

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

Respect for life - is it still 'alive and well'?

I have to confess to having had a deep sense of unease as I watched the BBC News footage of the events leading up to the execution of Saddam Hussein. I understand that video footage of the actual execution itself has been available over the internet and on mobile phones. Personally I haven't had any inclination at all to watch that footage and, as I said previously, felt discomfited by the footage of the preliminaries that was shown on mainstream news channels. I don't know whether it was the cold and stark nature of

the room that Saddam and his executioners were in or seeing a human being at such close proximity to death or whether (and I think this is most probably the case) it was the fact of one group of human beings preparing in a mechanistic, calculating and deliberate way for the death of another human being.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT – AN EYE FOR AN EYE?

I do not agree with capital punishment and am personally glad that under the Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1965 the United Kingdom parliament voted to abolish the death penalty for murder and, despite several attempts to have it re-imposed, has maintained that position ever since. Indeed in 1999 the Home Secretary signed the sixth protocol of the European Convention of Human Rights, which formally abolished the death penalty in the UK and guaranteed that it could not be brought back. Many people would not regard this as a good move because they are motivated by the idea of retribution for criminal offences that equates the punishment for the offender with the loss suffered by the victim. In this view, the only satisfactory punishment for a murderer is loss of life for the perpetrator of the crime. It's the old principle of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. [It's one of those quirks of the selective use of scripture that when proponents of capital punishment seek to justify that position they will refer to 'an obscure passage in Leviticus' that talks about "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"; but when Christians quote similar 'obscure passages' from the same

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book in partial support of their views on, for example, homosexuality, they are ridiculed. But such is the inconsistency of things.] Apart from the fact that for many people the motivation behind the death penalty is some sense of revenge rather than punishment, and apart from the inhuman and degrading nature of the punishment, there are also the facts that innocent people have been executed and, rather grotesquely in my view, several people suffering degrees of mental illness have been executed in the past. It is of course absolutely without doubt that many murderers have subjected their victims to extraordinary cruelty and inhumanity during the course of their crimes but if that is to be used as the criterion for their subsequent punishment then we are right back to the 'an eye for an eye' principle.

Saddam Hussein was of course notorious for the extreme levels of brutality, depravity, cruelty and inhumanity that he perpetrated on many of his innocent victims. It seems that he acted, or had his acolytes act on his behalf, with an utter disregard for human life whether in the killing of individuals or during mass murders. There is no need here to rehearse again some of the methods that were used to murder people. (Nor is the intention of this article to make any comment upon the justification or otherwise for the coalition war with Iraq or how Saddam came to be, and was sustained, in power over the years). In one sense I can't really understand why I would have felt any sense of unease at all about the death of such a brutal man who apparently showed no remorse for his actions – except for the fact that one person (or a group of people), even when authorized by a government to do so, deliberately planning orchestrating and carrying out the execution of another simply does not sit comfortably with me.

Inevitably, I suppose, these sentiments began to be translated into a comparison with sentiments about the execution of the most loving, gracious and compassionate person that the world has ever known. If there is any discomfort in contemplating the execution of a tyrant, quite what should be felt about the brutal, illegal and unjustified execution of Jesus the Christ, our Saviour, especially when we add into the mix that he was not executed for any crimes of his own, but to deal with the sins and transgressions of his own creation? It has been interesting to note the way that some media has expressed strong disapproval of the treatment of Saddam both during his trial (claiming that it wasn't fair or impartial) and during the events leading directly up to his death. If only we could hear the same outcry even today about the illegal and unfair trial of Jesus and the barbaric, unjust and undignified treatment meted out to Jesus during the hours of his crucifixion. Proper treatment is demanded for a tyrant (and I agree that should be that case) but how many people other than devout Christians really express any great concern over the treatment of the Son of God?

THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

I believe that there is an aversion within the human psyche to the unnatural taking of any life and, in particular, human life. At one extreme, I have heard of people who will attempt to usher a fly or a wasp out of the house rather than attempt to kill the insect. I hope my memory serves me well here but in the back of my mind I recall many years ago someone relating the account of how the late Bro. Leonard Morgan (it may have been Leonard himself), who, having struck a small bird whilst driving his car, immediately stopped his car and went to tend to the stricken bird. Flicking through the recently published 'Historical Survey of the Churches of Christ in Great Britain' there are graphic accounts of the determination of the wartime conscientious objectors to stick to their principles despite the sanctions that they were faced with. These are all manifestations, at different levels, of the aversion to kill. I must admit that when I reflect on some of the issues that have caused huge division within the Church over the years, we nevertheless seem able, within the 'Church of Christ' community, to accommodate those whose objection to war, based I assume on the

command that 'thou shalt not kill', is so great that they couldn't contemplate military action, whilst also including within that fellowship those who can readily engage in the front line of the armed forces. I'm not suggesting that we should have a division along those lines, but I am sometimes intrigued by the issues that have led to major divisions and those that haven't.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL?

The stance that many Christians take on matters relating to 'killing' is of course based on the 6th Commandment delivered by God to Moses: "Thou shalt not kill". As time goes on the range of 'procedures' or actions that may be covered by our English term 'kill' becomes more extensive and abortion, euthanasia (or assisted death as it is now commonly called), the use for medical research of 'excess' human embryos, suicide, death caused by war, murder are all generically covered by the word 'kill'. Some Christians and 'Christian groups' have resorted to extreme and, sometimes, violent measures in objection to some of the activities listed above because of the very principle that the 'taking' of any human life under any circumstances offends the command of God.

One of the more difficult aspects of this whole debate for Christians, particularly in relation to discussions that may be held with people outside of the Church, is the direct involvement of God with several situations where people have been killed, sometimes at the command of God and other times when God acted as 'adviser' to the Israelites in the conduct of conflict. How can the teaching of love for enemies as brought by Jesus be squared with the God who was involved in conflicts that led to serious bloodshed? This is perhaps one of the most intractable questions that Christianity has, and does, face. Can we square this particular circle? And if the God of the Old Testament is, as we claim, the God of the New Testament also, why does the emphasis switch so emphatically to a gospel of peace and 'love of enemies' in the teaching of Christ and the apostles? I have heard many answers suggested to the question of God's involvement in conflict and warfare. How can God condemn the murder of Abel (Genesis 4) whilst sending the Flood in which "all flesh died that moved upon the earth". The Mosaic Law provided for several actions that were punishable by death:

- Whoever strikes a man so that he dies ...
 - Whoever strikes his father or mother ...
 - Whoever steals a man ...
 - Whoever curses his father or mother ...
- ... shall be put to death (Exodus 21: 12-14).

Leviticus 21:10ff invokes the death penalty for several different types of sexual immorality. Why in the light of these Scriptures did I feel any sense of unease at all over the death of Saddam Hussein?

There are those who argue that the traditional rendering of the 6th Commandment as 'thou shalt not kill' is itself inaccurate and that a better translation of the Hebrew word '*ratsah*' is 'murder' and so the 6th Commandment becomes 'thou shalt not murder'. In this sense the command now only refers to intentional, criminal acts of murder. Immediately this moves the discussion from the position of all kinds of killing of whatever description being against God's law, to a position in which some forms of killing are justified. Perhaps this does help in understanding the provisions within the Mosaic Law that allowed for putting people to death for certain offences as mentioned above. Perhaps it does allow for the concept of a 'just' war in the defence of land or property against 'evil' oppressors in the way that God helped Israel defend itself. Perhaps, if the injunction is against murder only, then I'm wrong in my opposition to capital punishment. If the correct translation really is 'thou shalt not murder' and the

governments legislate to allow abortion (as many have of course done), does this move abortion to 'legalised killing' rather than murder and therefore not offend the Commandment, especially in instances where there is a serious threat to the life of the mother if a pregnancy runs to a full term?

On first reflection, 'thou shalt not murder, is much less onerous than 'thou shalt not kill' but the more one considers the alternative translation the more the number of questions grows. Even if the prohibition is read as 'murder' it is certainly no panacea for several moral issues that impinge on the taking of life.

GOD'S PURPOSES FULFILLED

So what then must we make of God's activities in relation to the conflicts that the nation of Israel was involved in from time to time? I have heard people say that God is sovereign and entitled to act in any way that He, in his infinite judgment, considers to be right. That statement is undoubtedly true, however I am sure that God does not operate on a 'do as I say, not as I do' principle. God surely doesn't command his people to act in one way, whilst at the same time reserving for Himself the discretion to act in another way. Or is that His sovereign right?

Others have argued that the apparent difference in approach of God during the developing history of the Israelite nation, and the message of peace and love for enemies spoken by Jesus, is only an issue of timing. Whilst in the Old Testament God's judgment on the disobedient was immediate and summary, the judgment for disobedience in the 'New Testament era' will have exactly the same outcome save that the execution of that judgment is being deferred until Christ returns and all mankind appears before God to answer for individual actions. The argument goes that God is not taking the same kind of direct action in today's world as he did in the early history of mankind, but that He nevertheless **will** act when the final reckoning comes.

I don't for one moment expect in a few sentences to offer an explanation that will satisfy every question that people may have in this regard. But two things at least seem certain to me. Firstly, before the foundation of the world, God conceived a 'plan for the fullness of time' that was to be fulfilled through Jesus and the purpose of which was to unite all things in heaven and on earth (Eph 1:9). It is the great and ultimate purpose of God. Secondly, then, it is inconceivable that God would allow anything to get in the way of the fulfilment of that plan because the whole of His purpose for the salvation of mankind and the earth that 'groans together with us' is vested in that plan. So neither Satan himself, nor the wickedness of mankind before the flood, nor the at times rebellious and disobedient chosen nation, nor the opponents of his chosen vehicle to fulfil his purpose, nor the Jewish religious and Roman secular authorities, nor the disciple (Peter) who wanted to 'protect' Jesus from his fate, nor the cost of our redemption (the life of Jesus), nor the cross itself would be allowed to stand in the way of the purposes of God. When the overwhelming military might of the opponents of Israel was ranged against them, did God really have any option but to lead his chosen people to defend themselves? Did women and children and animals and 'every living thing' have to be slaughtered as they were in some instances? I don't know, except to say that if God deemed it necessary we have to believe that it was so.

Life remains the most precious gift that we enjoy – witness the way that men and women, and indeed animals in their natural habitat, fight tooth and claw against illness and other threats to that life. For sure it isn't always endowed with all the physical and emotional blessings that we may wish, and for some life is so tough that it is undoubtedly more of a trial to be endured than a blessing to be enjoyed. But I think it remains God's will that we continue to reserve for life the highest degree of sanctity and respect. Even for tyrants who have denied such respect to other people.

Psalm 84

(John Kneller, Tranent)

This Psalm is probably best known for the statement in verse 10 that the **Psalmist 'would rather be a doorkeeper in God's house than dwell in the tents of wickedness'**. The reason he makes that statement is that he now has a new sense of fulfilment in his life. He has been through the mill of life and emerged with a deeper faith and a greater awareness of God's blessings, in spite of his experiences.

'How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts' are the opening words of the psalm and they tell of his delight in worship and praise. He says **'his heart and his flesh cry out for the courts of the Lord.'** He obviously has a deep need to worship and equally derives great satisfaction from the experience. Some of our own hymns, such as, 'Sweet the time exceeding Sweet' and 'With joy we hail the sacred day' express the same sentiments. We have all shared in great times of worship and refer to them as 'mountain top experiences.' As we all know this sense of elation can soon evaporate under the real pressures of life. As we read through the psalm we can see that his joy and faith are not superficial but the product of a life lived by faith and moulded by experience.

SATISFACTION

He longs for the living God. This suggests he has had some experience of dead gods. Has he been a worshipper at the gods of wood and stone? Perhaps he had worshipped the God of Israel but in a perfunctory way out of a sense of duty but without feeling or commitment. Was there a time in his life when he was not alive to God? Moses is commended in Hebrews 11 for his commitment in choosing to suffer affliction with the people in the wilderness rather than enjoying the luxury of Pharaoh's palace. When the time came to take possession of the land Joshua challenged the people to **'choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord'** Josh 24; 15. The Psalmist had learned that the uncommitted life was an unsatisfying life.

That same challenge - to choose - faces every generation. Some choose to dabble in the occult or mystery religions. Others consult the Gurus of the east for guidance and advice. There are endless choices before us but the Psalmist has found lasting satisfaction in the God of Israel. Whatever his previous experience had been he now delights in the worship of God. God is alive for him and is no longer remote and distant but close and personal. God has breathed renewed zest for life into him. How can he but delight in the praise of God.

SECURITY ...

... is a keystone of happiness. A secure marriage, job, home etc. are all key elements in our search for happiness. Safety and security are high on our list of 'must haves'. A locksmith after advertising all the safety services he could provide ended the list with this statement, 'but for eternal security you need Christ Jesus'. It was in the worship of the God of Israel that the psalmist had found his security. He had seen the birds nesting near to the altar (v3) and raising their young in the security of that place. It seemed to symbolise the security he had found at the altar as he worshipped and caused him to exclaim "how blessed are those who dwell in your house".

We tend to look for security in material possessions but in reality it is a spiritual value and Jesus points us in this direction. Jesus asks, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" and "seek first the Kingdom of heaven". In this life both adversity and prosperity are best handled in Godly service.

STRENGTH...

...is needed to fight the battle of life if we are not to be washed away. Especially so when life is hard. He refers to the valley of Baca and passing through it. My Bible margin gives 'valley of weeping' as an alternative reading. From the context it sounds a very dry, arid, bitter place and the psalmist has passed this way. It typifies a life that is hard, bleak and unsatisfying and yet he says God makes wells of water to spring up and pools of rainwater to appear and refresh. These verses seem to indicate a hard and difficult period in his life, yet rather than being embittered by the experience he sees the hand of God blessing him through them. His confidence is that if we live our lives in God's service we shall go from strength to strength (v7). The hymn writer puts it this way, 'Each victory will help us some other to win'.

The psalmist has obviously found satisfaction, security and strength in the service of the Living God. That is why he values (v10) **'a day in God's courts of greater worth than a thousand outside'**. He says **'I would rather stand in the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness'**.

Today people dabble in religion and the occult in their search for light and fulfilment. The psalmist has found the way by seeking out the Living God in his life and worship. He stands as a sure example for us that we can still find the same sense of satisfaction, security and strength by seeking God. But to have them we shall have to seek them in his service and worship. We will have to learn to trust Him as the psalmist had learned. Nor will they be won easily or carelessly but by commitment and dedication. It is as faithful sons and daughters that we shall learn to relish and delight in the worship of our God and enter into His courts with joyful praise.

God's Justice

Rose M. Payne

One thing that drew me to belief in God when I was a small girl (and I admit this was not the best reason) was that the world was badly in need of some justice. This was the era when the whole horror of the Nazi concentration camps was being revealed. Hitler had committed suicide, but if he had been brought before a court, there was no way in which the punishment could be made to fit his crimes. In those days a person was hanged for committing only one murder, so what could be done with a criminal who had sent millions to their deaths? Human justice cannot deal with such things. Then there was Stalin who, we later learned, was liquidating people on the same scale, but he also escaped any kind of punishment and died a natural death. If there were nothing beyond the law courts in this world, then these two atheists had got away with their crimes. Meanwhile we in school would get our knuckles rapped for minor infringements of the rules, and I could not believe in an unjust universe. The scripture says, **"it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment"**, (Hebrew 9:27) and **"we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"** (Romans 14:10).

These days there is an assumption that Christians should not be frightening their hearers by talking about judgment and punishment, but we should restrict ourselves to speaking of the love of God who wishes to save us all. This might be the right course to follow if we were mostly addressing people who were suffering under a sense of guilt for their sins. But nowadays is it not rather the case that people imagine God to be so tolerant that they can do as they please? It may be that the reason why the preaching of Christianity falls on such deaf ears today is that we almost fail to mention judgment at all. **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"**, says Proverbs 1:7, but how much fear, in its proper sense of awe, respect and reverence, of God is there about today?

Jesus included very many solemn warnings of judgment in his message. These would seem to be a very necessary part of the Gospel, because when the devil sees one of his own likely to escape his trap, he puts up a fight to keep that soul. In my case, it was as if he said, "Wait a moment! If you invite Jesus into your life, you won't be able to have your own way any longer!" While we should be encouraging hearers to accept the Gospel because of all its benefits, they also need to be warned about the consequences of rejecting it, as this helps them to come to a decision. We must of course be tactful in our preaching and keep in mind, as did Paul, **"lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"** (1 Cor. 9:27).

... Is it that... people imagine God to be so tolerant that they can do as they please?

An argument frequently brought up is that a loving God would not send anyone to eternal punishment. But what would be the alternative? For the saved to get to heaven and find there all the most unrepentant people who ever died? That cannot be, because even a patient Saviour is finally going to say to some **"depart from me, ye that work iniquity"** (Matt. 23:7).

When there is some disaster or crime, a religious service is usually called to pray for the victims and comfort the bereaved. But what can a truthful preacher of the Gospel say? A number of people have found themselves suddenly removed to the next world without time for repentance, and the scriptures do not give any grounds for hoping that they will have any other opportunity. The only real message for the mourners is that we should all repent and accept God's mercy without delay.

A proper appreciation of God as a judge produces some good results. The world is given to uttering vengeful thoughts about criminals, such as hoping that they may rot in prison. Of course lawbreakers should if possible be caught and restrained from committing any more crimes for the sake of their future victims. But the Christian can remember: **"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head"** (Romans 12:19, 20). There will be no miscarriages of justice with God, and if there are any extenuating circumstances, he will know of them.

Christians need have no fears about judgment, for, **"he... shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life"** (John 5:24).

THE SEVEN LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES (8)

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)

LAODICEA



Laodicea was a city of southwest Phrygia located in a fertile valley of the Lycus river, a tributary of the Meander. It was founded by Antiochus the second in the 3rd century BC and named after his wife Laodice. Laodicea is associated with Colossae (10 miles east) and with Hierapolis (6 miles north). The city was at a very important crossroad. From Laodicea a traveller could take, for example, the road west to Ephesus and Miletus, the road north to Pergamum and the road south to Attalia. Its strategic position made the city a prosperous commercial centre, especially in Roman times. It was famous for its banking services, its woollen industry and its work in the field of ophthalmology. The medical school there specialised in the

dispensing of collyrium, used as an eye-salve and a cosmetic.

Laodicea always had problems with its water supply. Water was piped from hot springs some distance away and usually arrived lukewarm. We read: **"I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth"** (3: 15,16).

Many gods and goddesses were worshipped in Laodicea. Coins and inscriptions refer to Zeus, Dionysus, Helios, Nemesis, Serapis, Mithras, Hera, Athena, Tyche and Aphrodite. Laodice was also worshipped. The pagan citizens especially revered Apollo, the god of prophecy, and Asklepios, the god of healing. Truly, the saints there were in a pagan world with its false standards, its false values and its false gods. Quite a challenge for them! Brothers and sisters in the Lord, I believe we face a similar challenge today.

TITLES OF JESUS

We read: **"And unto the messenger of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God..."** (14). Amen is an interesting word. It is the same word in Hebrew, Greek and English. Jesus often said "Amen, Amen" to introduce new revelations of the mind of God. (They are translated "verily, verily" in the A.V.) Luke uses the phrase "of a truth" instead of "Amen" and, in consequence, throws light on the meaning of the word.

Jehovah's Witnesses like the title: "The beginning of the creation of God", because they say it proves that Jesus is a created being. But "beginning" translates the Greek word *arche* and means beginning in the sense of origin, source, the active cause of the creation of God. Paul once described Jesus as the **"firstborn of every creature"** (Colossians 1:15b). "Firstborn" is the Greek word *prototokos*. W.E. Vine has written: "...in His relationship to the Father, expressing His priority to, and pre-eminence over, creation, not in the sense of being the first to be born". Paul went on to say to the Colossians: **"For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in the earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers (angels?); all things were created**

by Him and for Him: and He is before all things and by Him all things consist..." (1: 16,17). These words tie in with what the apostle John said: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1: 3).

RICH AND POOR

God sees things differently from the world. The Laodiceans were rich in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of God they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (17b). "With respect to the true riches they are mere beggars" (Beasley-Murray). Severe and wholesale action was required to save themselves. They needed proper wealth from God, the right and white clothing from God and the perfect eye-salve from God to cure them from blindness. It is interesting to note that Laodicea was famous for its black wool and for its world-famous collyrium, mentioned even by the famous Pergamene physician, Galen. God spoke in terms that the saints in Laodicea would fully understand.

KNOCK AT THE DOOR

When I read verse 20 of this chapter, I see in my mind's eye the famous painting by Holman Hunt entitled: *The Light of the World*. The church in Haddington once used the painting in a gospel tract with the heading: *What the Artist left Out*. What the artist left out was, of course, the latch on the door. The door could only be opened from the inside. They wrote: 'Thus the artist, by painting the door without a handle, clearly demonstrates that each of us alone is responsible for responding to the knock of Jesus. We either allow Jesus to assume care and control of our lives or we shut Him out. Only we can operate the latch of our heart's door and let Jesus in.'

I think it is right to use this illustration to win souls for Jesus. But I am struck by the fact that the words were originally addressed to a congregation – the congregation in Laodicea. Tragically, certain saints can get to a position that they have shut Jesus out of their lives. To be restored they need to repent; hear the Master's knock and voice; open the door and allow Jesus once again to come into their lives.

As I read these words I also think of the late brother W. Carl Ketcherside. In his autobiography, he wrote of a time of crisis in his life. 'And then I saw the answer to all of my longings, all of my loneliness, all of my lovelessness to others, ' Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and He with me'. I had never once invited Jesus to come in. True, I had never asked Him to stay out, but I had never shared with Him the kind of intimacy He had promised, the warm glow of companionship at the supper table, the convivial atmosphere in which friends talk and laugh and joke together, and let themselves go in the firm trust that they perfectly understand one another. I had come to Jesus thirty years before, but it is one thing to come to Jesus at His invitation, and a wholly different thing to have Jesus come to you at *your* invitation. I came to Him out of a state of alienation, like a refugee fished out of the muck and mire who needs to be cleaned up in the bath of regeneration and given an abiding place. But the statement to the Laodiceans was not made to those outside. It was made to those inside. It was Jesus who was outside. Regardless of the state of the things in the congregation with which one was identified, that one could have a royal guest sitting at his supper table and gracing his abode with His presence'.

THE THRONE OF JESUS

One day the faithful saints will reign with their Lord for ever (22). 'They will share His honours and triumphs' (Albert Barnes). The word "throne" appears over thirty times in the book of Revelation. The theme of the book is the triumph of the throne of God over all earthly thrones. Jesus is going to win the great battle of the ages. To be with Him is to be on the victor's side. Victory is assured! Victory is in Jesus!

Understanding the Seasons of Life

Lesson 3 - The Season of Self-doubt

(David Yasko, USA)

We are talking about the seasons of life and the seasons we are looking at will be faced, at some point, by all of us or by someone we know. Paul is very well qualified to talk about self-doubt. Look at what he wrote to the Corinthians. *1 Corinthians 2:3: "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling."* Paul could give advice about self-doubt because he faced it. Whenever we think about Paul we think about the man who was bold and wasn't afraid of anybody. But this verse shows another side of him. He was weak, he was timid, and he was under so much pressure that he didn't know what to do next. The letter to the Corinthians was written within three years of the death of Jesus so Paul was pretty young when he wrote it. When he writes to Timothy, it's much later in Paul's life, so he's able to say, "here's how you face down your doubts." *2 Timothy 1:7: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."* God wants to take us through this season so we can grow in this season. Before we look at Paul's advice to Timothy, let's take a minute and look at a couple of reasons the season of self-doubt comes on us, and then at four ways we can respond.

1. Failure.

That was **expected**, wasn't it? When we fail, self-doubt overwhelms us. When we lose our jobs or are out of work for several months we are overwhelmed and start feeling "will I ever work again." Or when we fail at a relationship. Maybe our marriage dies, or a good friend walks away. We think, "Can I make a relationship work again." Or when we fail with our children. Or when we fall into a temptation. We start to doubt ourselves.

2. Success.

That was **unexpected**, wasn't it? Success brings us self-doubt? Sure. Many times we face a season of self-doubt right after a great success in our lives. For one time, it all went the right way and you set sales records, or you set a production record, or you made the best grades you've ever made in your life. And then the realization hits you; "how can I live up to this?" Or worse, "the best I've ever been able to do, is what's going to be expected from here on." And you don't know if you've got it in you. A Yale University study indicates that 33% of Americans feel like they can't live up to what is expected out of them. A third of us feel like frauds. And the ones with the most self-doubts are the most successful. You'd think that the higher we climbed up the ladder the more self-assured we'd be. But it's exactly the opposite. When we find ourselves here, there are many responses we can choose.

FOUR WAYS TO RESPOND TO SELF-DOUBT

1. One way is to listen to our doubts.

We've all done that. That's when we sit back and begin agreeing with our doubts. "Yes, it's true. I'm good for nothing." And we start kicking ourselves and putting

ourselves down and scolding ourselves. Listening to our doubts doesn't work. We close the curtains and kick back and feel miserable.

2. *The second is to ignore our doubts.*

If listening to our doubts makes them big, ignoring them makes them huge. Remember doubting Thomas? He wanted to ignore his doubts about the risen Jesus and Jesus wouldn't let him get away with it. He said, "Look at my hands, look at my side, don't ignore it." Jesus can handle the fact we have doubts. In fact, he's bigger than our doubts. So don't ignore them. Ask Jesus to help us through them.

3. *Third, we can lie to our doubts.* That just means we tell ourselves they're not real. Look, there's only so long we can put a tape on before we go to sleep that says, "You will never fail." Or "You can do anything." Here's the truth: We're going to fail and we can't do everything.

4. *Or, we can tell our doubts the truth and act on that truth.* The great thing about the Bible is that it's the truth. It's not enough just to know the truth we also have to act on that truth. We may know the truth, but not everybody acts on the truth and that's going to be the difference in heaven and hell. I cannot be any plainer. Not acting on the truth results in us just being stuck in the season. Because we know the truth, we just haven't done anything about it. So we need to look at Paul's advice on the actions we must take if we want to get out of the season of self-doubt. The key word here is actions. Remember, if we do nothing, we stay there. Now, we will have four facts and four actions we need to take on those facts.

FACT 1: I AM INFLUENTIAL.

ACTION: BE AN EXAMPLE.

Paul said to Timothy: since you are influential, decide to be an example. *1 Timothy 4:12* **"Do not let anyone treat you as if you are unimportant BECAUSE you are young. Instead, be an example to the believers with your words, your actions, your love, your faith, and your pure life."** (NCV) Circle that word "because." There's always a "because" isn't there? For Timothy it was "because I am young." For Moses it was "because I can't talk so well." With Jeremiah it was "because they won't listen." For Sarah it was "because I'm too old God can't use me." We can always find a reason why God can't use us. Too young, too old, too much education, too little education. And Paul writes to Timothy and says, "don't let anybody look down on you, and don't let "because" get in your way." You know who the main detractor in my life is? Me. We struggle the most with ourselves. We tell ourselves how God can't use us because ... of our pasts, or our presents. But he can and he will because God looks at us and says, "You are an important, influential person."

Now, is it big headed to see ourselves as important and influential? Well, real humility isn't seeing ourselves as less important. Real humility is seeing God as most important, and others as more important. We are all important in God's sight and he can use us and we can act on that truth. So be an example because we are being watched. We're being watched by our kids, we're being watched by others kids, we're being watched by our husbands and by our wives. And we are influencing their lives, either for good or for bad. You say, "How can I be an example?" In that verse,

Paul gives us five examples to work on.

- Our words (what comes out of our mouths),
- Our actions (what comes out of our lives),
- Our love (what comes out of our hearts),
- Our faith (what comes out of our soul) and
- Our lives (what comes out in our relationships).

Paul makes this much simpler over in *1 Corinthians 11:1*: "**Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.**" Paul says, let your role model be named Jesus. When we make him our role model, that can't help but rub off on the people we influence. We are never too young or never too old to make an impact.

FACT 2: I AM INADEQUATE.

ACTION: DEPEND ON GOD.

You're thinking, "I knew that. That's why I'm deep in the season of self doubt." I'm not trying to build false confidence. True confidence can only be built on truth. And the truth is, I am inadequate in a lot of areas in my life. I can't even meet my own needs. That's why we depend on God. *2 Corinthians 3:5*: "**Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.**" Learning that lesson was what pushed Paul into greatness. Sometimes seasons of self-doubt come into our lives to remind us of the fact that God is the one we find our confidence in. Let me give you a pretty common cycle of life. We are dependent on God and things are going great and so we decide to lighten his load a little bit. So I get less dependent on God and more dependent on me. Then I fall flat on my face and run back to God for my dependence. And things get good, so I decide to depend on God a little less and me a little more and, bam, I'm in a vicious circle. We are too fragile not to depend on God. In fact, God created us to depend on him and when we don't, we lose. *John 15:5* "...**Apart from me you can do nothing.**" You can't love, you can't care, you can't live ... apart from God. You don't have it in you. But you don't have to have it in you, God already does. *Philippians 4:13*: "**I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**"

FACT 3: I AM INVALUABLE.

ACTION: USE OUR GIFTS TO SERVE OTHERS.

We're invaluable because we are one of a kind. Nobody on earth has the exact same combination of gifts that you do. That makes you invaluable. Did you see where they recently auctioned off some of Princess Diana's clothes? One lady paid \$100,000 for a gown. Somebody asked her why she paid it and she said, "Because when I put it on, I feel like a princess." Why do people pay so much for stuff like that? They're one of a kind. There's nothing else like it in the world. We're all one of a kind. There is no one else like us. And we never feel more like children of a king than when we let his gifts live in our lives. That's where the joy of serving others comes in. Paul's advice to Timothy is found in *2 Timothy 1:6*: "**For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you.**" And in *1 Timothy 4:14*: "**Do not neglect your gift.**"

There are two things there. First, take the gift already in us and use it so that it will grow. Second, don't neglect what God has given us. When self-doubt settles in for

a season we are tempted to become spectators. Oh, I'll cheer for you, but that's all I can do. Hang on, God's the coach and he wants you in the game. In fact, he's got a place for you that nobody else can fill. And if you're not filling it, somebody is being cheated. Get out of the stands and get into the game. *1 Peter 4:10: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others."* Life is like a game of volleyball. As long as you're serving, you'll never lose.

FACT 4: I AM INCOMPLETE.

ACTION: DECIDE TO GROW.

Sometimes we feel self-doubt because we're just not perfect ... yet. We are all unfinished masterpieces. We're masterpieces, we're just not finished. And we grow into completion. I don't want to get through the seasons of my life, I want to grow. I want to come out of them better than when I went into them. *2 Peter 3:18: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* When we grow, we get to know him better, and that's what God wants. Self-doubt can drive us to depression or it can challenge us to grow. Hears something for newer Christians to think about. It's easy to look at older members and get intimidated. They're spouting Bible verses and you're just trying to make it through the day without cussing. And you think, "Will I ever catch up." If you have been a Christian 10 minutes and are growing, you are miles ahead of the person who's been a Christian 10 years and have decided they know it all. What pleases God isn't how much we've achieved, it's how much we are growing. So we make the decision to grow. Now how do we start? *1 Timothy 4:15: "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, and we will see your progress."*

Diligence requires work and the things that are the most helpful are the most difficult to do. You don't enjoy going to the gym and getting hot and sweaty. But when you're finished, you see the benefit. The same thing is true about reading the Bible and praying and things like that. After we finish, we see the benefit. Now most of us don't want anybody seeing our progress. We want them to see when we're done. But, when we allow God to take us through the season of self-doubt he rewards us. *Ephesians 3:20: "He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."* When we let God work in us, significance comes out of self-doubt.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

A father wanted to read a magazine but was being bothered by his little girl, Shelby. She wanted to know what the United States looked like.

Finally, he tore a sheet out of his new magazine on which was printed the map of the country. Cutting out all the states, he gave it to Shelby, and said, "Go into the other room and see if you can put this together. This will show you our whole country today."

After a few minutes, Shelby returned and handed him the map correctly fitted together. The father was surprised and asked how she had finished so quickly.

Oh," she said, "on the other side of the paper is a picture of Jesus. When I got all of Jesus back where He belonged, then our country just came together."

"To the world you may just be someone, but to someone you may be the world."

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Thanks to our donors the work in Ghana continues although, sadly, it is limited by declining contributions.

We help brothers to travel considerable distances to evangelise and a brother in the eastern part of Ghana has been travelling to Togo where he has recently had five baptisms. These include a fetish priest who has now destroyed all the implements of his previous worship. As there is insufficient water there for baptism, as well as shortage of funds, they have to delay baptizing until there are enough converts to fill a taxi to take them to a suitable place for immersion.

Your contributions have also enabled some church meeting places to be completed as well as benches on which to sit.

A sister who needed surgery because of a difficult birth was not allowed to leave hospital until the fee was paid. We have paid this and she is now home with her baby boy. Other medical cases include hernia operations. The co-operative business, which we helped a number of sisters to form together a few years ago, is still thriving.

Those wishing to help in this work please make cheques payable to Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund and send to treasurer:

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

The Historical Survey of Churches of Christ in the British Isles

Here is what one reader writes of this book: "It was about 40 years ago when I found the Church of Christ. Having come from a Church of England background, my grandfather being a Canon, it was important for me to know the history of the Lord's Church in order to reinforce my belief that it was the right church for me, and not just an American sect. Had this book been around in those days it would have quickly fulfilled my need. It supplies a comprehensive view of our history, plus some touching and inspiring accounts of the faith and struggles of brothers and sisters who lived in days gone by. It is a book to be kept, and recommended, for subsequent generations to explain who we are and what we believe." – SMW

I believe that **The Historical Survey** is an extremely important book that goes a long way towards filling many of the gaps in Church history that have prevented us understanding the historical influences on the Church. Whilst a book of this nature could never be exhaustive (though it probably exhausted those most closely involved with its production) this book of over 300 pages is packed with information. I suspect that had it not been compiled over the last 10 years or so, it would never have been written and the efforts of the main contributors and those who assisted, some of them now deceased, are to be warmly complimented. They have left future generations a lasting legacy. This is not a

narrative or a story, but a book that can be picked up anytime and enjoyed as it highlights some of the key people and events that have shaped the Church of today.

This book is superbly presented and deserves to be bought and read - and at a cost of £9.77 including post and packing it is very affordable. May I urge you to make the long hours of research and writing truly worthwhile by obtaining a copy? They are available from:

Mrs Julia Clark, Pennine House,
Strachan, Banchory, Kincardineshire,
Scotland. AB31 6NL, or

Mr Frank Worgan, 11 Stanier Road,
Corby, Northants, England. NN17 1XP

Enclosing payment of £9.77 per copy with cheques payable to: "BRITISH BIBLE SCHOOL (BOOK FUND)"

Editor

Help a Christian School in Cameroon

The following letter was sent via our previous editor, Bro James Gardiner. James has some previous knowledge of the work in Cameroon. The SS can only ever carry a limited number of such letters and the policy, space permitting, is to limit such items where the 'bona fides' can be verified from within the UK. That said, it remains a personal/congregational decision as to how to react. Editor

"Greetings to you in Jesus' name from Cameroon. My husband and I are members of the Church of Christ. My disabled

husband and I are schoolteachers. We resigned teaching in denominational schools and opened ours in order to teach the truth of the New Testament doctrine.

After compiling the required documents, the government of our country gave us the approval. We have started already in a rented building with an enrolment of 150 children. The school is for children from 4-5 years for the Kindergarten section and 7 - 13 years for the Elementary section. Our village chief has offered us land. At the moment we have brethren in Christ who teach the New Testament religion as well as secular subjects following our National Syllabus.

Brethren, if we can have aid to help us pay our teachers for some years, we (through God's grace) will be able to accumulate funds collected as Tuition Fees for some years or more to erect even a wood building. One Teacher of Grade 1 Certificate earns USD100/month (just over £50). The 6 teachers payments means that we are not able to save money for the building.

In Cameroon, there is no Christian Elementary or Kindergarten school - not to talk of a secondary school. What we have here are: Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Full gospel Mission Schools, etc. Our dream is that we want to plant this school so that brethren should not send their children to these denominational schools in the name of religious studies. I am pleading for you to come to our serious aid in Jesus name.

Yours in Christ,

FONKENG FLORENCE
Queen Nursery and Primary School
Small Ekombe - Mbonge SWP
PO Box 556, Kumba Meme,
Republic of Cameroon.
Email: gnpsekombe@Yahoo.com

Coming Events

Saturday Evening Meetings at Stretford.

To be held in the Green Hut,
538 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester.

Each meeting will start at 7.00 pm and
will consist of:

A Gospel Topic, followed by
Light refreshments, concluding with
Open Discussion.

Dates and speakers:

21st April 2007
John Morgan, Hindley
22nd September 2007
Mark Hill, Loughborough
20th October 2007
Ernest Makin, Wigan.

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WORKSHOP

**Thursday 30th August to Saturday
1st September 2007**

We are pleased to announce that we
will be holding our Second European
Christian Workshop at Lancaster
University.

The Theme will be:
*Growing Strong Hearts
And
Strong Churches*

Last year we had 53 people from 11
countries and they enjoyed the
experience.

DON'T MISS OUT!!

The speakers that have been
confirmed so far are:

*John Mooney (UK),
Vince O'Donovan (UK),
Jason Sneathen (UK),
Alexander Malirrytos (Greece),
Randy Lowery (USA),
Terry Briley (USA).*

We are also planning to hold
Ladies Classes as well.

**Early Bird Offer: The fee will be
£95 if you book before 30th April.**
After this the fee will be £105.

If you want further information then
please contact:
Stephen Woodcock – (01942) 211479
Or E-mail:
stephen.woodcock@hotmail.co.uk

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YOU THERE**

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