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Editor's Introduction

If you read the last issue of YPS you would have noted that we had fewer articles than normal. Well, in this issue we are back on track with four very interesting articles. There is quite an emphasis on the use of your mind so I hope you find them helpful. We have a number of new writers coming on board so watch this space, as they say, over the coming months.

Stephen Baker

THOUGHTS ABOUT THINKING:

Conformed or Transformed?



BY MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE GRANTHAM, ENGLAND

The volume of the white noise simulator was slowly raised in the college library until it was at its full capacity. Nobody stirred, heads were down, and no one noticed the steady increase of background noise. Suddenly everyone's head came up wonderingly; had the volume got just a bit too loud? No, the volume had been muted and the thing that caused the surprise was silence.

It is said that it is difficult for a fish to describe water for the very reason that it is completely immersed in it. Likewise, the difficulty of trying to critique the culture in which we live is because we will be more affected by it than we think. In this article I want to ponder some more of the things that I find a challenge to me living a Christian life. Bear in mind that I think that modern living has probably made living a Christian life more difficult than ever before. You may not struggle with the same things or to the same extent as I do, but my purpose, as with all of these articles, is to try and encourage you to look around and consider

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the following:

1. Whether there are factors in our modern world that we cannot escape, and
2. How we are going to deal with these issues so that we do not become 'conformed¹ to this world', Rom. 12. 2.

Argument or atmosphere?

It is a simple fact that over time things change. The fact that it is gradual means that it is often harder to notice than if someone comes along and tries to convince us to make an immediate change. It is suggested that over the 'modernization' of the past 150-200 years there has been a steady process of secularization² going on leading ultimately to faith becoming 'privately engaging but socially irrelevant'. This is different from secularism in that it is a philosophy and needs to be adopted through convincing by argument. Secularization, however, has simply been happening.

In his book *The Gravedigger File*, Os GUINNESS suggests two things are behind this:

1 - *The Displacement of Religion* – By way of illustrating what has happened he invites us to look at the silhouette of the major city skylines of the western world back in the eighteenth century and compare them with what they look like now. Back then there was the dominance of church architecture whereas now, with great diversification in areas of authority, the churches, even with their great spires, are dwarfed by the office block skyscraper, symbolic of man's confidence in self to manage his own affairs.

2 - *The Disenchantment of Religion* – with the loss of authority over so many areas the church was then hit with wide-ranging rationalization in thought, but more subtly perhaps, by its functional use in the development of technology. If you want something done then figure it out, there is no need to rely on divine intervention; if you plan it well enough then you can do it.

As man's ability to be able to provide answers for himself increased, so the need to acknowledge a superior power became less needful; it wasn't

necessarily that God was deliberately pushed out but that He simply became irrelevant to everyday living. With this attitude, why would anyone bring their faith to their work, and so faith increasingly became privatized. Add to this the ease by which we can communicate and move about and the multitude of different ideas that get thrown into the mix in a pluralistic society leading to doubt as to how the claim to exclusive truth can be sustained, and we have a potent, anti-God, or at the least a God-not-needed, atmosphere.

The challenge to us centres, then, on the great claim of the Christian, Jesus Christ is Lord. If He is Lord then He must be Lord of all! It should not simply be a case of heading out to do that job, study or leisure activity, but heading out to do it *as a Christian*. Have I ever thought through what that means, to own Him as Lord over all? Not to do so demonstrates just how far the atmosphere of secularization has entered into our way of thinking and living.

This challenge is played out in another way. Consider the consequence of a society where style is just as, if not more, important than substance! Or what if plausibility is just as, or more, persuasive than credibility! If the world cannot see our submission to the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of life, it will reinforce the idea that there are some areas where He is irrelevant. Thus, it becomes just a personal choice, for my personal pleasure, whether I follow Him or not.

The test of technology - for humanity

Functional rationalization has given rise to the attitude that if there is a problem or challenge then we can fix it. This has led to many amazing and life enhancing things. When we enter the world of biotechnology, however, we head towards difficult territory. Co-author of *How to be a Christian in a Brave New World*³ NIGEL CAMERON comments, 'Technology is the story of our "conquest of nature." Now we have added human nature to "nature." The long story of our gaining "dominion" . . . has taken a fresh turn. We are working on getting "dominion" over ourselves'. The people in

Genesis chapter 11 desired to build something to make them a name; some in our generation want to go further, to make ourselves! To have the ability to work at this level means man has the potential for creating man in the image he wants him to be, rather than allow the truth that all are created in the image of God to determine what we do. This brings into play a whole range of other ethical issues. What is our thinking on such matters?

The test of technology⁴ – for us personally

If secularization is the white noise of society, technology can become the white noise of personal living. How much time in the day am I free from the radio, TV, computer, tablet, smartphone, etc? When was the last time I ensured that that which comes through the domain of the Prince of the power of the air did not cause interference with the still small voice of the King of Kings, or the earthly alerts asking for a response distract from the heavenly call to action? Here I ponder a couple⁵ of the challenges that I have felt:

Communication – the white noise factor – with billions of emails, texts and social media posts flying through cyberspace each day, it is easy to get sucked into continually responding to communications. Unlike the postal system where things were delivered once or twice a day, in keeping with today's 24/7 living, messages arrive any time of the day or night. Add to this 24-hour media and entertainment possibilities⁶ and we begin to realize that, instead of things stopping for us, if we are to obey the injunction to be still⁷ and know that (He) is God, Ps. 46. 10, then it is going to take a deliberate effort on our part. We will also need to remember that, in the impatience that is caused by the expectations created by instantaneous communication, we have a God who asks us to 'wait'⁸ on Him.

Information – Knowledge without knowing – with the world and its learning at our fingertips; with the next article just a link and a click away, it is so easy to always be reading but never knowing. Paul warns Timothy of those who would be 'ever learning and never able to come to the

knowledge⁹ of the truth', 2 Tim. 3. 7. With the resources available for digging into the depth of scripture, our generation has the possibility of great potential for God. Someone has commented, however, that, the longest journey in the world is that 'from the head to the heart', because learning doesn't become knowledge without time taken to sift and meditate. For the godly man of Psalm 1, his delight was to meditate¹⁰ in the law of the Lord day and night. The combined white noise of communication and simply getting knowledge needs to be turned off to allow the indwelling Divine Teacher the opportunity to whisper true knowledge to the heart.

The ultimate goal

In this series we have tried to think about some of the different pressures that might affect our thinking. Our aim was to encourage and inspire others to be aware of the subtle influences around us. The ultimate goal for the believer, no matter what generation they are in, is the same: 'Thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created', Rev. 4. 11. ARCHBISHOP WILLIAM TEMPLE spells out for us the whole life impact that this should have: 'Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose – and all this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin'.¹¹ May the world see in us a people transformed through the renewing of our minds proving what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God, Rom. 12. 2.

¹ 'To fashion or shape one thing like another', W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary*.

² Secularization: 'The process through which, starting from the centre and moving outwards, successive sectors of society and culture have been freed from the decisive influence of religious ideas and institutions', OS GUINNESS,

The Gravedigger File, p. 51.

- ³ J EARECKSON and NIGEL M. DE S. CAMERON, *How to be a Christian in a Brave New World*, p. 33. There are further resources listed at the back of this book to explore these kinds of issues in more depth.
- ⁴ Although it may seem from what I say that I am against technology, this is not true. I am thankful that I live in an age of computers with all their potential for usefulness and good. I simply want to point out the subtle effect that these new technologies can have and the need for as great, if not greater, self-discipline in the basics of Christian living.
- ⁵ I have chosen ones that I have particularly felt the pressure of. Others could perhaps be thought about, e.g., how the quickly changing technology might affect relationships between generations, or the challenge of consistency across our 'real' and 'virtual' worlds, remembering that we are the same person whether in cyberspace or space time!
- ⁶ The possibility of sending out accurate, useful and wholesome programming for the amount of time it was on air was questioned by seasoned media man MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE way back in

1977 in a series of lectures called 'Christ and the Media'. When you consider the proliferation of channel availability in the digital age, we should be acutely alert to what we are taking in.

- ⁷ *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*: To be relaxed, slacken, desist, let alone.
- ⁸ Ps. 27. 14 among others. The idea is that of hoping in, trusting and being prepared to wait steadily and patiently until a thing is effected, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*.
- ⁹ Full knowledge; it has been got, tested and, as a result, has resulted in rejection if false, or submission to it if true. Summarized from the section in *What the Bible Teaches*, 2 Timothy 3. 7.
- ¹⁰ Has the idea of talking over something with oneself, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*.
- ¹¹ 'Beyond Opinion – Living the faith we defend', Ed. Ravi Zacharias, p. 326



Uniforms and Weapons

BY **ANDREW ROBERTSON** CHATHAM, ONTARIO, CANADA

'Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God', Eph. 6. 16–17 NKJV.

There is a big difference between the clothes we wear and the tools we use. Depending on the job or career you eventually choose, you may be given specific clothes to wear, and you will probably need to learn how to use the tools of your trade. If you are a surgeon, you will get very accustomed to wearing simple clothing called 'scrubs'. They have the resemblance of bed sheets and there's a good reason why. If you are going to be working around

open wounds and deep cuts, you're going to need clothing that doesn't get in the way, that is easily washed and that doesn't carry infection. And while the surgeon works through a procedure, those scrubs will be a part of him through the entire process.

But the tools a professional uses are a very different story. Before ever stepping into an

operating room and picking up a scalpel, that surgeon had better know more than just how to put on a pair of scrubs. There had better be some schooling on the resume. A lot of schooling in fact! Anyone can put on a uniform and look the part, but the person with the scalpel had better know what they're doing!

The same was true for Roman soldiers. Like modern-day soldiers or police officers, they were not just given a bundle of equipment and told to hit the battle lines. Training was involved. That training was not simply to learn how to put on the uniform, but, more importantly, to know how to use weapons effectively. A well-dressed soldier was useless to the Roman Empire. In modern-day police programmes, new recruits can spend months at a police academy before ever hitting the streets. They never know what circumstances they are going to face in the real world, and they need to be prepared for anything.

Bible translators are undecided on what Paul meant by his first two words in verse 16. In English he simply said, 'in all' - but what does that mean? Some translators thought that Paul meant 'above all', as though the following instructions were more crucial than the previous ones. But Paul has already told us to 'put on the *whole* armour'. We are not to minimize any part of the armour as more or less important. Other scholars decided that Paul was saying 'in addition to all' which seems to imply that these final pieces of armour were added on as afterthoughts. But again, all the parts of the armour were equally important in battle.

There is a third option that seems to make more sense when we see that Paul is transitioning to a different type of equipment. Up until this point, Paul has used the belt, breastplate, and shoes to help us picture the things we need to face our enemy. Can you see what they have in common? They are all types of clothing. They are pieces of the soldier's uniform, just like the surgeon's scrubs or the police officer's uniform and badge. But Paul is about to talk about a shield, a helmet, and a sword. The shield and the sword are not clothing items; they are tools. We *wear* clothing and uniforms but we must learn to *use* tools. We wear clothing and uniforms all the time but we use tools only when they are needed. So it is most likely that Paul was

saying, 'in all circumstances', as he begins to tell us about the protection we will need in order to stand and fight well.

You may wonder why this is a point worth writing a whole article about. What's the difference between the two types of equipment? Simply this: we must wear the truth, and righteousness and conviction all the time as Christian warriors. It needs to be clothing for us. It must saturate us until it becomes part of who we are. Our character must reflect these three key gospel realities. We must live for what is really there, and not simply for what we *think* is true. We must rest in the righteousness of Christ and we cannot trust our emotions. We must stand on the solid ground of the gospel of peace with unwavering confidence in our God who fights for us. This must define us as soldiers in the battle. It must become who we are.

But now Paul is turning from '*who we are*' to '*what we do*' at any given moment. Through life our circumstances will change, but we will always wear the gospel uniform. But, as circumstances change and our enemy attacks us in different ways, we must train well to use our weapons effectively against him. We must be ready to use our weapons 'in all circumstances', ESV.

Just like a police academy or a military training camp, training is a life-or-death necessity. It is not enough that we've been supplied with the weapons. We must train for the battle. We have a faithful Teacher who invites us to learn from Him as the first disciples did. He provides everything we need to prepare us for the enemy. He is patient and gentle. He will never leave us or forsake us. Our only hope in wartime is to surrender to His instruction and learn from Him through His word.



ADVENTURES IN ACTS:

Acts 21-22 - Trouble in Jerusalem

BY JEREMY SINGER BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

MONTEFIORE,¹ a modern Jewish author, describes Jerusalem as 'the most illustrious of cities'. It was an impressive city in Paul's day, but it was also a hotbed of religious fanaticism. In part, this was the reason for Paul's difficulty.

Commentators disagree over Paul's motives and actions during this visit to Judea's national capital. We will restrict our attention to four key questions in this article.

Why did Paul go to Jerusalem?

As ever, Paul was selfless in his service. He had been collecting money for poor believers in Jerusalem. His appeals to the Thessalonian and Corinthian churches had been successful, 2 Cor. 8. 1-5, Rom. 15. 26, so he was bringing this charitable gift along personally, with other trustworthy believers, 2 Cor. 8. 19. He would have deposited the money with the elders at Jerusalem, as on previous occasions, Acts 11. 30. The donors and amounts are not known to us! Perhaps they were not known to the Jerusalem believers either. However, each gift has been recorded in heaven's account books, 1 Cor. 4. 5.

Paul had great respect for the leaders in the church at Jerusalem. He referred to James as one of the 'pillars' of the church, Gal. 2. 9, and he was keen to spend time with James again.

In addition to his concern for the saints, Paul also loved the Jews, Rom. 10. 1. He longed for their salvation. At Jerusalem, he must have hoped for opportunities to witness to them. These opportunities were certainly afforded to him, although not as he might have anticipated. Do we have such an evangelistic burden for our friends and neighbours?

Was Paul expecting trouble?

Paul wrote a letter to the Romans before his visit to Jerusalem. He specifically asked them to pray for his protection, Rom. 15. 31. So it seems that he was anticipating difficulties. The believers at Tyre warned him of unspecified danger, Acts 21. 4. Subsequently the prophet Agabus tells him very definitely that he will be taken prisoner at Jerusalem, v. 11. So Paul was clearly aware of trouble awaiting him at Jerusalem.





How did Paul react to being arrested?

WIERSBE² describes Paul as ‘the misunderstood missionary’. Like the Lord, Paul was unjustly accused by the Jews, ‘His own received him not’, John 1. 11. However, Paul did not lose his dignity. He did not cause a nuisance. Instead, he submitted to the governing authority, Rom. 13. 1, while claiming his rights as a Roman citizen, Acts 22. 27.

Paul seized the opportunity to witness. This was almost certainly preaching ‘out of season’, 2 Tim. 4. 2. Nevertheless, Paul was able to give an account of his dramatic conversion. This is the second of three personal testimonies from Paul in Acts. We notice subtle differences between chapters 9, 22, and 26. Each time, the Lord’s glory gets brighter (cp. 9. 3; 22. 6; 26. 13). Also, Paul’s mission is expressed more clearly (cp. 9. 6; 22. 10; 26. 16-18). In summary, Paul never tires of telling of Christ’s sovereign claim upon him. Can we be similarly outspoken regarding our faith?

¹ SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE, *Jerusalem the Biography*, Orion Books, 2012.

² WARREN W. WIERSBE, *Be Daring (Acts 13-28)*, 2004, Cook Communications.

Paul was never insensible to the risks attached to his service for Christ. He had already endured tremendous hardships, some of which he catalogued for his Corinthian critics, 2 Cor. 11. 23-33. He was ready to suffer and even to die, Acts 21. 13. Do Christians lack such resolve in contemporary society? Ultimately, Paul knew he was in God’s hands. Like their Master in Gethsemane, Paul and his companions pray for God’s will to be accomplished, v. 14.

Should Paul have gone into the temple?

Once Paul, along with others, had agreed to take the Nazarite vows, v. 24, he was putting himself under an unnecessary obligation. He knew that he had ‘died to the law’, Rom. 7. 4, but he was paying observance to it. This was probably a judgement call in a grey area. Paul weighed up his options and decided to respect his Jewish brothers with their scruples of conscience, 14. 19. He was ready to answer for this at the judgement seat of Christ, v. 12.

The temple at Jerusalem was one of the largest religious buildings on earth at the time. Paul knew that the Lord Jesus had walked there, John 10. 23, and that the early church met there after Pentecost, Acts 2. 46. There were great historical associations with the temple. Can we point to places where we have seen great spiritual victories occur? Paul certainly could!

Mindfulness and the Bible

BY **GRAEME SMITH** WALLINGFORD, ENGLAND



A recent article from *Christian Concern* stated that 'mindfulness is gradually becoming a popular relaxation method for individuals, employers, health services, and now possibly schools'. They reported that Edward Timpson, Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, told MPs that mandatory lessons in mindfulness should become a 'normal part of the school day'. However, *Christian Concern* believes that 'mindfulness, as a practice, is rooted in the thoughts and practices of Buddhism, and is defined as the "mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment"'.¹ Others, however, disagree and believe that it is possible to practise mindfulness today, and not be involved in Buddhism. Whatever the origins of mindfulness the UK's National Health Service advocates that 'becoming more aware of the present moment can help us enjoy the world around us more, and understand ourselves better. Mindfulness is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to prevent depression in people who have had three or more bouts of depression in the past'.²

This article considers whether aspects of mindfulness can be practised within a Christian context.

Mindfulness emphasizes the use of meditation to break free from unhelpful thought patterns such as rumination. The believer who practises meditation on Christ will already be aware of the therapeutic benefits that are derived from this. King David knew how to meditate and wrote such words as 'I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands', Ps. 143. 5. The words translated 'meditate' and 'muse' here are similar words and both carry the idea of 'pondering'. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, meditation is defined as 'the act of giving your attention to only one thing, either as a religious activity or as a way of becoming calm and relaxed'. With mindfulness, the focus of the meditation is oneself; however, in the Bible the focus is never on oneself but rather on God, His works, and His word. The Psalmist made meditation a habit and this absorbed him constantly throughout the day. When we meditate in this way, our minds are being 'stayed' or kept by God, and the result is 'perfect peace', Isa. 26. 3.

As a side note, the society of today gives a lot of time to 'amusement', but amusement is the opposite of musing or meditation. Here the mind is distracted, and

kept from deep thoughts which arise during periods of quiet meditation.

Those who advocate mindfulness believe that it should become an integral part of life, suggesting that everything we do should be done in a 'mindful' way.³ The parallels with Christian meditation are obvious, as meditation on God needs to be an integral part of our daily lives. When we are taking a walk in the park we can meditate on the wisdom of God in creating such a beautiful world. Whilst singing hymns, we could focus our attention on the words that we are singing, allowing our minds to fully absorb the truth of the hymn.

With mindfulness, the individual is encouraged to take time to be still, and, if distracted, to keep returning the thoughts back to the subject of the meditation. The Psalmist could write 'be still and know that I am God', Ps. 46. 10, and we should endeavour to find time in our busy lives to be still and really 'know God'. Times of prayer and meditation are best conducted in a quiet, secret place, away from distraction, Matt. 6. 6.

Mindfulness teaches that thoughts should not be judged, but simply accepted as they are as mere thought events. Some Christians argue that the danger of Buddhist meditation is that by practising it you give up all control of your mind. We should therefore be on our guard, as the believer is taught to have an alert mind which is on guard against wrong thoughts, 1 Pet. 1. 13; 5. 8. Other believers have a real struggle with negative or even sinful thoughts entering their minds and some are even caused to doubt their salvation because of this. The scriptures would teach that it is not a sin when a wrong thought pops into your head, but it is when that thought becomes a longing desire, and that sin is committed, Jas. 1. 14-15. MARTIN LUTHER is reputed to have said concerning temptation, 'You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair'. We should remember that bad or negative thoughts are a product of our fallen nature, Mark 7. 20-23, but having them is not in itself a sin.

In conclusion, there are aspects of mindfulness that may be beneficial when practised within a Christian framework. As the Christian meditates, the benefits come from the mind being renewed, and more in tune with Christ than self, Phil. 2. 5, Eph. 4. 23.

¹ <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/education/growing-concerns-over-mindfulness-entering-schools>

² <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/mindfulness.aspx#different>

³ <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2012/06/09/7-easy-ways-to-be-mindful-every-day/>