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process tended to focus attention on the more hard-line exponents of each approach that then tended to radicalize the views of most of those he included alongside them.

It is suggested that a better approach would be to recognise these radical elements in a more practical way that also identifies broad commonalities. The analysis of Bediako highlighted this need by calling attention to the many complexities involved in engaging different cultures with the gospel, suggesting in the process that practitioners were often more complex and highly nuanced in their engagement than Bevans' findings suggested.

Upon examination it was discovered that the text-based models were not primarily related through their differences but through their similarities. The nature of the relationship was not, therefore, the dichotomous description Bevans provided, but was instead a much more complex process of dialectical interdependence. Instead of two unrelated polarities, the translation and countercultural models were found to be descriptions of the extreme boundaries of a single broad spectrum of context engagement postures. Further inquiry will be necessary in order to derive a more comprehensive understanding of the dialectical model this

implies, but for now it is sufficient to note that such a model exists, and that analysis of it is likely to be of greater practical benefit than the overly simplifying approach of the two models Bevan's advocates.

In closing, we can note the potential for linkage to be made here with the work of Paul Hiebert.<sup>25</sup> His 'critical contextualization' approach would seem to embody a basic framework for thinking through the dialectical approach being advocated above. Instead of the gospel being simply identified with culture, or acting as a rejection of it, he suggests a 'critical' process in which the particular culture being encountered is first carefully examined and assessed. He notes that this is not a distant missionary analysis, but a lived indigenous experience in which relevant aspects of the culture are deconstructed in light of the gospel. This is a methodological clue as to how the dialectical model may both affirm aspects of culture and critique others, or, at a global level, how it may be more inclined towards a positive assessment of some cultures but a negative view of others.

<sup>25</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, 'Critical Contextualization', *IBMR*, 11(3)(1987):104-112.

# Renewed Journey: A study of Philippians 3:10-11

John Lewis

**KEY WORDS:** *Church, mission, power, suffering.*

## I The Context of Ministry

In recent decades the church found confidence in its ability to understand society and connect emotionally with it. Christians around the world established a new and meaningful awareness of their surrounding cultures for the purpose of reaching out with vibrant relevancy. But recently it has become clear that this confidence no longer exists. We are travelling on a journey into a midnight of uncertainty and we do not know what the new dawn will bring. The effect on the church has been dramatic. Once self-proclaimed experts of the collective psyche, Christians in their multitudes have withdrawn to the blog, where, by way of an avalanche of chats, they wait for a clear way forward.

It is unlikely, however, that the type of clarity sought will ever emerge. The world will continue to roll forward in ever new ways and these will continue

to defy Christians' grasp and provide nothing of substance on which hang our plans. The new wine skins will not hold the old wine. Therefore there must be a fashioning of a new awareness if the church is to be faithful to our Lord's commission to preach the Gospel. Instead of seeking to know the world, God's people are called upon to know Jesus Christ with a new and revived passion, so that, through revived fellowships of faith, the world would come to know him.

Indeed, the church is not an institution to be fashioned according to its ability to connect with its neighbourhood but a living entity in movement through history. Each local church is a complex and unique collection of relationships, feelings, backgrounds, perceptions, emotional capacities, wounded hearts, dreams and hopes. To be sure, the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:15-16), each congregation or branch having its own distinct personality. The biblical passage for our consideration is a passionate cry of the heart that exhorts these distinct 'per-

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sonalities' to a full embrace of Christ in the fullness of his being. Indeed, in this part of Paul's letter, all knowledge, other than the knowledge of Christ, is cast aside as 'unspeakable filth'.<sup>1</sup> To know him is the goal to which we are called to set the course of our collective lives.<sup>2</sup>

## II Overcoming the Problem

At its most engaging Christianity is faith in the Word of God, encountered by a faithful and passionate people of the Spirit who seek revival in our time. However, the consumerism of our western society, impacting unnoticed upon many compliant Christian communities, has often left Christians with a minimalist vision high on ambition, but low on faithful discipleship. With fragmentary notions of the Reformation and revivals of the past, many Christians, possessed with a determined individualism, and fully aware of their many needs to be met, can sometimes portray more of an image of holy greed than humble and prayerful obedience to Christ.

Indeed too many Christians today, entrenched in prevailing societal thought patterns and attitudes, and unwilling to forsake it all for Christ through a total circumcision of the heart and a consecration of life, take on the unfortunate existence of being saints on the take. Often lacking fortitude and perseverance they deal with challenges and conflicts in ways that

would never be tolerated in the workplace or broader society. Sadly, they do so in contrast to a willingness to mature in Christ through trial and perseverance as they face difficult issues regarding self, others and the complexity of relationships. In contrast to Paul's passionate vision in Philippians 3:10-11, they seek to receive Christ's power, but they will not suffer with him. It amounts to a devotion to a fragmented Christ who is not found in the gospels. The impact on the churches has often been devastating.

## III Starting again with the Power of his Resurrection

Many churches are emerging out of a season of endless strategies, conferences, seminars and proposals with a collection of dreams and expectations that have never been realised, with hopes that have never been fulfilled, and with visions that are buried under the weight of too many failures. For some, and no doubt too many, the burden of church growth has taken them on a downward spiral, from passionate feelings that they were going to bless many, to feelings of despair that this vision would not be realised, and then, finally, no feelings at all. The way to avoid this numbing end is to go back to the beginning and start on a different footing.

The passage under consideration possesses a distinct Christology. It is an outlook on life, a world-view, in which Christ stands at the centre of Christian life and fellowship. We are called to know Christ, and live in him. The Christian's life must be possessed of a vision characterised by the life of

Christ and our longing to mature in embodying that life. Indeed, Christians must constantly turn to the hope that Christ offers to his workers and trust in his ability to bring renewing strength from the storehouse of his resurrection power. It is only Christ who can bring new life as he quickens and stimulates the whole moral and spiritual being.<sup>3</sup> Christ must be the basis of our ministries, our starting point and vision, and our hope during those inevitable days of distress, when our roaring flames of faith seem to struggle as tiny embers.

Those who are despondent and overcome by a sense of hopelessness must at least pause and reflect on the promises of the Word. There we find the assurance that those small embers of faith, reminders of a once great fire, now shy and fading, will flame again with holy love. Indeed, as we immerse ourselves in the Word and meet with the Lord of Life by way the illumination of his faithful Spirit, we do in fact find a new expectation and reality of ministry. From it we will begin to reach our world with something greater than social studies. We will touch them with our hearts; lives circumscribed by repentance and aflame with faith and love.

Large numbers of Christians have developed expectations of church life that are totally unrealistic. Instead of being guided by the gospel, they have turned to the thought patterns of their surrounding culture with all its false assertions and promises of success and fulfilment. Many pastors, unable to sustain the ferocious greed that has come to define so many of these fel-

lowships, walk away. For these pastors ministry has become a way without life, the painful passing of time in some vain effort to guide the ways of an organisation greedy for self-fulfilment, and on the take for grandeur. But often they cannot be helped. Unable to get what they want, their corporate anger increases and they cease to have purpose. After pursuing—with their own strange fervour—a multitude of *cul de sacs*, they eventually destroy their purpose for being.

The only hope for such churches, of which there are many, and their pastors, is a reformation that draws one back to the Word, and a revival of the heart that seeks for new life. They must forsake and repent and seek for Jesus and fullness of life in him. It is an incarnational vision, a life lived in love with Jesus Christ, as his life giving power nurtures our obedience and faithfulness. It is the longing that the narrative of our lives submit to the grand narrative of Christ. It is a way characterised by the life of the Lord, as it is revealed to us in the gospels, with its highs and lows, triumphs and disappointments, blessings and struggles.

It is a life that weeps at Gethsemane, longs to embrace Jerusalem, is distressed and troubled by desertion and loneliness, and is affirmed and blessed. It is a life that heals the hurting, proclaims the truth, confronts the wrong, and seeks to be in the Father's will.<sup>4</sup> It is a life that longs for prayer and yearns for holiness. It is a scene of many images, numerous thoughts, and

<sup>1</sup> G. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians* (Vol 43), (Texas: Word Books, 1983), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 143.

<sup>3</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 144.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:44; Matt 23:37; Mk 1:11, 14:32-42; Jn 17:20-26.

many feelings. It is an unpredictable narrative as diverse as the people who seek it.

But there is one common factor, a single thread that unifies the whole. It is a way that seeks constant intersection with the life of Christ. Ultimately, it is the way of the cross that leads to the glory of resurrection life. It is a Divine narrative that must characterise the narrative of our lives and be played over time and time again. Our reassurances cannot be in our search forever increasing successes, less still in our bitterness that we are not enjoying nobler days, but in our willingness to embrace the life of Christ at every juncture. We must shun what Karl Barth referred to as the sin of mediocrity<sup>5</sup> by going on in our mission of ascent to fullness in Christ with a resolute spirit. We must see our ministries through to the end with undiminished hope, which is the glory and strength of our faith.

The Word directs us to see our lives in the context of our journey completed and fulfilled. Only then, crowned in victory, will the full fabric of our journey come to light. We are not automated entities designed to find purpose in the rules of reasoned logic. We are more like waves that roll upon the shore; a myriad of shades and sounds moving forward, through an unavoidable submission to a divinely ordained passing of time, toward a state of peaceful bliss.

There is no escape from this sovereign chronology. All must capitulate to

the passing of the divine journey. For the people of God it is a journey of complexity and contradictions that can never be completely defined or fully reconciled, but that continually moves forward from Sabbath to Sabbath with the promise of a sweet resolution into the fulfilment of existence, the end of our labour and the celebration of our final Sabbath rest. Therefore, as we discard our shallow aspirations and monitors of accomplishment, and embrace the way of Christ, we will find ourselves on a different footing, inspired by true purpose and hope.

#### IV Suffering with Him

We never know what the next day brings, but whether we find ourselves alone at Gethsemane, or preaching to thousands, in the middle of a conspiracy to undo us, or giving hope to the hopeless, we must find our life in Jesus Christ, whose life and way is blessed and loved of the Father and empowered by the Spirit. In Christian life suffering never amounts to defeat but always offers the possibility to join with Christ and experience a kind of depth of understanding that can never be attained by any other means.

As we meet with Christ on his cross we discover his love and find a new light that guides us forward. With the Israelites of the Exodus, we discover in our desert experiences God's grace of guidance, provision, and covenant love. Indeed, through our submission to the Lord's embrace even painful screams from the depths of our being can be transformed into new journeys of hope in the wilderness, where we might build our sanctuaries and worship our Redeemer. The path that

Jesus took to the empty tomb was made up of many shades and colours, highs and lows, rejoicing and sadness, excruciating pain and hopeful praise. We should expect no less of ourselves; we who seek to follow after him.

Paul longs to share in the sufferings of Christ. His purpose is not to seek suffering for its own sake, but to know and experience the Christ who, out of the massive storehouse of his love, lived in full obedience to the Father and who gave totally of himself for the sake of all humanity. Paul wants to know what it is to love that much. Indeed, it is likely that Paul was fully aware that his mission would lead to his death. Yet as he reconciled himself to this expression of love he had full confidence that his Lord would deliver him into the hands of a glorious resurrection from the dead.

We would be right to interpret this as the fusion of Paul's faith in Christ and love for him. Ascent to the truth of Jesus Christ must lead to a submission of our beings. Geoffrey Bromiley superbly summarised Barth's consideration of the relationship between faith and love. According to Bromiley,

Barth affirmed that by the working of the Holy Spirit faith can be called 'the living and active reception of God's work in Christ.' But this reception must bear its fruit in our lives. There must be, according to the work of that same Spirit, 'a second and related act of self-giving in confirmation of what has been received in faith. This act of self-giving is Christian love.'<sup>6</sup>

#### V Conclusion

This passage under consideration here is a call from the heart. It is a passionate plea for fullness of life in Jesus Christ. The church today must finally rid itself of the many societal snares that entrap her and seek fullness of life in Christ by way of a renewal of the Spirit that leads to repentance, submission, faith and hope in the One who bids us to join with him. We propose here a courageous letting go of our securities to trust in the only one who can truly hold us securely and who longs to touch the world through open hearts.

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<sup>6</sup> Bromiley, *Karl Barth*, 214.

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<sup>5</sup> G. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1979), 205.