

Taking ourselves seriously

When we become active and practicing Christians – what Jesus called ‘being born again’ (John 3v3) – we embrace a lifelong process of sanctification; so that, when Jesus returns, we may be found pure and spotless (see 1 John 3v1-3). Take time to dwell on that and it will blow your mind!

Along the way, one challenge we often ignore is in taking charge of the ways in which we think, protecting ourselves from sources of influence we may have little or no awareness of where they come from or can lead to if unchecked.

The invitation to ongoing sanctification, including how we think to be part of this process, is at the heart of what Paul encourages in Romans 12v1-2. He is not alone. For example, Jude v20-21 exhorts:

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”

These verses - read and understood in context - tell us:

- a) We have a personal responsibility for how we progress in our engagement with the Lord,
- b) How we think has a direct contribution to our behaviour before God and with one another,
- c) Whilst God’s love is unfailing, it is our response that determines whether we are living in or apart from this love, and
- d) This has more than one component – including how we pray (‘in the Holy Spirit’), and, fostering a God-oriented vision for life now (‘ waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus ...).

Reading, receiving and responding appropriately to what we call Holy Scripture is central to this. To be fair, it is not always as straightforward as we might like: because we do not come to reading the Bible with an uncoloured disposition and mindsets. We are often creatures of culture, our upbringing and education hitherto.

In the past few weeks some of us have seen and felt this starkly. Those who make the cycle of lectionary reading (as agreed and published for our benefit by the Church of England) a core and regular part of our spiritual disciplines have read through much of the book of Joshua. This is one of the Old Testament books in which killings of people are recorded as God’s instruction.

Not surprisingly, some have real “issues” with these accounts and struggle to see how they can be part of what Paul, in 2 Timothy 3v16-17 describes as *“...Scripture ... breathed out by God ... profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (so) that the man/woman of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

Instead of being led solely by what may be unguarded instincts, rather being intentional and prayerful in “building ourselves up”, I encourage wider reading – both in Scripture itself and what reputable theological scholars offer through their faithful study and work on our behalf.

A good example that tackles this very topic is an article **Old Testament Mass Killings by Paul Coulter**: published by www.bethinking.org, easily found via your internet browser. Be warned: it needs more than a cursory glance but repays generously half hour an hour over a cup of coffee where you can own and tackle some, probably, deep-seated prejudices. I was not disappointed!

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