

FOR GOD
AND HIS GLORY
ALONE

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES



INTRODUCING PATHWAYS

The situation in Northern Ireland raises many difficult - sometimes controversial - issues for Christians. However, we believe that God's word addresses these issues and that God's people need to engage with this word and with the community.

In another situation that raised many difficult and controversial matters, the prophet Jeremiah called on God's people to search for the ancient path - the good way - and to walk in it. This series of PATHWAYS booklets is our contribution to that search for our time.

We invite others to join with us in understanding God's word to Northern Ireland.

As Evangelical Christians we confess the historic faith of the Gospel as it is revealed in the Bible. We affirm that the Bible, which is the Word of God, reveals God's plan of salvation, that it has been breathed into existence by the Holy Spirit, and that through it the Holy Spirit continues to speak. We therefore hold the Bible to be truthful, authoritative and, in both the Old and New Testaments the only written Word of God.

We want our thinking and behaviour to be governed by these Scriptures, as our only infallible rule of faith and practice. In the complexities of Northern Ireland it is of paramount importance that we subject all our ideologies to the test of the Bible and order our lives according to its teachings.

Our primary aim is to address our fellow Evangelicals in order to encourage a continuing process of relating the Bible to our confused situation.



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A CONTRIBUTION RELATING SOME BIBLICAL
PRINCIPLES TO THE SITUATION IN
NORTHERN IRELAND

FORWARD

This booklet by Alwyn Thomson, Research Officer at ECONI, is the third in the PATHWAYS series. ECONI has previously voiced its concerns by identifying biblical principles pertinent to a Christian response to the Northern Ireland conflict and applying these to the situation in our community. Now, a complementary process needs to take place. Our goal with this series of booklets is to identify issues raised by the situation in Northern Ireland and to bring these to the Bible looking for guidance. We hope that the questions asked and the debate raised will enable God's people to find his paths and to walk in them. Though some of these issues are controversial, ECONI is committed to the task of examining all aspects of the Northern Ireland situation in the light of God's word. ECONI believes that God has something relevant to say to the community and that God's people need to engage with his word and the hurts facing our community. We invite others to join with us in understanding God's word to Northern Ireland.

As Evangelical Christians we confess the historic faith of the Gospel as it is revealed in the Bible. We affirm that the Bible, which is the Word of God, reveals God's plan of salvation, that it has been breathed into existence by the Holy Spirit; and that through it the Holy Spirit continues to speak. We therefore hold the Bible to be truthful authoritative and, in both the Old and New Testaments the only written Word of God. We want our thinking and behaviour to be governed by these Scriptures, as our only infallible rule of faith and practice. In the complexities of Northern Ireland it is of paramount importance that we subject all our ideologies to the test of the Bible and order our lives according to its teachings. Our primary aim is to address our fellow Evangelicals in order to encourage a continuing process of relating the Bible to our confused situation.

FOR GOD & HIS GLORY ALONE

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A CONTRIBUTION RELATING SOME BIBLICAL
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PREFACE

SINCE ITS FIRST PUBLICATION in 1988 over 10,000 copies of 'For God and His Glory Alone' have been distributed. The response to the booklet, both locally and from as far away as South Africa, has been very encouraging. Subsequently, the ECONI Steering Group, responsible for the publication of the booklet, decided to commission a series of Action Packs. Each pack develops one of the ten biblical themes presented in the booklet and provides resources for churches, schools, youth groups and others. The 7th November 1993 saw the first ECONI Sunday. The goal of this day was to say to our community that:

- God has something to say to the community - His word is relevant.
- God's people are engaging with His word and the hurts facing our community - His church is real.

Some fifty five churches, representing more than 10,000 people, were involved in this initiative.

November 1993 also saw the publication of a new booklet, 'What Does the Lord Require of Us?', in which we raised this and other biblical questions - questions that challenge God's people in this community. Our aim in all of this is not only to promote reflection and debate within the evangelical community, but also to enable change to take place in values and attitudes so that an increasing number of Evangelical Christians may take up the challenge of active involvement in our community. With that in mind we again commend this booklet to you.

"The tone is modest and the booklet has clear biblical foundations."
Dr John Stott

"May God use it to mould and change the attitudes of many!"
Rev Clive Calver

INTRODUCTION

“THE TROUBLES” have now been part of Northern Ireland community life for twenty years. No one has been unaffected by the tension, violence and polarization that have marked this tragic period. All of us have had to respond in the ways that we have seen best. As Evangelical Christians this response has often taken the form of a “Call to Prayer”. Specifically, we have prayed for peace, acknowledging our dependence on God to restrain evil.

Yet this has left us with a “problem” for, despite the sincere prayers of many, peace has not come to Northern Ireland. We know that God hears our prayers, so what then is He saying to us? Often our prayers for peace identify the problem as being “out there” - with the terrorists, the politicians or the government. But it is not enough just to pray for peace in these terms. We must ask God to begin with us - to make us peacemakers. In such prayer we open ourselves to Him - to learn what He wants us to be and to do in our society.

This booklet sets out to be a contribution towards this process of learning. Those who commend it to you for reading and study do not do so because they think it contains a blueprint for solving Northern Ireland’s problems. Indeed they recognise that those problems are many and complex and that they cannot all be put down to “bad religion”.

The vast majority of our community claim at least a nominal Christian connection. Our province has the highest level of church attendance in Western Europe, and a strong emphasis on evangelism makes this probably one of the most evangelised areas of the world. Many have left the province as missionaries, commended by their churches and committed to world mission. Significantly for us, we have one of the largest percentages of evangelicals in any community. It is with these facts in mind that it is relevant to assess the role of the Christian faith in our province.

The identification of Christianity with a particular political outlook by both sides of the community has resulted in a serious loss of spiritual impact on the part of Christian believers. Instead of Christians being able to comment freely on the political order and to offer biblical insights, we often reflect the divisions in our society. As a result we become part of the disease and are therefore unable to be part of the cure.

We invite you to join with us in looking afresh at the Bible in order to identify some principles which we hope will help us become part of the cure. The Bible

does not directly refer to all aspects of the Northern Ireland problem. However, it does tell us what sort of people we should be in the situation and which values should govern our actions and attitudes as Christians.

Those who commend this booklet to your reading and study do so from within the evangelical community of the Christian church. As Evangelical Christians we confess the historic faith of the Gospel as it is revealed in the Bible. We affirm that the Bible, which is the Word of God, reveals God's plan of salvation, that it has been breathed into existence by the Holy Spirit and that through it, the Holy Spirit continues to speak. We therefore hold the Bible to be truthful, authoritative and, in both the Old and New Testaments, the only written Word of God.

We want our thinking and behaviour to be governed by these Scriptures, as our only infallible rule of faith and practice. In the complexities of Northern Ireland it is of paramount importance that we subject all our ideologies to the test of the Bible and order our lives according to its teachings.

Our primary aim is to address our fellow Evangelicals in order to encourage a continuing process of relating the Bible to our confused situation. We hope that our contribution will also be read by the wider Christian community, so that they may understand some of the concerns of evangelicals in Northern Ireland. It is to our shame that we have often been the last to affirm publicly the biblical values which others outside our particular community have highlighted. We acknowledge that many before us have done good work in seeking to develop a Christian response.

The booklet is a statement outlining TEN selected biblical principles which relate to Christian values in our society. The commentary does not say everything there is to say on each, nor do the ten sum up all the relevant biblical teaching, but they do clarify certain issues which tend to become blurred in Christian attitudes and practice.

Passages and questions for further reading, thought and discussion have been included with each of the principles highlighted to help you consider how they can be put into practice. They are suitable for either individual or group use. All quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible and are taken from the references listed with each section.

There is a list of those who, while not necessarily agreeing fully with every point, have felt able to join in commending this booklet to you for study.* Together we are in broad agreement in offering its contents as a helpful contribution to biblical thinking and action in Northern Ireland.

Our hope is that, as you join with us in examining our values and actions in the light of God's Word, we may be open to the Holy Spirit, submitted to the Lordship of Christ and dedicated to the greater glory of God in our land.

Our prayer is this:

**□ Lord, by your grace, help us not just to curse the darkness,
but to open ourselves to the light of your Word;
to be responsive to its penetrating insight;
to be sensitive to the community in which we live;
and in this way to be light to the world.□**

(Mt 5: 14-16; Jn 1:9)

* *The first edition included a list of some two hundred individuals who as church and community leaders identified with the evangelical basis of the document and allowed their names to appear in commendation of its contents. This list is available from ECONI which currently operates under the direction of a Steering Group of thirty eight members drawn from across the spectrum of evangelicalism in Protestant churches.*

FOR GOD AND HIS GLORY ALONE

*A contribution relating some Biblical principles
to the situation in Northern Ireland*

Rom 10:9; 12:2
2 Cor 3:18
Gal 5:22
Eph 4:20-24
Col 3:5-11

AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST living in Northern Ireland, we share in the suffering, distress and perplexity which result from violence and community strife. In all circumstances, we believe that Christians must declare and demonstrate values dependent on the nature of God himself. We rejoice when, in moments of great darkness, such values and hope shine through.

As Evangelicals, drawn together by our relationship to Jesus Christ and our commitment to biblical faith, we share a common concern. Far too often our values, attitudes and actions have been but an imitation of society and not of the character of Christ.

As those who emphasise conversion to Christ we affirm that its fundamental meaning is a change of allegiance. JESUS CHRIST IS LORD.

This **confession** involves us in a complete transformation of mind and character, to make us like Christ. There is no area of life outside the scope of His Lordship.

In this contribution we are attempting a clarification of the values, attitudes and actions which Scripture identifies as marking the Christian character.

Together we face the **challenge** of examining before God our effectiveness in making them evident, not only in our individual lives, but as members of our community.

In doing this we have a **commitment** to action - action that begins with understanding, that produces genuine repentance and, by God's continuing grace, leads to a determination to work together to bring glory to God by living Christlike lives. We invite you to share in this process.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

1

LOVE

Ex 34:6f
 Lv 19:18, 34
 Dt 6:4f;
 10:17-19
 Pr 10:12; 17:9
 Jer 31:3
 Mt 5:43-48
 Lk 6:27-36;
 10:25-37
 Jn 13:34f
 Rom 5:6-8; 12:9;
 13:8-10
 1 Cor 13:1-13
 Gal 6:2, 10
 1 Pet 2:17; 4:8
 1 Jn 3:18, 23
 4:7-12

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” “...love your neighbour as yourself”
 “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love”

GOD IS LOVE, and if we do not love, we cannot claim to know Him. This love is to be pre-eminent in the church, and is to be evident in our relationships with our neighbours, irrespective of their culture, religion and background. Distinctively, followers of Jesus are told to love their enemies.

Such love is not just an emotional feeling, but an active concern for the welfare and good of others. It must be shown in our attitudes and actions. In showing such love we reflect God's attitude to us. He showed His love by sending Jesus while we were still His enemies. We may find it difficult to love our enemies if they are terrorists, but we can begin by learning to love those of our neighbours who are from other traditions.

STUDY

Read Luke 10:25-37. There are two questions in the passage (v 29 & 36). Notice the difference between the two. By turning the issue around, Jesus presents us with the challenge to be neighbours rather than to debate whom we ought to consider as our neighbours. In what ways have evangelicals failed to see the implications of what Jesus is saying to us on this matter? What needs to be done about it?

The key term for love in the New Testament is 'AGAPE'. It has been described as "the love of the cross" (Rom 5:8; 1 Jn 4:10). It is a love towards the undeserving and those who deserve the opposite - a love that reaches the "hard cases" (eg Acts 3:14-26 - those implicated in the death of Jesus; Acts 9 - Saul). What are the implications of 'agape' love in evangelism, social action and politics?

2

FORGIVENESS

Mt 5:7; 6:9-15;
7:1-5; 18:21-35
Mk 11:25
Lk 7:36-50;
11:4; 23:34
Jn 3:16
Rom 3:9-18;
3:23-25;
5:16-21;
7:15-20;
12:17-21
Eph 1:7f; 2:8f;
4:29-32
Col 1:13f; 3:13
1 Tim 1:12-16
Tit 2:11-14
1 Pet 2:18-25;
5:10
2 Pet 3:9
1 Jn 1:9-2:2;
3:8

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

THE ROOT CAUSE of the Ulster problem is that we are sinners. We have, like all humanity, a natural inclination to live without God and to rebel against His will. Pride, bitterness and bigotry have the same root cause as racketeering, kidnapping and murder. They are the inevitable consequences of our rebellion against God's purpose for our lives, which is to love and to be loved. All of us have sinned and deserve God's condemnation.

Yet there is complete forgiveness with God. It is not that He treats our sin lightly. The cross of Jesus reminds us how seriously God regards sin. He has borne the pain and cost of the forgiveness that we are invited to receive through the Holy Spirit.

By God's grace those who, through faith, acknowledge their need of forgiveness and accept His salvation in Christ, receive the gift of new life. In Jesus Christ we are completely accepted by God.

Through His amazing grace, God has done everything necessary for the salvation of His enemies. Believing in Christ and repenting of what we have done is our proper response to such grace. It is not the prior condition - for when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. In parable and in teaching us to pray, Jesus shows that we must now follow this model. We are to forgive others as we have been forgiven - **unconditionally**.

In a situation that demonstrates humanity's inhumanity and despair, it is our responsibility to be agents of such forgiveness. This will mean that:

- We take sin and its consequences seriously. To forgive is not to say 'it doesn't matter'.
- There will be an expectation of pain in offering forgiveness. It is not easy to forgive, especially when there is 'justifiable anger'. Nevertheless, we are

called to leave the judgement to God and instead to offer mercy as we have received mercy. It is those who acknowledge that they have been forgiven much who in turn forgive much.

- Those who are offered forgiveness, including terrorists, will experience what it means to be forgiven only when they are truly sorry for what they have done and have a genuine change of heart and mind. However, whether this reaction is present or not, we are commanded by Christ to offer forgiveness unconditionally.

STUDY

Read Luke 23:34 and 1Peter 2:18-25. The key to understanding how Jesus could utter the words in Luke 23:34 is found in 1 Peter 2. How valid is the observation that a refusal to forgive others is an expression of a lack of trust in our Heavenly Father and His care for us?

It would appear that essential ingredient of politics in Northern Ireland is a long memory for the wrongs of the past. In what way would political aspirations and expressions be changed by taking seriously passages such as Matthew 6:14-15, Mark 11:25 and Colossians 3:12-14?

One of the key words for forgiveness in the New Testament is 'APHESIS'. Its associated verb, 'APHIEMI', was used in everyday language to speak of letting go of something - a ship's mooring or an arrow from a bow. The idea is that when God forgives us He lets go of our sins and does not hold them against us. They become part of the past, they no longer colour His attitude to us either in the present or in the future. Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 43:25 and Micah 7:19 are Old Testament parallels. Why do we find it so difficult to let go of the past? What does such difficulty say regarding our understanding of God's forgiveness?

RECONCILIATION

Mt 5:23f
 Rom 5:9-11
 2 Cor 5:11-6:2
 Gal 3:26-28
 Eph 2:14-18
 Col 3:11

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

THE GOOD NEWS emphasises reconciliation. By His death Christ not only has reconciled us to God, but also has healed our divisions and abolished the barriers which separated us from one another. This ministry of reconciliation is the calling of all who follow Christ, and should therefore be visibly demonstrated. To fail to do so in a society that desperately needs the reconciling power of God is a denial of our discipleship.

As Evangelicals, we must accept our share of the blame for any way in which we have contributed to the alienation felt by many of the minority community in Northern Ireland. We have allowed our differences to be turned into barriers, and at times we have been active in that process. Such humanly constructed barriers are caused by our arrogance and attitudes of superiority. They not only mar our community life, but also restrict the effective sharing of the good news.

STUDY

Read Matthew 5:23-24. Whether the grievance held against us is well founded or not, Jesus expects His disciples to be the initiators of reconciliation. Equally, just as God initiated our reconciliation with Himself, so He expects us to initiate reconciliation with those who we believe have wronged us (2 Cor 5:18-19). What steps could you take to aid reconciliation in your community?

*What are the implications of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:16 that "from now on we regard **no-one** from a worldly point of view"?*

PEACE

Ps 34:14;

37:11, 37

Pr 16:7

Is 9:6f; 32:17;

52:7; 53:5

Mt 5:9

Jn 13:34f

Rom 12:17f

Eph 2:11-22

Heb 12:14

Jas 3:17f

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”

HAVING FOUND PEACE with God and with each other, followers of Jesus are, by definition, peacemakers. The impetus for peacemaking lies in our doctrine of God and in our experience of His grace.

We are to live at peace with all people as far as it depends on us. This implies and demands, firstly, the rejection of violence, whether in the form of action, word or attitude, in all our relationships in the community. It also requires the embracing of actions, words and attitudes which constructively contribute to peace. In following this way, we must not associate ourselves with the use or threat of violence and paramilitary force, even under the guise of self-defence.

STUDY

Romans 12:18 and Hebrews 12:14 place a great responsibility upon Christians to “make every effort” to live at peace with others. What does “making every effort” imply in Northern Ireland? Can there ever be a time when we can assume that we have fully satisfied this command?

What was David’s attitude to Saul in 1 Samuel 23, 24 & 26? What was the effect of David’s consistent approach (1 Sam 26:21)? What lessons can we draw from this?

CITIZENSHIP

Ex 20:4
 Mt 22:21
 Acts 5:29
 Rom 13:1-7
 Eph 2:19
 Col 2:8
 1 Pet 2:13-17;
 4:12-19

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.”

As CITIZENS OF HEAVEN, our primary loyalty is to the Lord Jesus Christ. All other loyalties are secondary and must be judged by the values and priorities of this one. It is idolatry to equate God with any one culture or political ideal. It is quite wrong to require allegiance to any of them as evidence of allegiance to Him.

There is no room, therefore, for the identification of either Unionism or Nationalism as being particularly expressive of Christian faith. For too long Ulster Protestantism has passed without question as biblical Christianity when, in many particulars, it owes as much to culture as it does to Scripture. Seldom is it admitted among us that one can be a true Evangelical and not be a Unionist.

There are Evangelical Christians living on this island whose culture is British and whose political preference is for a continued link with Britain. Equally there are those whose culture is Irish and whose political preference is for a united Ireland. From the biblical viewpoint both are legitimate preferences.

Although our true citizenship is in heaven, we are still commanded to be good citizens. Respect for and obedience to government and the law is our normal Christian duty. If we were commanded by the state to act in a manner contrary to the Word of God, nonviolent disobedience would be necessary. But as this situation does not apply in the province at this time, our responsibility as citizens is to submit to the duly constituted government and rule of law.

Correspondingly, the government of any state has a responsibility to restrain and punish evildoers. In this it is entitled to the support and involvement of its citizens in the impartial enforcement of the law, in the administration of justice and in the encouragement of law-abiding behaviour and good citizenship.

STUDY

From the following passages list the priorities and principles of Christian citizenship: Matthew 5:13-16; 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1-2, 8; 1 Peter 2:13-14; 4:12-19.

TRUTH

Ps 25:4f; 26:3;
 43:3; 51:6;
 119
 Pr 23:23
 Zc 8:16
 Mt 22:16
 Jn 1:14,17;
 4:23; 8:32;
 14:6, 16f;
 16:13; 17:17
 Eph 4:15, 25;
 6:14
 Phil 4:8
 2 Tim 2:15
 1 Jn 3:18-20

“Jesus answered, ‘I am...the Truth...’”

COMMITTED TO BIBLICAL FAITH, we must constantly discern and apply the truth of Scripture to our lives and our community. This involves commitment to biblical truth not only in word, but also in action and attitude. Biblical truth manifests itself in the fruit of the Spirit in character and not in doctrine alone. Jesus, in all of His being, is Truth.

There is no place for bigotry, prejudice or hatred: we must recognise good and truth where they exist in other traditions. Sectarianism arises when we make an absolute identification between our formulations of the truth and the Truth, and then only accept others as Christians if they accept our formulations. Often it is those of us who claim to be evangelicals who have displayed such un-Christlike attitudes.

We must have the humility to see that the Truth of the Gospel is far greater than any of our formulations, because at present we see through a glass darkly, not yet face to face. This does not mean that we consider creeds and confessions unimportant, nor that we condone any doctrines that we regard as false. As those who are zealous for Truth, we consider such formulations not as ends in themselves but as means of perceiving ‘the Truth’ in Christ.

STUDY

In the light of John 4:9 it is significant that Jesus takes time with the woman of Samaria, uses Samaritans to illustrate correct moral attitudes, (Luke 10:25-37; 17:11-19) and strongly rebukes James and John in Luke 9:51-56. If Jesus will not accept the popular stereotypes of his day surely evangelicals must challenge the stereotyped images, myths and half-truths of our own day.

Try to identify the types of images that Protestants have of Catholics and vice versa. How would Jesus deal with such ideas? (This kind of exercise is best accomplished by people of different traditions coming together and explaining sensitively how they think about each other, rather than as an exercise in speculating out of ignorance.)

SERVANTHOOD

Is 42:1-4;
52:13-53:12
Zc 3:8-10
Mt 20:25-28
Mk 10:45
Lk 9:51-55
Jn 13:1-17
Rom 15:17f;
16:17f
1 Cor 9:19-23
2 Cor 4:5; 8:9
Phil 2:5-11

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...”

AT THE HEART of our understanding of Jesus is the concept and attitude of the Servant. The community of His followers consists of those who serve, instead of rule; who suffer, instead of inflict suffering; whose fellowship crosses boundaries, instead of reinforcing them.

Living like this involves the setting aside of status and power, and the giving of ourselves in sacrificial love. The towel (which Jesus used in washing His disciples' feet) and not the sword, is our symbol of service. By loving in this way we take up our cross and follow Him.

To serve others is to desire to understand, with compassion, their anxieties and to place their needs before our own. We confess that often we have celebrated our cultural and political traditions, such as the anniversary of events, both recent and ancient, in a triumphalistic manner. This is inconsistent with the mind of Christ, the Servant-King.

Our commitment to a particular political ideology may be for self-centred reasons, such as economic or social advantage, without consideration of the hurts, anxieties and needs of the rest of this divided society. Such a commitment would be a denial of the way of Christ.

STUDY

Read John 13:1-17. Notice the basis for Jesus' confidence which enables Him to carry out a menial and demanding task in front of His disciples (v3 & 4). Is it true that we celebrate anniversaries in a "triumphalistic manner"? Is the inability to humble ourselves before others a sign that we lack the strength and security of Jesus? How can we learn to live like Him?

Was Paul misguided in becoming "all things to all men", "a slave to everyone" for the sake of the gospel? (1 Cor 9:19-23) If not, how ought we to follow his example (Phil 3:17)?

JUSTICE & RIGHTEOUSNESS

Gn 1:27
Dt 32:4
Jb 8:3
Ps 82:2-4; 89:14;
Is 32:16f;
58:1-14
Jer 22:13-17
Am 3:6f;
5:7,10-15,18-24
Mi 6:8
Mt 6:33; 9:12f
Lk 4:18f
Rom 3:21-26

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...”

IN AFFIRMING THAT HUMANITY was made in the image of God, we acknowledge that every person, regardless of nationality, religion, race, sex or class, has an intrinsic dignity, and should therefore be respected and served. Any form of exploitation, oppression or discrimination is a denial of that dignity and is an offence to God.

The God of the Bible is a God of justice. He requires that His people not only exhibit, but also spread righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. A healthy community is one in which the human rights of each individual are protected. In this context, the Christian ethic is not a defence of “my rights” but a concern for the rights of my neighbour. God’s concern is expressed specifically for outsiders, the poor and those without power.

Because God is a God of justice, there cannot be anything other than a counterfeit peace when society is built on injustice. Any society which is influenced by Christian principles will be concerned with justice as a priority. Working for peace means working for justice. It means:

- That we are opposed to any form of religious discrimination in the workplace.
- That we strive to preserve a judiciary which is respected by the entire community so that justice is not only dispensed but seen to be dispensed with total impartiality.
- That we work for the removal of unjust structures and patterns in society and specifically those which hurt the poor and the powerless.
- That we expect those who enforce the law to be answerable to the same principles of justice as the rest of society.

STUDY

God made justice a key part of the message of the prophets in the Old Testament (Amos 2:6-11; Micah 6:6-8). The prophets warned the people that they could not turn a blind eye to wickedness or injustice and expect to maintain their relationship with God. If we take our love of and commitment to truth and justice as an indicator of our spiritual condition, what sort of spiritual condition are we in?

H O P E

Ps 2:42; 46:71
 Is 52:7
 Mt 16:24f; 24:14
 Mk 16: 15f
 Lk 24:45-47
 Rom 8:24f
 1 Cor 13:13;
 15:1-11
 Tit 2:13
 Heb 6:19
 1 Pet 1:3-9; 3:15

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”

THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE is a message of hope. We know that God is in control of this world and is working His purposes out in Christ. Therefore, whatever the political prospects of this island may be, as Christians we can view the future with hope - hope in God and not in nationality, politics or culture, important though these may be. History proves that the Kingdom of God can prosper, whatever the constitutional context.

God is bringing about His salvation. The task of the church is to make known the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ, who died and was raised from the dead, now, as reigning Lord, offers forgiveness and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all in our land who repent and believe.

In spreading this message we must stress the cost of discipleship. All who follow Him must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him, living out the values of His Kingdom. Those who preach the good news must be marked by the cross, rather than be identified with any particular social, cultural or political system. However painful this may be it gives rise to hope, a hope that is based on Christ.

STUDY

To what extent do we share the Psalmist's hope - Psalm 37 & Psalm 46 for example? Read Habakkuk. Habakkuk's difficulties stemmed from his inability to perceive that God was active in the situation. His concern for justice and righteousness was not matched by a big enough view of God's sovereignty. Is it true that we as Evangelicals share this weakness and, like Habakkuk, need to reaffirm that God alone is our strength?

Read Jonah. Jonah is a representative of God's people who knows God's grace, who can boast of his relationship with God and who can pray to Him in time of trouble. However, in this story, it is the heathen sailors and repentant Ninevites who appear in a better light than the prophet. They surprise us with their sense of what is right and their ready response to God's message. Yet Jonah wrote them off because they were not Israelites! In what ways has our stress on "heritage" and our strong sense of cultural identity cultivated a "Jonah attitude" in us?

REPENTANCE

2 Ch 7:14
Ps 51:17
Joel 2:12f
2 Cor 7:10
1 Jn 1:8f

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

THE ONLY WAY we can become a community of hope is if we come to God (and to one another) in humility, penitence and repentance. Many in Northern Ireland are caught in a face-saving exercise, but there can be no face-saving at the cross. The essential nature of repentance is losing face.

We need to say we have been wrong - not merely that we have been the victims of history. We all need to ask for forgiveness from God and our neighbours, repenting and seeking the way of nonviolence and the way of the cross as the effective means of change in our land. However difficult it may be, we as Christians are committed to Christian means as well as Christian ends.

Specifically, some of us need to acknowledge and repent

- Of the prejudice which can see no good in the culture of the other side;
- Of our failure to strive for practical discipleship with the same enthusiasm as for doctrinal purity;
- Of the idolatry that equates political and cultural loyalties with loyalty to God;
- Of the attitude that requires allegiance to “our side” as evidence of our allegiance to Christ;
- Of helping to foster divisions by our reluctance to meet, talk with and build friendships with those of different ecclesiastical and political traditions;
- Of actions, attitudes and words which have served to perpetuate violence.

STUDY

Psalm 51, written in the light of the events of 2 Samuel 11 & 12, indicates clearly that wrong attitudes and behaviour constitute sin against God. Until David, under Nathan's ministry, stood in the shoes of the victims of his injustice he was incapable of either recognising his sin or repenting of it. Discuss the implications of this story.

CONCLUSION

1 Cor 4:20
2 Cor 10:3-5
Eph 6:12
1 Pet 2:12

In our endeavour to practise Christlike attitudes we acknowledge that our conflict has a spiritual dimension as well as a social and a physical one.

OUR COMMITMENT MUST BE:

- to the action of prayer as well as practical discipleship;
- to an attitude of repentance and humility before God and our fellow men and women;
- to the values of the Kingdom of God in opposition to those of this world and of Satan;
- to involvement with others in whatever activity might promote such values in our society;
- to declare the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

May God be our strength; may He help us by His grace as we seek to live for His glory.

"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture."

*"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." **Psalm 100***

*"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' "He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" **Revelation 21: 3-5***

FOR GOD AND HIS GLORY ALONE

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Does the Bible have anything to say about 'the Troubles'?

This book is an invitation to Christians to explore that question. It is an invitation to look afresh at the Bible. It is an invitation to ask God what kind of people we should be and how we should live as Christians in Northern Ireland. Our hope is that as we examine our values and actions in the light of God's word we may be open to the Holy Spirit, submitted to the Lordship of Christ and dedicated to live *For God and His Glory Alone*.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Romans 12.2



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