jesus in this verse, applies to every possible aspect of human life. But, here it is expressed in connection with the great law of love.

**To love only those who love us, is to be *imperfect* in love.
But to love those who do not love us in return, is to be *perfect* in love.**

May I again say, in conclusion, that, when we read such words of the Lord Jesus, we must not turn away from them as though they have no message for our time, or as though they demand that we attempt the impossible.

It is fatal at any time, to read His words and then say, *"This is demanding perfection from me – and perfection is impossible"*.

We should read the New Testament scriptures with this fact fixed in our minds; THE LORD, JESUS, ALWAYS MEANS WHAT HE SAYS! AND HE NEVER DEMANDS THE IMPOSSIBLE!

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WONDERFUL WOMANHOOD

(Edited by Ann Boland)

Women of the Bible

As a new year is beginning, I thought it was the best time to start a new series. I mentioned before that I wanted to do a series on the women in the Bible that can be a very profitable study for each of us. I started some notes a few months back, and was so struck with the similarities of the experiences of the first women I looked at, that I was reminded of the following verse, which will be the foundation theme of the study:

1 Corinthians 10:13. 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. (New International Version)

Please keep this verse in mind when you read the series. Other issues I will be looking at will be the sort of woman she was, the reactions of family and friends to what she did, and the lessons we can learn from each case.

Eve

Of course everyone knows about Eve, how she picked the fruit and caused the banishment from the Garden of Eden. But the story is a bit deeper than this.

In **Gen 2:18** we see that God made Eve as a helper for man, as **"it is not good for the man to be alone"**. The world had been created with the animals and plants, but only one person was created. The chapter goes on in **Gen 2:19 – 20: "no suitable helper was found."** This shows that man was in a class of his own (and not evolved from apes!). In **verse 21** we are told that God took a rib from Adam and created Eve from that rib.

So, from the beginning, the tie or bond between man and woman (wife and husband) was established, which is shown in **verse 24: "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh"**. In **1 Corinthians 7 : 4** this is brought out by Paul: **"The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife"**.

Genesis 3 describes the encounter with the serpent, and the "fall of man". Adam and Eve had been told not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden (**v 3**), but Eve saw that it was "desirable" (**v 6**), so they both ate the fruit. As we know, this is the very first case of temptation that we read about, and it had very sad consequences for both of them.

Perhaps the worst was the loss of the company of God. If you look at **verses 8 to 19**, you can see that Adam and Eve were in a very privileged position, namely that

of actually seeing and talking to God. Of course, they didn't know what a privilege it was, until they lost it. In these verses, it is interesting to note the "passing of the buck" - Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. This is a human response, but, nonetheless, a temptation. Further punishment was that they were banished from the Garden, that they would have to provide their own food by tilling the ground, and that Eve would bear children in pain (**v 16**). Also in **verse 16**, we find the future relationship between men and women was laid out: "**your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.**" The New Testament also contains this idea in **Ephesians 5: 22 – 25**. In **Genesis 4**, we read about the birth of Cain and Abel, and then the story moves on from Adam and Eve.

So, what sort of woman was Eve?

It's very difficult to say, as there is so little information about her. Also, at this time, there was no sin in the world, so it would be a little difficult for us to relate to her as a woman – after all, who's perfect nowadays? All we can learn is that she was a helpmate for Adam, who was to rule over the earth (**Genesis 1:26**). Again, we do not learn much about the reactions of her family (there was only Adam at that time), but it is interesting to note that he was with her when she was tempted (**Genesis 3:6**).

There are quite a few lessons we can learn from these four chapters. Firstly, Eve was created as a "**helpmate**", which implies a certain equality. No doubt many of you have fetched hammers, nails, etc. for your fathers or husbands while they do the work. You might have had the choice to say, "No, I'm busy" or that you couldn't help. The fact is that you **helped**, and were not just there to obey orders. Helpers are extremely important in any society. Without help, many jobs and tasks couldn't be done.

The next lesson is that of **obedience**. We have seen that Adam would "**rule over**" Eve. Yes, the lesson extends to men as well, in their relationship with God, but women are taught to "**submit to your husband**" (**Ephesians 5:22**) and, to those women who are not married, **1 Timothy 2:12 – 14**.

The idea of marriage is also brought out quite strongly in these verses (**Genesis 2:24**). The theme of "**oneness**" is very strong in the New Testament as well (**Ephesians 4:4 – 6**). Of course, God doesn't expect us all to marry, as we can see in **1 Corinthians 7**, but the idea here is that if you do marry, it is a serious business, and that we should not take it lightly.

The final lesson is that **disobedience will bring punishment**. Look back again at the verse at the beginning of this article "**he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.**" If we can't resist temptation then the problems begin.

(Next time I will be looking at Noah's wife. If you have any comments or additions to this article or have one to print, please contact me:

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N.B. postage is the same for a first-class letter in England, if it is not too heavy)

Practical Christianity

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

LESSON 7 - RELAPSE (AND HOW TO AVOID IT)

(David Yasko, USA)

In previous articles we've been talking about coming out of the dark and exposing our problems to the light of God's love and watching him heal those habits, hurts and hang-ups that have been messing up our lives. Today we talk about how to maintain recovery. The fact is, growth is not smooth. The road to recovery is jagged and sometimes we take two steps forward and one step back. It is not easy and when we fall back into our self defeating patterns we call that a "relapse." Today we are going to look at what causes a relapse and then get into step seven, on "how to avoid or prevent a relapse." First, we need to understand that relapses happen in a very predictable pattern.

- 1. COMPLACENCY.** Complacency is where we get comfortable with short term gains. You start saying "I don't need anymore help." The pain has been reduced, not eliminated, but reduced to the point of manageability. So we don't need help anymore and we become complacent.
- 2. CONFUSION.** Confusion is where we start rationalizing and saying "well, maybe the problem wasn't so bad after all. We start forgetting just how bad it really was.
- 3. COMPROMISE.** That's where you go back to the place of temptation. You return to the risky situation that got you in trouble the first time. And you start compromising. Inevitably comes:
- 4. CATASTROPHE.** Where you give in to the old habits and old hurts and the hate and resentment comes back. Note this - the collapse is not the relapse. The relapse started a long time ago. The collapse or catastrophe is just the result of this pattern or process. Now, why do we fall back? Why do we mess up, even when we know the right thing to do.

WHAT CAUSES A RELAPSE?

1. REVERTING TO WILLPOWER.

Galatians 3:3 "**Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?**" You started off by trusting God. Step one said, "I'm powerless to change." Step three had you giving it all to God. But as time goes by we start thinking, "You know, it's me who's doing all the work here." It's my power and willpower takes the place of God's power and we start thinking, after we've had a few successes "I'm all powerful, all knowing and can handle everything." We all need somebody to tell us when we're fooling ourselves. We all need somebody to say to us, "Come on, who are you kidding?" God will permit unlimited relapse until we finally admit we can't do it on our own. *Zechariah 4:6*, "**This is the word of the LORD: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit you will succeed' says the LORD Almighty.**" Only God has the power to take away those defects. That pretty well shoots "I'll just try harder" in the foot, doesn't it?

2. IGNORING ONE OF THE STEPS.

We get in a hurry and try to move through recovery too quickly. We decide we're not going to do the amends part of it because it's too hard. Whatever reason, relapse happens when we ignore one of the steps. The Bible calls these steps, "principles for life." Look, we didn't get like this overnight; we aren't going to fix it overnight. The plan works if ... you work the plan. *Galatians 5:7, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?"*

3. TRYING TO RECOVER WITHOUT SUPPORT.

That's where you say, "I'll just make it by myself. I don't need anybody else's help." You are primed for a relapse because it doesn't work that way. Look at *Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"* You can't beat some problems alone. So when you're tempted and things are going bad, who are you going to call? We all need somebody to lean on and we all need support. *Hebrews 10:25, "Let us not give up (the habit of) meeting together, ... and let us encourage one another—."*

The fact is, we can see short term gain in our lives by doing these steps without involving other people. We can do these steps on our own and see short-term effects. But we'll never manage long-term recovery without relationships. Let me say again, we will experience relief for a while, but it will not last. You will relapse; I guarantee it. If we don't have support when the temptation hits us and we don't feel like doing the right thing, who is going to help us do the right thing. In order to avoid relapse we need a good support system. We need them because we can't see our own problems, so great is our denial. We need each other to serve as mirrors.

4. BECOMING PRIDEFUL.

We run the risk of relapse when pride gets behind the wheel. Pride gives birth to overconfidence. We start thinking we're strong, we've got this hurt or habit licked, I've closed the door and I'm strong. No you're not. *Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction."* Stay humble or you will stumble. The man who gets too big for his boots will eventually be exposed. Pride gets us all into trouble and it always, always sets us up for a fall. "I can handle it." Pride blinds us to our own weaknesses, keeps us from getting help, prevents us from making amends to other people we've hurt. But the biggest problem with pride is it causes us to blame other people for our problems. You know, "It's not my fault" and it gets pushed off on somebody else. When everything becomes "somebody else's problem" we are headed for relapse. And pride causes us to blame other people. *1 Corinthians 10:12 "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"* The secret to lasting recovery is to live with humility. Humility is the best protection against relapse. Not "I've got it all together", rather, "I'm getting it all together." And you live with a constant state of humility in our lives. Not humiliation, humility. And humility is the best protection. Let him who stands take heed, lest he fall.

SO HOW DO WE PREVENT A RELAPSE.

Take step four. Let me give it to you again:

STEP FOUR: RESERVE A DAILY TIME WITH GOD FOR SELF EXAMINATION, BIBLE READING, AND PRAYER IN ORDER TO KNOW GOD AND HIS WILL FOR MY LIFE AND GAIN THE POWER TO DO IT.

This is the maintenance step. This step is based on *Mark 14:38*, "**Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.**" He is saying it is human nature to relapse. It is human nature to fall back into old habits, hurts, and hang-ups even though we know they mess us up. So we need some safeguards and there are three safe-guards or tools to help us maintain our recovery.

1. EVALUATION.

- *2 Corinthians 13:5* "**Examine yourselves ...**"
- *Lamentations 3:40*, "**Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return (repent) to the LORD.**"

OK, I'll buy that. But just what do I examine and when do I examine it? Let me give you four things to self-evaluate and I want you to ask yourself a question on each one of them:

- **Physical: "What is my body telling me?** Our bodies are barometers of what's going on inside of us. You got tense muscles? Guess what, you're under stress. Our body is our warning light telling us what's wrong. Am I hungry, tired, fatigued, stressed out? What is my body saying to me and get some clues from it that things are out of line.
- **Emotional: "What are my real feelings right now?"** Am I letting my real feelings come to the top? If we're not we are like coke bottles that have been shaken up. We will explode. So we ask what our real feelings are and we do a HEART check. A HEART check is five emotions that need a daily checkup. Here's our HEART check: *Am I:*

HURTING?
EXHAUSTED?
ANGRY?
RESENTFUL?
TENSE?

- **Relational: Am I at peace with every one?** If we're not, that internal conflict is going to hold us back. Now, I realize there are people we deal with every day that we have conflicts with. But do you know there are other people out there who live a long way off that we are letting live rent free in our minds.
- **Spiritual: "Am I relying on God, moment by moment?"** Now an inventory is an inventory. That means not only see the bad stuff, but make note of the good stuff and be proud of the positive steps we make. Don't be prideful, but be proud of how far you've come. *Galatians 6:4* "**Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.**" Celebrate any victories, no matter how minor they are because you worked hard for them.

That's the what. Now consider the when.

There are three ways we can do an inventory.

- 1. A Spot Check Inventory.** We can do a "spot check," at any time of the day. That's where we sit down and say, "OK, how am I physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually?" And deal with it immediately, because the longer we postpone it, the worse it gets. We can't afford to let those sins stockpile, so keep the list short. Breathe out the sin and breathe in the forgiveness God wants us to have. It's like taking out the garbage. If we don't take it out, pretty soon the place starts stinking.
- 2. The Daily Review.** That's finding a quiet spot at the end of the day to confess our failures and celebrate our victories.
- 3. The Annual Checkup.** That's going away for a day for the purpose of looking at your life and taking a moral inventory.

2. MEDITATION.

Meditation is a Bible word that was hijacked by Eastern religions. Let me give you a good definition for meditation. **"SLOWING DOWN LONG ENOUGH TO HEAR GOD."** This is our secret to spiritual strength. Crowds, noise and hurry stop our spiritual growth process. Satan hates us to have time alone with God so he uses those three things to stop us. *Psalm 1:1-3, "Blessed is the man who... meditates on God's law day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."* The key to growing is to plant our roots deeply in God's word. The way to plant our roots deeply in God's word is to meditate on God's word. So we read the word and then think about what God wants us to take with us from reading that and how we can apply it. When we do that we are like trees planted by the river. The benefit is that we prosper. The point is God tells us his word is the manual for life and life becomes easier when we follow the directions. *Psalm 119:11, "I have thought much about your words and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin."* How do we store God's word in our heart? We memorize it. Thinking about God's word holds us back from relapse.

3. PRAYER.

This is the third tool for maintaining our recovery. Prayer is the way we access God's power. We can pray about any need in our life. Prayer can do what God can do. How do we pray: *Matthew 6:8-13, "This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, may your holy name be honored; may your kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, forgive us the wrongs that we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us. Do not bring us into temptation, but keep us safe from the evil one."* Notice a couple of things about this. This is "how" we should pray, not what we should pray. It is a model, not a ritual prayer. A couple of verses before this one Jesus warned against repeating a ritual prayer. The second thing is that all the recovery steps are covered in this prayer. Our Father in heaven, that's admitting you're not God, but he is. That's step one and two. Your will be done, your kingdom come is step 5 and our daily bread is step three. Forgive us our debts is step four, as we forgive others is step 6. Deliver us from temptation and deliver us from evil is this step. Yes, Recovery is as old as the Lord's Prayer itself.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Again we convey the thanks and appreciation of our Ghanaian brethren for your assistance in their service to the Lord as well as for the medical care without which many would have died.

The daughter of a Church leader has been hospitalized for three weeks for an operation to her leg. His mother was also in hospital at this time and his wife gave birth to their baby. During this time he answered a call from the church in his hometown to evangelizing there. In the town there is an idolatrous temple. If he could be given a bicycle it would help him greatly with his work.

Two other sisters were taken to hospital for treatment to a hernia and malaria respectively but after receiving some treatment they had to return home for lack of money. Another sister with epilepsy fell into a fire and now needs hospital treatment for burns.

A child needs urgent attention for boils on his head and a yellow discharge from his ears and the wife of a preacher requires further treatment for typhoid fever and an ulcer.

The successful evangelism throughout Ghana results in expenses such as hiring a room for worship, benches, Bible study material and hymn-books.

Those wishing to help please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund** and send to the treasurer,

**Mrs Janet McDonald,
12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk,
Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB.
Tel: 01324 562480**

Simply Christian - a report on Allan Ashurt's website

Those who have looked at the website at <http://members.aol.com/eusebos> will realise that it contains a wealth of very interesting and helpful reading matter.

Many people have looked at this website. Up to mid-January, 1575 contacts had proceeded to request courses, leaflets or CDs. These requests have come from 99 different countries, and more arrive almost every day. For every ten items sent out, at least one will reply with thanks and encouragement.

Some of these requests are from Churches of Christ, some from members of various denominations, but the majority are from individuals whose beliefs we do not know.

The largest number of enquiries so far has come from the USA. The majority of contacts there and in Canada appear to be seeking further information about how best to approach Muslims. A few requests have been received from South America, where the dominant religion is Roman Catholicism and enquiries are more likely to be for information on simple Christianity.

The next largest groups are from India, followed by Ghana and Nigeria, these countries being on the edge of the Muslim world. Again the information on Islam is much in demand.

Requests for the Muqaddas CD also come from inside predominantly Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, as well as requests for literature about basic Christianity.

An interesting group consists of the countries that were in the former Soviet Union. These also border on Muslim populations. The largest number of enquiries is from Russia, followed by the Ukraine, and some of the enquiries have come from very remote and otherwise inaccessible places.

Most of the contacts from the British Isles are members of the Church, but there are a few from the denominations and other people.

Many overseas Churches of Christ can use all the leaflets, correspondence courses, etc. that we are able to send, while the CDs supply much good teaching material without the expense of going online.

It seems likely that access to computers will continue to spread around the world and demand for information on the Christian faith will grow. Many people can understand English sufficiently to translate teaching material into their local languages.

This is a very promising way to spread the Gospel. Would you like to help? There is considerable expense involved in producing the material and paying the postal charges. Any contribution you

can make will be of great assistance. **Please send to:-**

**Allan Ashurst,
60 Kenwood Road, Stretford,
Manchester, M32 8PT.**

Rose M Payne

Obituary Bro. Peter Wilson

Slamannan, Scotland

The Church in Slamannan regrets to announce the passing of Bro. Peter Wilson on Tuesday 28th December 2004.

Peter was born again in 1945, after which he remained a faithful servant of Christ. His role in the Church was that of treasurer but he also took an active part in the services of the Church and made sure that our building was kept in good condition doing the necessary repairs where needed. He was a mainstay of the Church in Slamannan and he will be greatly missed.

Peter was blessed with a good Christian wife, May, and 4 daughters and two sons.

Bro. Ian Davidson of Motherwell officiated at the service in the funeral home and also at the graveside in the presence of many sympathetic relatives, brethren and friends.

We commiserate with Peter's wife May, his children and other family members and commend all to the love and grace of our Heavenly Father.

**Grace Snedden,
Secretary**

Thanks

Sister May Wilson and family would like to thank everyone who expressed sympathy by way of letters, cards, telephone calls and visits, over the death of her husband, Peter. The support shown at a difficult and trying time was deeply appreciated.

Editor's Notes

Firstly, in last month's edition the article "What is Worship?" was unattributed. The article was in fact submitted by Bro. John Dodsley of Kirkby-in-Ashfield and I apologise to John for that unintentional omission.

Secondly, there has been no response to the 'What do you Think' feature on Repentance on Forgiveness. I did hope that introducing this feature to the magazine would elicit some input as responses can be long, short, detailed or general. Without the regular input from Ian Davidson, Frank Worgan and a few other regular contributors, it would be difficult to provide a magazine at all. In fact in terms of 'ad-hoc' articles our sisters are far more productive than the brothers at the moment. Which brings me to point three.

The Question Box is empty. I have reported before that following discussion with Frank we have decided not to 'make up' questions. Frank is willing to answer genuine questions submitted by or through the readership but the formula is simple - No Questions, No Answers! Franks address is at the bottom of the QB page.

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