

Some Contemporary Issues: Group 3

1. MENTAL ILLNESS.

In England alone, 5 million people have help for mental illness each year. ¼ million are in-patients, 1½ million out-patients, at hospitals.

This is no new problem.

From early times Christians have written about it, and experienced it. Until last century it was regarded as the sphere of the minister, not the doctor.

1. Mental illness in 1977.

- The mind, and therefore the conduct, may be affected by a number of physiological conditions. This is the province of the doctor.
- But often the mind is disturbed for no apparent physiological reason. This gives rise to character disorders, extreme anxiety illogical fears; depression; melancholy, distortion of reality and delusion, and various physical effects.
- In modern society, this too is generally regarded as 'illness' for the doctor to treat:
 - like any other disease, it is outside the control of the patient.
 - even sin and crime are sometimes viewed in this way
 - it is no longer accepted that the symptoms may be spiritual in origin, and should be treated by spiritual means.
 - often the spiritual, counsellor is regarded as a meddlesome intruder, while the psychiatrist is the unquestioned 'expert'.
 - yet there is still profound disagreement about precisely what mental illness is, how it is caused, and how it is to be cured.

2. Mental illness in the Bible.

- i. So little do men understand spiritual-mindedness, that they sometimes mistake it for insanity. Mark 3:21, John 10:20, Acts 26:24-25.
- ii. Conviction of sin may give rise to symptoms which today would be called mental illness. Psalm 32:3-5, 38:17-18, 51:8-10.
- iii. So may spiritual desertion, Psalm 6:3-7, 88.
- iv. Sometimes people act insanely, to avoid troubles and difficulties. 1 Samuel 21:12-15,
- v. Some mental troubles have their roots in physical and mental exhaustion. 1 Kings 19:4-8.
- vi. It may be the result of sin. 1 Kings 21:4, 2 Samuel 17:23.
- vii. It may be a judgment from God for sin. Isaiah 57:20-21, Deuteronomy 28:15,28,34, Daniel 4:29-33, 5:22-23.

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- viii. It may be the result of sin and Satanic activity.
1 Samuel.16:14, 18:9-11, Ephesians 4:26-27.
- ix. Demon-possession can produce symptoms similar to mental trouble.
Matthew 4:24, 17:14-21, Mark 5:1-20.
- x. And there are personal situations beyond any human's understanding!
See John 9:1-3, and the whole book of Job.
Not all in trouble and turmoil are guilty of secret sin.
In some cases there is nobody who can discern what is going on.

3. Mental illness in a Christian fellowship.

- Correct diagnosis is essential. When possible, enlist the help of a Christian doctor or psychiatrist who has a Biblical understanding of human nature. There is no place for the careless or the self-confident in giving help; or for Freudian speculations; or for treatment which adopts ungodly values.
- For spiritual help, refer the sufferer to someone qualified to give such help, humbly, wisely, compassionately, prayerfully, using Scripture.
- The fellowship must be a place where the afflicted person finds acceptance, love, care and understandings; where peace of mind is promoted, not disturbed. It should be quick to give practical support to the person's family and friends
- It should be remembered that a good deal of mental illness can be avoided by:
 - sitting under a balanced ministry, which unveils all God has to say to sinners.
 - being more open with helpful Christian friends about our troubles and fears.
 - leading a balanced life, free from the excesses of exhaustion and idleness
 - never straying from the Physician of Souls.

Next week: Old age.

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2. OLD AGE.

"Youth is a blunder, manhood is a struggle, and old age a regret,"

This is the world's view

It believes that it is wonderful to be young, and dreadful to be old.

For a child of God, old age does not have to be a time of regret.

God's Word has wonderful things to say about old age.

Proverbs 4:18 - an ageing believer is not a fading light.

Proverbs 16:31 - if it is holy, it is something to be acclaimed, not ashamed of.

Leviticus 19:32 - it is to be respected.

Psalms 92:12-15 - a time of fruitfulness.

There are Biblical examples of these principles.

Moses - began his most productive period at 80. Exodus 7:7

Caleb - cried for challenges, at 85. Joshua 14:6-15

Anna - was still serving God, when very old. Luke 2:36-38

Paul - continued his work of spreading the Gospel. Philemon 1:9.

So old age can be a time of blessing and fruitfulness.

- it does have its particular problems and temptations
 - but none of these is unique: or is more than you can take: or is without a solution.
- 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Some particular problems and temptations of old age.

1. Loneliness. You feel like David in Psalm 102:6-7.
2. A feeling of uselessness. Like Barzillai in 2 Samuel 19:35.
3. Diminished strength and impaired health. Unlike Caleb in Joshua 14:11
4. Emotional problems - fears
 - resentment and bitterness
 - self-centredness and self-pity
 - false guilt and vain regrets

Some positive suggestions

- to make old age the time of blessing & fruitfulness God intended it to be.

1. Never retire from work! (though you will have to give up your job).

Proverbs 14:23, Ecclesiastes 5:12, Rev 7:15, 22:3.

Work is a divine ordinance - one of the good things of life.

2. Focus on what you can do, rather than what you can't do.

Romans 12:3 - evaluate what you can do

Job 12:12 – you do have something, to give the young (Titus – 2:1-5).

How wonderful if every ageing believer used his existing abilities in the service of Christ!

There are things which even the immobile can do!

3. Focus on what you can do for others, rather than on what they can do, or haven't done, for you.

This is the Biblical teaching laid down in John 12:24, Matthew 17:24, and Philippians 2:4.

4. Continue to grow and develop in every area of your life.

Never stop growing, or life will be a bore.

Intellectually - stimulate your mind

Socially - have a wide circle of friends

Spiritually – see Psalm 92:12-15 again.

How marvellous it would be if all the Christian folk who are older lived lives of fruitfulness and usefulness!!

Next week: Race.

Some Contemporary Issues: Group 3

3. RACE.

This message is not about 'immigration', 'nation', or 'culture'.
It is about race.

Racial prejudice.

- this is widespread in the country, especially against men and women who are black (whether British or immigrant).
 - some aspects of legislation have been discriminatory.
 - despite Race Relations Acts it is well-known that there is massive discrimination against black people in housing, jobs, etc..
 - black people are often discussed as if they are inferior.
 - people believe all sorts of fantasies about black people.
- many Christians are not exempt from racial prejudice.
 - some of the things apply to them which we have mentioned.
 - many never give a thought to the social injustices in our land.
 - some have absorbed worldly attitudes, and are uneasy about black neighbours, black superiors; and oppose racial inter-marriage.
 - some associate 'black' with 'sin' - but see Isaiah 1:18, Rev 12:3, 17:4.

The Bible does NOT teach:

- That Ham was cursed, and his descendants are to be subject to others.
- It was Canaanites who entered the curse, and it was fulfilled, in Joshua 9:23.
- That races are to stick to certain areas. It says that the length of a NATION'S prosperity, and its boundaries, are in God's hands, not its own. Acts 17:26.
- That racial inter-marriage is wrong. There are several such marriages in the Bible, and they meet with God's approval. The bars to marriage are religious, not racial.

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The Bible DOES teach:

- Every single person has the same dignity, rights, and responsibilities, for all men are made equally in the image of God.
Genesis 1:26-27, 9:6, Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, James 3:9.
- All men are sinners, Romans 3:10-23, 5:12-21.
Some cultures and communities are more wicked than others, but it does not follow that any particular RACE is more sinful than another.
People who are discriminated against may react badly - but the blame is to be put, not upon their RACE, but upon those who make race a cause for discrimination.
- All who are in Christ, are ONE.
Ephesians 2:11-21, Galatians 3:28, Acts 10:34-35, Revelation 5:9-10, 7:9-10.
Race, background, status, ability etc. do not come into it.,
Every believer is equally a brother, or sister in Christ.
Whoever or whatever he or she-is!

Some things to do.

- Get your thoughts on this subject from God's WORD, not from the WORLD.
The prejudice of: other .people is never to affect what we. do. See Galatians 2:14.
- Implement Scripture's teaching in your own life; in church life; and, as a citizen, do what you can to bring a distinctive Christian savour into society (Matthew 5:13).
- Be particularly careful to be welcoming and helpful to the immigrant.
Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:33-34, Deuteronomy 1:16-17.
- And see that the Gospel is heralded to ALL. Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15.

Next week: The place of women in the church.

Some Contemporary Issues: Group 3

4. THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH.

The drive today is for a unisex society where all distinctions between the sexes are obliterated. This spirit is invading the churches.

1. Men and women are equal.

- they are equally creatures made originally in God's image. Genesis 1:26-27.
- they are equally sinful, as fallen creatures. Romans 3:10-19.
- they are equally new creations, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:28. 1 Peter 3:7.

2. Yet God has assigned to them different roles.

Man is to lead; woman is to follow. (Who says one is preferable to the other)
Submission does not suggest inferiority; nor does it contradict equality - see 1 Corinthians 11:3, Romans 13:1, Ephesians 6:1, Hebrews 13:7,17.

- a woman may not have authority over men. 1 Corinthians 11:1-3. The reason? vv8-10. This is to be seen to be observed in the churches.
- a woman may not be the head of the family. Ephesians 5:22-23. As she is not qualified there, she certainly may not lead the church. See 1 Timothy 3:5.
- a woman may not speak in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:33-37.
- a woman may not teach or lead men. 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

1 Corinthians 11:5 is a problem to some. Paul is not likely to contradict himself (14:34), so it either refers to women doing this when men are not present; or to their conduct in public worship ('pray and prophesy' could mean this).

3. There are some things to note about this teaching.

- this teaching is not due to Paul's supposed bigotry - for he had a very high regard for women. See Romans 16 for example.
- his arguments are not based on custom (he told them to break with it - 1 Timothy 2:9-15); nor on the fact that first-century women were not capable of leadership (they certainly were!).
- but he appeals to God's order at creation, and his own apostolic authority.
- to disagree here is to undermine apostolic authority; to throw out what you don't like in the Bible; and thus to strike at the roots of the Faith. Arguments based on custom, ease and results, simply will not do.

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4. God puts an inestimable value on womanhood - especially godly womanhood.

- meditate on Exodus 22:22-24, Proverbs 12:4, 31:10.
- think about Old Testament women such as Sarah, Hannah, Ruth, Naomi, and the Shunammite woman.
- Consider our Lord's dealings with Simon's mother-in-law, the Syrophenician woman, the Samaritan woman, the lady with an issue of blood, the woman caught in sin, Mary Magdalene etc.
- remember the women who ministered to our Lord (Luke 8:2-3), the widows of Acts 6, Dorcas, Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Euodias & Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3).
- call to mind Ephesians 5:25,28,33 & 1 Peter 3:7.

5. There is almost no end to what a woman may do for Christ.

- she may sing and play in worship. Exodus 15:20-21, Psalms 68:24-26.
- pray and give thanks in the presence of others. Luke 2:36-38, 1 Timothy 2:8-9.
- witness to anybody. Mark 5:25-34, John 4:39, 20:17.
- children are her speciality - her own and others. 1 Timothy 2:15, 5:10,14. Exodus 20:12, 21:15, Proverbs 1:8, 6:20, 30:17. There are more women and children in the world than men!
- so is hospitality. See the general commands of 1 Peter 4:9, Romans 12:13, and the fine examples in 2 Kings 4:8-17, Acts 16:15, 18:26, Romans 16:2,13.
- and look often and long at 1 Timothy 5:9-14.

May all of us, men and women, find our hands full of suitable work for our Master !!

Next week: The sanctity of life.

5. THE SANCTITY OF LIFE.

Human life is no longer valued as it was. This is made clear by the rise of violence; and also by the debates on abortion, euthanasia etc..

1. Man is unique - he is made in the image of God.

When a man looks in the mirror, he and his image are:

- completely different - since one is real and alive, and one isn't.
- extremely alike - since the mirror-image is a copy of the original.

God is the Original. Man, as first made, is His image. The two are:

- completely different.
 - God has certain attributes which belong to Him alone, and man has nothing of them at all. These are called INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES.
 - God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable. Man isn't. He is finite, temporal, and changeable.
- extremely alike.
 - God has certain attributes which man, made in His image, also has. These are called COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES, and include being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.
 - God has these as eternal attributes (intrinsic); but man only has them because God gave them to him (derived).
 - So man does not have these things in the same way as God does. For instance, God's wisdom is eternal, infinite, unchangeable - and so are all His communicable attributes, in man these things are always finite, temporal and unchangeable.

It is clear that God is unique.

Yet man is higher than all His creatures. He is made in God's image.

God - the Original		Man the image
A Spirit		a living soul
Infinite	}	being
Eternal		wisdom
Unchangeable		power
		holiness
	justice	
	goodness	
	truth	finite
		temporal
		changeable
Completely different		(Incommunicable attributes)
Extremely alike		(Communicable attributes)

2. It is for this reason that God commanded "Thou shalt not Kill (Exodus 20:13).

That commandment is NOT about:

- killing animals. The covenant with Noah, which is still in operation, permits us to eat animals. The same covenant forbids the killing of man, as. He is in the image of God. Genesis 9:1-7.
- manslaughter. This is carefully distinguished from murder. Deuteronomy 19:4-6, 11-13.
- capital punishment. The state has, as a delegated power from God Himself, the right and duty to execute murderers, a right not given to individuals. It is because human life is sacred that this supreme penalty is laid down. Genesis 4:15, 9:6, Exodus 21:14, Romans 13:1-7, Acts 25:11, Luke 23:41.
- warfare. God has similarly given the state the right and duty to wage war in certain circumstances. When a citizen kills in a legitimate war, he has not broken this commandment. Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17 etc.

That commandment IS about:

- wilful and premeditated assault on human life. It is correctly translated "Thou shall do no murder".
 - human life begins at conception. Luke 1:35, 42-43.
 - not only the actual act of murder is condemned in Scripture (Genesis 4:8-10) but also acts intended to result in death (2 Samuel 11:15, 12:9); consenting to murder (Acts 22:20); taking away that which is necessary for life (Deuteronomy 24:6); obvious negligence which proves fatal (Exodus 21:28-30).
 - all that is said about the killing of others applies equally to the killing of ourselves -we, too, are in the image of God.
 - God hates murder. Psalm 55:23, Revelation 21:8. We must not do (or think, Matthew 5:21-22) anything that tends towards it, but rather the opposite. Our interests are to be:
 - the propagation of life Genesis 9:1,7
 - the sustenance of life. Genesis 8:22, 9:2b-3.
 - the protection of life. Genesis 9:2a, 5-6
 - Yet life is more than the body, and death is more than the dissolution of the body. This should move us to evangelise. James 5:20.
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