

Spiritual Survival

How do you survive in a world that is changing so quickly? More changes have occurred in this century than in the previous history of humanity. The rate of change is escalating. We face uncertainty in the Western world about our future. All levels of society face instability. Young people face instability. They choose a course to study hoping it will lead to a career. But will it still be relevant 3/4 years from now? "What is the world going to be like when I've finished this area of study?"

People involved in employment worry about "downsizing". How soon will my employer "downsize" and I find myself without a job? Is the stock market going to crash and all of my pension going to go up in smoke? Do I have a future? People at all levels of society find that part of the challenge they face.

Spiritual survival is also part of the challenge. Never before have people who serve God been faced with such a barrage of uncertainty. When Mr Armstrong came to understand about the Sabbath and Holy Days he had in reality only one choice - the Church of God 7th Day. About 10 years ago someone gave me a 50-page booklet that had been produced by the Bible Sabbath Association about Sabbatarians. All of the Sabbath keeping groups were listed and their antecedents. This booklet needs several revisions since then! It needs to be revised on a regular basis. Choices abound. What is the real choice between?

There is really only 2 choices for us. The same choices as were given to Adam and Eve. They had the choice of the Two Trees. Our first choice is one that people seldom realise they are making it: We trust in other humans. That is a natural reaction for us because of the fact that we live in a humanist society. It's called humanist because it believes in the "goodness" of humanity.

Even Catholic theologians realise that humanism is the greatest challenge to religion. It is a religion of itself.

Society today abounds with the example of this attitude - whether it be in the treatment of infants or criminals. A human being "is intrinsically" good, and treated in a particular way, that human being can make a positive contribution to society.

Yet we are told by God's Word not to trust in man. One of the most fundamental lessons of God's Word is that we don't trust in humans.

Jer 10: 23 O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

This verse strikes at the very heart of the humanist philosophy. Human beings do not know how to live properly. As such they should not be relied upon.

Prov 3: 5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

There's only one way to live - trust in the Eternal.

(NRSV): 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

8 It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.

Isa 2: 22 Turn away from mortals, who have only breath in their nostrils, for of what account are they?

Our lives are so temporary. When you go through an experience such as we did as a family when our daughter was involved in a car accident, you realise the whole fabric of human life could be gone before you even knew what the cause of the going was. We are nothing. Yet society places its trust and confidence in human intellect. Absolutely amazing. Then a generation later someone decides the previous guy was wrong.

Jer 17: 5 Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD.

All they do is bring trouble on themselves and on others because their hearts are turned away from the Eternal.

6 They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

We live in a godless society. God has been removed from our understanding. Humanity's relationship with God is dead.

Chart (as a triangle with base at bottom)

SELF ACTUALISATION

ESTEEM / EGO

BELONGING

SAFETY / SECURITY

SURVIVAL

This diagram is representative of the world we live in today. It's a chart that will be found in ANY psychology textbook. It was produced by Abraham Maslow around 1938. It represents society and a view of society cut off from God. "Maslow's hierarchy of human needs". Maslow was a humanist. He had no idea of God. Maslow came to establish what he understood were a hierarchy of human needs. These have been used widely as a means of motivating people.

He outlines 5 areas of human needs. As a society we are driven by this. The most basic of human needs is SURVIVAL. Pick up the business section of any newspaper - it's about survival and nothing else. If we don't produce the return for our shareholders that we need to produce, we become prey for a take-over - hostile or friendly. Survival drives the economy of the western world.

Where do the unions fit into society? The whole thrust of the union movement is concerned about safety, security and survival. We live in a world which has been described by Darwin as "survival of the fittest". That's where everyone begins. Another author described it as "the law of the jungle". Eat or be eaten. Kill or be killed. What has government policy been established on? "If you take care of a person's survival and security needs, they will become upstanding citizens of the community." The whole motivation of the liberal democracies have been to spend enough to take care of these two elements - so people can then create a sense of belonging or relationship (the 3rd level). Maslow realised that until you take care of survival and security, you can't really build relationships. The problem is that the relationships are built upon shifting sands, because you can't always guarantee safety, security and survival. Relationships are built upon expediency.

Look at the increase in divorce rates since the 1950s and 1960s. It's not really a breakdown in marriage. It's

just a change in perception in terms of where we sit - in terms of our hierarchy of human needs. Prior to World War 2 a young woman needed a husband to take care of her. People entered marriage and endured all sorts of problems because they needed to be married in order to survive, or have security. A guy would also tolerate problems because they needed someone at home to do the cooking and laundry and other such things.

Why do people divorce with such ease today? Or even not get married? Because marriage is no longer an element of survival or safety and security. The laundrette down the road can take care of your laundry. Ready made meals in supermarkets takes care of your food. You can live your life with one night stands in the local pub to take care of whatever other needs you might have.

We have a very different world. As the ability came to survive outside of marriage, and to have security outside of marriage so the relationships fell apart.

People move up the ladder - the "Esteem / Ego" - the yuppie era. People grew out of their relationships and they needed a relationship that more reflected their new found ego or esteem. They threw off their previous marriage relationship just as if it was an old garment and found themselves a new set of clothes that now reflected their situation in life. Look at the entertainment world. "I've got everything I can out of this individual - now I need something to enhance my view a little higher, and so I will form a relationship with this person." A very very sad world.

At the apex of this triangle is the strange "self actualisation". It's a point at which you come to see meaning in life and seek to find what the purpose is for life.

According to Maslow's adherents, the quintessential actualised person was Eleanor Roosevelt. She didn't have to worry about survival, safety and security. She had no problems of belonging or ego. She could think about the great altruistic things of life.

Sad. How many of us are Eleanor Roosevelts? I don't see any potential Eleanor Roosevelts. I see a group of people who in terms of Maslow are concerned with survival - with making ends meet from week to week. People who are concerned about their security and safety. "What is going to happen if they put our rent up, or cut our pension. How will I survive if they cut the National Health."

I see, in the years I have been in the church, those God has called do not have their lives in control so that they can be concerned about the issues and concerns of life. They do not have their entire lives under control and are "self-actualised". People I meet in Africa are not like that. The people I've met from when my parents came into the church in the early 1960s have not been people at this level of life. They are people who've been grappling with that.

There's a problem with Maslow's representation. While it may represent a reasonably valid view of humanity without God, in terms of God's Word it's totally lacking. It's upside down, inside out.

The sad thing for me is that I've heard of ministers giving sermons on Maslow to their congregations - telling them how they need to be concerned about their needs. After giving this sermon elsewhere, one young lady came up to me afterwards and said "I went to College and I had 3 years of Maslow". I asked "What College was that?" - The reply was "Ambassador College"!!!

It is a godless view of the world. Yet this was taught this was "the bees knees" - "This is the way to organise your life". But it is not the way to be concerned about our lives. We will never get out of the rut at the bottom. God doesn't want us to even be there to begin with!

As the first few verses in Deuteronomy 8 show, God tells the people of Israel "Look I've led you these 40 years in the wilderness and fed you with manna - to know what was in your heart." I took care of your need of survival to see whether you had a right focus to your life.

When the children of Israel were given manna, where was their focus? On survival! Their focus was on themselves.

Deut 8:3 He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

4 The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. 6 Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills,

Every need you have is going to be taken care of. The children of Israel never really learned to walk and to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Matt 6: 19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

Recently I was in Italy. My wife encouraged me to visit the Vatican and St Peter's Basilica. Very very impressive. I doubt whether anyone could estimate the value of the objects d'art that are included there. They are constantly having to restore, replace, and update. We went into the Sistine Chapel and looked up at the magnificent ceiling. It's just recently had to be cleaned so that people can actually see it. In St Peter's Square, the marble columns are being eaten away with pollution. There is much marble in Italy. Yet it decays - the exhaust fumes from the cars eat it away. All this wealth is constantly being broken down and destroyed.

We had to look for "Peter". Unfortunately his right toes are all gone. Even his left toes are in a bad state. "Gangrene" - because too many people have kissed his feet and worn away the bronze! It's quite a sight. That represents the treasures of that church. It's a very sobering experience. They have collected all these treasures, but what godliness have they taught people? Who has learned to live in a Godly relationship as a result of that organisation?

The building of St Peters gave rise to the Reformation. To finance the building, the Pope indulged in selling indulgences, and gave the Dominicans the right to sell indulgences to the Catholics to get enough funds to complete the building of the Basilica. A very sad world.

Jesus said:

Matt 6:9 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

He's referring back to what we read in Deut 8. Christ and the Father don't expect us to be caught up in the trials of this world in terms of survival. We're called to something else. God provides for the well being of His creation. God has provided for the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field.

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

This is to be the focus of our lives - the seeking of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all the other things will be taken care of.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

What Christ is saying cannot be represented in terms of Maslow and the Western world.

In the Eastern world, they view their lives in terms of concentric circles - with "SELF" at the centre. Self is the centre of the universe.

God says "I want to be the centre - the focus - of your life. You are to seek my kingdom and my righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." This is the total antithesis to Maslow. Instead of survival being the focus of your life, your relationship with God should be the focus of your life.

(Chart - concentric circles - working from the inside out:)

1. God
2. Transpersonal - Laws, Statutes, Judgments.
3. Relationships - Family, Community.
4. Environment - Practical, Business, Social.

The movement between the two models is something that is undertaken as part of the process of conversion. A person cannot move from the Maslow model to the God-centred model by themselves. Ancient Israel never accomplished this. Some may get part of the way - but they put something other than God at the centre.

To be able to live this life requires the process of conversion. Through conversion we come to live this way more perfectly. We're told to strive first for God's kingdom and His righteousness - a state of being right with God. It's not something that we define by ourselves. Righteousness is "Right conduct that accords with God's will and is pleasing to Him."

A righteous relationship with God is the seeking of God's will - not our human interests. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness - for they shall be filled." This is what God wants us to be concerned about.

How does God define righteousness?

Matt 19: 16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

This young man knew the commandments. But there was an aspect of keeping the commandments that had never gotten through to him. Like many of his day, I would suggest that what was the centre of his life were the commandments. He kept them as an end in themselves.

He never saw the commands, the statutes, the judgments of God as being a way in which he could establish a righteous relationship with God. We know many other people who've never comprehended that as well. The commandments are not an end in themselves - but a means by which we come to understand more about God's character. It's a means by which we build that righteous relationship with Him, and show that commitment to be part of the Kingdom of God.

God wasn't central to this young man's life. He didn't see that the reason we keep God's Law is to learn the character of God of outgoing concern towards others.

Micah 6: 6 Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

God is saying the sacrifices were not an end in themselves. They were a means whereby we were to learn something about God's character. God is a just God. He requires a penalty for sin. "Take the lamb up to the Temple and offer it for a sacrifice." What did this teach you about mercy and about God? It should have taught a lot. But God wasn't the centre of their lives. The sacrifice of the lamb should have taught about humility. If our life was only of the value of a lamb in God's sight, how great are we really in God's sight? We don't amount to very much. If the life of a lamb could take the place of a human life and pay for the sins of the human being, how great is that human being?

God's laws are given to teach us great spiritual lessons about our relationship with God. God says He wants us to hunger and thirst after that relationship with Him. That's what should drive us.

A Jewish secular writer states "Living in the west where broad humanism seems to coexist well with the churches, let us be awake to the fact that speaking of values may be a way of gaining credibility as a culturally accepted participator in public discourse, even as otherwise non-accredited religious believers."

He says "Let us raise the stakes. Is it possible to pray to, talk with and walk with God if one has values alone? Possibly. But let us consider commandments as another fact of identity. Commandments presuppose direct address. The king commands his subjects ... The force of a commandment follows from the relationship in which it is embedded. In this case the relationship of love and loyalty demonstrated to the satisfaction of all when Yahweh took Israel out of Egypt to be his own. Values, however, which suggest meanings embedded in a uniform reality presume no such relationships."

Values are things which you choose for yourself. You can't have this relationship with God based on "values" or your own ideas. You can only have this relationship with God based upon the means whereby God has established - and that is through His Law, His statutes and His judgments. Jesus Christ came to reveal the Father to us - to show us the way we can have that relationship.

This young man didn't understand that God had given laws so that man can have a relationship with Him. He saw those laws as an end in themselves.

We build a relationship with God based upon His Laws. That then becomes the foundation for our relationships with each other. The foundation upon which our family and community relationships are built. That is a sure foundation. There is no other foundation upon which a proper Godly relationship with others can be built.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.” “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples in that you love one another.” This is where our relationships one with the other need to be built. Not on the shifting sands of human reason that a philosophy may bring on society, but upon God’s revealed will, as given in His Word. That foundation will provide for stability and continuity.

We’ll still have ups and downs - we’re still human. We can each get out of bed the wrong side in the morning. Then we must get down on our knees and ask God to help us get out on the right side of the bed. Jesus said “Love one another just as I have loved you.” Our relationship with God is to be the basis upon which our relationships one with another are to be built.

Matt 22: 36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, (The second is of equal value) Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

On these two commandments hang the whole revelation of God. What the New Testament provides us is a way in which we can see that more clearly focused. It doesn’t change that relationship with God. Our focus is constantly towards God. “What would God have me do?”

God’s Word gives us an interesting contrast of an uncle and nephew. The uncle built his life on the aspect of survival. The end result was that he altered the benefits available to his descendants for thousands of years. His nephew was God-centred and he provided a benefit for his family, his descendants and for all humanity as well. Esau was willing to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. He was more concerned about preserving his life than where God fitted into the equation of his life. Joseph, on the other hand, was God-centred and provided a blessing for multiple generations of his descendants and for all the family of humanity. It was through that family that Jesus Christ was born.

Our life needs to be centred on God. Why does God say “A wise man lays up for his children’s children”? Because He wants our mind to be like His mind -not concerned about itself but for others. To be concerned for the next generation.

I was contrasted my trip to Kumasi (Ghana) in 1980 with the one I have just taken, noting the incredible deforestation that has taken place in those tropical forests in the interim. We have no thought as a society for the next generation. We’re only concerned in consuming for ourselves. God says He wants us to think of something bigger than ourselves. He wants us to think of the next generation. He wants us to put something aside whereby they will be blessed and benefited, because that is the type of God He is.

He doesn’t want us to do these things from the point of view of our survival because He can take care of that. He wants us to think of others. It’s only those people who are going to be in the Kingdom of God. Have a pension plan. But not just one for your survival - but for the benefit of others. Learning something about Godly character. Mr Armstrong said “If we build a building it should last 100 years, even if we only get x number of years out of it. We’ve got to do it right in the first place.” Why did he do that.? Mr Armstrong built for the long term.

It’s sad that too many in the church didn’t follow the example he established. Cannot afford to? We can afford in our own ways to. Mr Armstrong was simply wanting to try and represent the character of God. He wanted it to be something of quality rather than something that was to be a shanty which would fall down if a cow or donkey leant against it.

He wanted something that was to be durable and that was representative of God.

I see many in the church suffering from a survival mentality. Too many people who are in the churches of God are in this mode of operation (of Maslow). Their lives are in terms of survival. People say "We need more prophecy!" Why? So that you know when things are going to happen? So that you will survive - so you know when to go to the place of safety, and have your safety and security needs taken care of? Is that what we need prophecy for?

No - we need prophecy to understand the consequences of building a righteous relationship with God. That's what we need prophecy for. We don't need prophecy for the "when?" and "how?". We need prophecy for the "why?". Why is society falling apart at the seams? Because we don't keep the law of God and we don't seek to build the righteous relationship with God. We don't value and appreciate God's laws, statutes and judgments, and the wisdom of God.

Many people today suffer from that survival mentality. People nurse hurts, real or imagined that affect their relationships with others in the church. "I won't attend that church because such-an-such a person is there". But God's way is for our relationships with our wife or congregation to be based on and reflected by our relationship with God. Start to examine your marriage. How does your marriage reflect your relationship with God? "Do I need to change my relationship with God and hence with my spouse, or someone else in the congregation?"

People as a result of nursing hurts, build fences to protect themselves - so that they can survive. The living-room Church of God. People seek an environment that is suitable for them. This is a day of spiritual survival. We have a smorgasbord of spiritual food. You are being tested by God to see what you will choose. It is so easy to choose the thing "that is right for me. This one suits me nicely."

God is interested in us making a choice that makes a right relationship with Him and that alone. Ultimately speaking there is no choice. If you make the first choice - the right mix or this or that - ultimately speaking you have relied on the human mind to make the choice for you. God says "Don't make that mistake. You focus on what I said to focus on"

Jude 11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain ...

What was Cain's mistake? He thought his mind could come up with a pretty good offering for God. He didn't need to rely on what God said. Cain had the choice just as we do. He trusted in his own intellect and intuition.)

... and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

The three are all linked together. There's a lesson for us. I see within God's Church the difficulty of people rightly using the Word of God. They claim to use it, but they haven't really studied it and they use it to destroy relationships rather than to build them. They don't see the Word of God as a real solution to relationship problems - because righteousness is not properly understood.

As Solomon said in Proverbs 3, rely on the Eternal. It will be health to your navel and marrow to your bones. It will fortify you. It will be a healing to your flesh and refreshment to your body. It will reach the parts that nothing else has ever been able to reach! This all leads to a healing of the human body and relationships. It brings refreshment to the body and we surely need it. It has to start with our relationship with God - putting God at the centre of our lives and building that righteous relationship with Him.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. That is a truism for us - and it has been true for 2,000 years. It will be true for the next 1,000 years and it will continue to be true though all of eternity. We must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else will be provided.

Our focus needs to be on this relationship with God - keeping His laws - not as an end in themselves, but as a means of learning more about our God so that we can become more like Him and we can establish relationships with the rest of humanity that are a reflection of our relationship with God.

... Peter Nathan

28-Feb-98

Basingstoke

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