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## **CHRISTIAN SURVIVAL in a CROOKED and DEPRAVED WORLD**

In the last decade we have heard it said that we live in a post Christian era. This can be taken to mean that Christianity is not surviving as a moral force in our society. Has it really lost its influence? One would easily come to the conclusion that it has when we watch TV and read the newspapers. If this is so, what do we as individual Christians do to live the life that Christ called us to live? I believe the world today is no worse than it ever has been. Christians have always had to survive in a crooked and depraved environment. It is a fact that when the great frontier revival began sin was rampant. It was rampant at many other times, but especially in the 1920's. Let us then take a look at the plan God has for us to survive.

When we address the subject of survival we have to think of it in two ways. The first is to stay alive. By this I mean to sustain life in our physical bodies, to continue existence. The second meaning is to continue to function and prosper. When we prosper we become strong and flourishing. It is the second meaning that I am addressing in this essay.

This raises a number of questions. Why do we need to learn to survive in a crooked and depraved world? How do we know it is crooked and depraved? What makes it crooked and depraved? Do we have trouble surviving in it? Is it more crooked and depraved than it was when Paul used those words to describe it? What about his world was crooked and depraved? What did he mean by world?

It appears that the crooked and depraved world he was talking about was made up of the people of that generation. Our generation is no different than those of his day. People have not changed. In his day there was godlessness; sexual immorality; impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred; discord; jealousy; fits of rage; selfish ambition; dissensions; factions; envy; drunkenness; orgies and the like (Gal. 5. 19-21). The world is the same today. We have to add murder and genocide to his list, but history tells us it occurred in his day too. He just did not include them. Perhaps we are more aware of murder and genocide today because the numbers are greater. In the face of all this, I am certain we can say it is still a crooked and depraved world!

Why do we need to survive? Paul said it well. We should shine like lights. God wants us to glorify him by being the righteous community of people he called us to be. Surely the first article of the Westminster Shorter Catechism summed it up when it said that our chief aim is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

To survive or continue to function and prosper as a Christian we have to be a real Christian. This may sound like a tautology, but you would be surprised at how many persons think they are real Christians and are not. There are many reasons why this is so. The first is that when they made a commitment to the Lord they did so for the wrong reasons. Some of these are that they went to the "altar" (1) to please their parents or wife or husband; (2) to get their parents, wife or husband off their back; (3) to go along with the crowd; (4) because their preacher, Sunday school teacher or some other person in the church said it was time; (5) because they thought they could escape Hell (they wanted an insurance policy); (6) because they did not understand what they were doing; (7) because they never got a chance to make a public confession of their faith. There are other reasons, but the important thing is they must be a born again Christian to have the power to survive.

To be a born again Christian one has to follow the plan of salvation. First, they have to admit they are lost, blind and naked before God. They admit they are sinners! Second, they have to believe Jesus died on the cross to take their punishment. Sinners are under the sentence of death and must be punished, but God made Jesus take their punishment so they could be redeemed from certain death. Third, after this realization they have to repent of their sins. They must realize they have sinned against God and become genuinely sorry for their sins. Fourth, they must then believe Jesus was resurrected from the dead to testify to the reality of his being the second member of the Trinity. Finally, by a simple confession of faith they must sincerely ask Jesus to be the Lord and Master of their life. In this invitation they must agree to serve Him. This is what it takes to be a real Christian. Being nice and sweet and kind will not do it, becoming a church member will not do it, being baptized will not do it, being consecrated will not do it. The only thing that makes a person a Christian is to make Jesus the LORD and MASTER of their lives.

Why is this process so necessary? Because it is only BY FAITH that one becomes a Christian. There is no other way.

When this takes place, dramatic changes take place in a person's life. William James listed four things that happen, and I have added two. (1) There is a happy mood. The person is full of joy. This can happen many times throughout a Christian's life, but it is especially noticeable when a person first comes to know the Lord. (2) The next thing that happens is the person perceives truths that they have not perceived before. They have God's Spirit and they now understand spiritual things. (3) Now they feel clean inside and out. To illustrate this point, I will describe the experience I had when I had the privilege of leading a prostitute to the Lord. After she prayed she exclaimed, "I'm clean! I'm clean!" After she had sex with her customers she had to take a shower because she felt so dirty. Even then she did not feel clean. Now that her sin was washed away she felt clean for the first time in years both inside and out. Jesus said that we are made clean by his teachings. (4) The world around them seems brighter and cleaner. (5) They

have a desire to know more about God and to know him better. (6) They have a desire to associate with persons who are like minded. Since church is where this can be accomplished they go there.

If they go to the right church they will be disciplined. They will learn the attributes of God, learn how to and for whom to pray, to study God's Word, to really celebrate the Eucharist and appreciate its meaning. They will learn about the work and person of the Holy Spirit, and they will learn how to witness, to know and do God's will and how to serve him. In time they will no longer be infant or midget Christians. They will have reached maturity. To survive, we need to be mature.

The most important thing that occurs is they will have God's Spirit to guide them around the booby-traps in the world. There is always an extra measure of the Holy Spirit available on request that either restores our power or enhances it. It is sometimes called the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is needed because Satan has mined this world with cesspools of corruption, and filled them with infectious agents. Therefore, the world is morally polluted with sin. Both James and Peter described it as polluted, so the concept is as old as our faith (James 1:27, 2 Pet. 2:20). To realize the importance of what I am saying, it is necessary to look at the reality of our environment. All around us there is opportunity to sin. Satan knows sin leads to death, so to destroy us he appeals to our sinful nature. Our sinful (human) nature consists of the biological drives of sex, appetite for food and drink, activity and aggression, sleep and the mental function of pride. I add this because pride is the queen of the seven deadly sins, and out of it arise the other six sins. Our human nature (that Paul called the sinful nature) does not want to live according to the rules God has given us (Rom. 8:1-12).

To illustrate my point, I cite a revelation that came to me when I saw a magazine in my audiologists office the other day. On the cover in bold words was, "SEX SELLS." Like most men would be, I was intrigued by this statement, so I started to read the article. My audiologist summoned me before I finished, but I did read the first few paragraphs. Those paragraphs said a lot. What the author said was that if you wanted to sell something link it to sex! In the same magazine earlier there was an ad for Nissan cars. They did not put a picture of the car in the advertisement. They put a skimpily clad girl in a suggestive pose. Would people read the ad? I am sure most men would! Remember—they buy cars!

Why is it that sex sells? It is because it arouses sexual desire, and desire is an emotion. The siren call of sex was recognized by Homer who created a mythological creature half woman and half bird whose seductive song lured sailors to their death on the rocks of their island. A person remembers ads that stimulate them sexually. Ad agencies know vivid memories can affect you when you go to buy a car.

Look at the beer ads on television and in magazines. They are frequently linked to sex. Many of them have attractive girls being drawn to men when the men

offer them a particular brand of beer. The suggestion is as Ogden Nash said so correctly, "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker." It was true in the Bible. Look what Lot's daughters did with it (Gen 19:32-36).

It is quite clear that emotion, whether it is the inherent emotions of our biological drives or our emotional reflexes (I have written about this elsewhere), enhance the storage of memories. Advertisers want you to remember their advertisements because those memories will influence your buying habits. In the same way propaganda influences our feelings about the subject presented. It is presented in an emotionally charged way. We are more likely to believe it and subsequently act on it if we are emotionally charged by the presentation. We see this in our time in the propaganda of the greens, gay rights and radical feminist movements.

The fact that we live in a depraved society is manifest in the activities of the gay and lesbian movement. Their behavior in their parades is indecent and obscene. They insist on being allowed sexual access to youth and others. They have infiltrated the curriculum of the schools with their propaganda. They present themselves as being hated and despised for something they cannot help. How can we condemn them if they are just being themselves? We are a bunch of bigots. Their whole purpose is to make us ashamed. If we are shamed enough we will change our thinking and no longer condemn them. They also hope to indoctrinate children so they will grow up believing their propaganda. They tell us they are sweet, kind and nice people. Don't listen to the religious bigots. To convince children, they have produced educational materials containing favorable content to be distributed free in schools. Their pleas are supported by the ACLU, Planned Parenthood and the radical feminists. Young impressionable minds attend to their propaganda, and since they have no corrective, they believe it.

What shall I say about the drug scene? It is pervasive and our children are solicited by their peers and pushers on and off the school grounds. "Hey kid! Your friend Joey is doing it, why don't you?" Or "be cool kid!"

I cannot leave out the economic world. We inherently want to be financially secure, so there are people out there who will appeal to that desire. They run lotteries, gambling casinos, get rich quick schemes, "sure thing" investments, big plays on the commodity markets, or Amway-like pyramid schemes (yes, I know Amway is reputed to be run by Christians). It is still a pyramid sales scheme that promises great riches if you work it right! If you want to really find get rich schemes go to the Internet. I get 20 or more offers a week.

His greatest weapon, though, is humanism. Humanism has become the religion of the liberal academic establishment. Through John Dewey and his disciples, humanism infiltrated the educational world and spread its philosophy into education, literature, medicine, the law, theology and politics. It had a tougher time with science because science at first could see the fallacies in its dogma.

But Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud with their pseudo science helped to undo the Word of God in many men's minds. Sadly, my field of medicine came under its influence through the theories of Freud and their adoption by psychiatry and psychology.

Humanists say God does not exist. We are the only god we need. The concept that we can be like God was first used as an appeal in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:5), and is still being used today by humanists. A famous Russian writer (I don't remember if it was Dostoyevsky or Solzhenitzen) said if there is no God, everything is permissible. Humanism sets your sinful nature free! You can do anything you want to do!

Shall I go on? I don't think I have to. I hope by now you can see for yourself that we live in a morally polluted environment. Satan is busy. He uses all the things I have mentioned and many others you can identify to appeal to our human nature.

I repeat, a morally polluted environment is full of sin. It leads to suffering and death. Sin is an infectious disease, and we have to learn how to keep from becoming infected. How do we do this?

Persons sin because they will to sin. Will is a neglected subject in psychiatry and psychology. Behaviorists deny that will is important. They say we are programmed to behave as we do and will not do otherwise. Determinism is a primary tenet of scientific and psychological philosophy. Determinism does away with will. But in our theology will is a fact. Although the Calvinists believe in limited free will, most other traditional theologies believe there is moral free will. This was confirmed in the proceedings of the early church fathers and councils.

I reiterate, we sin because we will to sin. Thomas Oden, in volume 3 of his systematic theology, states there are four things that make it easier to fall into sin: (1) the strength of our biological drives—our desires; (2) the imperfection of ethical judgment; (3) the inconstancy of will; and (4) the weariness caused by continued resistance to temptation. These factors conspire to limit human willing and acting. So it is no surprise that, as Kierkegaard has so astutely observed, humans will fall into sin without the special grace that God can give to resist the endless series of temptations that are around us. I must say this is borne out by my experience with a number of godly men who have fallen into sin. It is obvious that we who want to live sustained and prosperous lives must have mechanisms to deal with those factors that will cause us to sin.

Most importantly, we have to know how to deal with temptation. What is it? Temptation is defined as "to entice or seduce to do evil." There are only two ways to deal with temptation. The first is to avoid it, but to do that completely we would have to get out of the world. Paul spoke to this point when he said, "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all

meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world" (2 Cor. 5:9,10). Let me say, though, that we can avoid sin in many ways. We do not have to go to single bars or gay bars. We do not have to go to road houses or clubs where violence occurs. We should not counsel a person of the opposite sex without having another person close by. We should not spend time alone with a person of the opposite sex who evinces a romantic interest in us. We should not associate intimately with persons who do not share our value systems. There are many other ways to limit temptation by not associating with those who are flagrantly sinning.

The second way is to make sure our spiritual immunity is high. Our immunity is mediated by the Holy Spirit who helps us in our weakness, but there are rules we must have fixed in our mind. I was introduced to the concept of spiritual immunity by Costa Deir. He presented a workshop on this subject at a conference in Pittsburgh where I was speaking. I was so intrigued by the title I went to hear what he had to say. I had already developed my ideas of spiritual disease in some of my earlier researches, and I knew it was infectious, but I had not thought about needing spiritual immunity as a defense against infection by sin. Costa said that spiritual immunity was established at salvation, but it had to be maintained by the utilization of the means of grace. This made sense to me. He also emphasized engaging in spiritual warfare as another booster to keep our immunity high.

I was already convinced that we only maintained our spiritual power by the means of grace, but I had not realized that it also boosted our spiritual immunity. This revelation sent me searching the medical literature to learn more about our immune mechanisms. I had not kept up with this area of medicine, so I was uninformed. We knew very little when I went to medical school. In my studies I discovered that our immune system is highly complicated and highly effective. I realized, too, that the development of and maintenance of spiritual immunity is also complicated, and it, too, is highly effective.

I have already said that to live in safety in this crooked and depraved world we have to be real Christians. This gives us the power to obey God's laws. When Jesus said he came to give God's laws real meaning, he knew what the Holy Spirit was going to do (Rom. 8:6-8). Thus with salvation we vaccinate ourselves against sin. Now it is also true that no vaccination gives us permanent and total immunity to the agents of disease. One has to have booster shots. Our spiritual immunity gets boosted when we pray, celebrate the Eucharist, worship, study the Bible and are taught about our faith. To obey God's laws we have to have a secure knowledge of those laws. These commandments, we call moral laws. They teach us what is right and beneficial behavior. These behaviors have consequences that facilitate life. They are revealed in the Ten Commandments, the Levitical laws, Jesus' commandments and Paul's teachings. Obedience brings blessings, disobedience brings curses (Deut.28).

The Bible tells us there is a trajectory or pathway to sin. Most sins originate when our human nature gives rise to evil desires. When we are exposed to stimuli that arouse these desires we are tempted. For example real food, pictures of food and smells all arouse our appetite to eat even if we are not hungry. Or if we see young people partying, or advertisements for beer or wine, or if our peers offer us a drink, our desire for an alcoholic beverage will be stimulated. We can cite things that stimulate our sexual desire or our greed, but it is not necessary. You understand how it happens.

The second step is that our evil desires, when dwelt upon, will draw us away from the moral truths in God's laws. The next step occurs when they conceive and give birth to sin. Finally, sin when it is fully grown results in death (James 1:12-15).

Knowing the trajectory of sin, how can we deal with temptation? The answer lies in having available spiritual interventions, "antisinotics", (similar to antibiotics) that we can use to overcome a developing infection. These are confession and repentance. Let us look at an example from real life. A married man has a woman colleague who is divorced and wants to remarry. She confides in him her loneliness and unhappiness since she is living alone with her children. She also reveals to him that she feels sexually deprived. He is married, but his life, including sex with his spouse, is "Dullsville." The excitement has gone out of his marriage and as all humans do, he longs for more excitement. His colleague is a rather exciting person so he begins to fantasize trying to meet her needs. He fantasizes what it would be like to have sex with her. At this point he is being drawn away and knows it. He is tempted! Whether he is a Christian or not, he should consider the consequences of his allowing sin to conceive. If he has an affair, he may be discovered. His wife will be hurt and jealous. She will no longer trust him. His children will be angry because he has betrayed their mother and caused her great hurt. His employer(s) may find this behavior unacceptable, and he could lose his job.

What does he do? God has given a Christian a way of dealing with his conflictual situation. First he must come before Him and confess that he is sinning and in great danger. He needs to realize and believe he is adding to the punishment that Jesus took for him on the cross. If he truly loves Jesus, this should create deep (godly) sorrow in him. If he is sufficiently aware of the gravity of what he is doing, he will know he cannot pursue his fantasies. This combination of godly sorrow accompanied by a resolve to change his direction is repentance. He must pray until God works repentance in him. We are called to repent when we sin. Lust is a sin that the man described above was guilty of. When he has truly repented, he will be forgiven and his mind cleansed. It is likely, though, that his thoughts will recur because his colleague will not go away, so he will have to repeat the procedure again and again until he is completely cleansed. Repeating the procedure results in a transformation of his mind. This methodology can be applied to impulses to other aberrant sexual behavior, to greedy behavior

(covetousness), to smoking, to alcohol and even to outbursts of anger or rage. Sadly unregenerate persons cannot use these antisinotics to deal with temptation because they do not have the spiritual understanding or the power.

To have spiritual immunity, we must also belong to a community of faith that will assist us in maintaining our power. In that community we will pray, learn from God's Word directions for right living and receive encouragement. There we will also praise and worship our Lord. These lead us into new encounters with Him and we will be again strengthened.

Another booster for our immunity is to be in spiritual warfare. Sadly, most churches today do not engage in it, and if they do only by accident. Satan has convinced the theological world that he does not exist. As a result, we do not look for his works and attribute them to fate if they have deleterious consequences. It is only natural that we should believe we do not have to be afraid of something or someone that does not exist. Even so, the Bible is explicit in describing Satan and his works. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). We are told to put on spiritual armor to protect us against his incursions into our lives. If we regularly pray, study our Bible, praise and worship the Lord, he will not have anything on us, but that is not enough. We must recognize we have authority over Satan and his minions and there are times when we must exercise that authority.

I was once in Ambohiponoina, Madagascar. They brought a 13 year old girl who had been in a highly excited state for three days. Her stepfather, a witch doctor, had put a spell on her and the excitement began immediately thereafter. I could not examine her because she did not respond to any commands or questions. She was so violent I put my arms around her and held her close. I discerned she was demonized. Suspecting he was a demon of violence, I told him he had no hold on her and he must leave immediately. He resisted me for 10 or 15 minutes, but I continued to hold her tightly. Finally with a reiteration that Satan had been defeated when Jesus died on the cross, the demon left and she fell asleep in my arms. She was released from the spell and the infestation by a demon. It is easy to carry on such a contest where it is obvious that we have to confront evil forces.

But what about Satan's work in our society? In the western world he is much more wily. Here he infiltrates and provides the ideation for those who oppose Christianity so forcefully. We have to be in spiritual warfare against these attacks too. Recently the Lord has convinced me that the ACLU is one of his primary operations. It is resolutely anti Christian and does all it can to destroy Christianity. Should we be in spiritual warfare with Satan for domination of the ACLU? Unequivocally! The Lord told me to ask people to pray for the ACLU. We should pray for enlightenment of their leadership, for their salvation, and that they would not find favor in the eyes of judges and jurors. Most of all, we should bind Satan

that he not be allowed to work through that organization. Only if we do this, will we be able to survive and retain the Christian basis for our society and our freedom to proclaim the Gospel. Only if we do, will we be able to worship our Lord. Satan's ultimate goal is to wipe out Christianity and have us worship him.

David Seamands once said that we have three enemies. The world is our external foe. Our human nature is our internal foe. Satan is our infernal foe. I think this sums it up. To survive in a crooked and depraved world we need to realize that we will be in conflict in these three areas. We have weapons to fight each of these foes and they are mighty. We must use them. The battle's outcome is clear, but we cannot stop fighting. The sites of infection of the enemy are out there; we have to avoid them. We have to have spiritual immunity. We must keep on confronting the enemy until victory is proclaimed. Victory is proclaimed in a life that is filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. When we have these, we have survived and prospered. We will shine like lights in the world and illuminate the darkness.