

Bimonthly Encouragement to Sudanese Christian Workers

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At one of the churches I attend our weekly service begins with this prayer:
“Almighty God, grant to your people *love* for all the things which You command and *desire* for all that You promise, in order that, in the middle of the many changes in our world, our hearts may be securely fixed where true joys are to be found”.¹

As we have started another year, that is a good goal to adopt.
In 2010 we must want what God wants – nothing more, nothing less.
It is a challenge to want nothing else except what God wants.
Before we do anything else, elections, referendums, resettlement, career choosing, marriage, etc., let us start with God central in our minds.

The Bible begins with God. “In the beginning God”, Genesis 1:1. It may sound strange to say this, but I believe we must learn to think of God as *He really is!* Too often our routine and unchallenged thoughts limit our vision and appreciation of who God actually is. Even as Christian leaders, we must spend longer meditating on this wonderful **God, who is our Saviour**, 2 Timothy 2:8, Isaiah 46:8-10.

In the last week I have heard from friends of the burning of half a village in Atar, Jonglei State, on New Year’s eve, during what was described as “ethnic unrest”. Sadly this is one of many such reports. It gives rise to the question:

How should we as Christians respond to ethnic unrest?

Here are a few ideas:

1. Remember that God is still the Creator and the Ruler of this world and of local events.

Consider these words of God from Isaiah. “Who is my equal? Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created these?” “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God”. “I am the Lord, and there is no other. I bring prosperity and create disaster; I the Lord do all these things”. (from Isaiah 40:25-26; 41:10; 45:5-7).

God wants us to think of Him every night when we see the millions of stars. Think that He is in charge of all events – even the ones where we are treated badly. As the roadside ladies carefully weave their mats and baskets for sale at the market, so God is able to weave all the events of life into His lovingly successful plan for our lives, Romans 8:28, and verses 37-39. Strong Christians believe, and live by, this.

2. Remember how our Lord Jesus said we must view and treat all other human beings.

Every person born has the image of God, Genesis 1:26-27. Therefore our traditional enemies, as well as our friends, have the likeness of God put into them by our mutual Creator. The world may want us to see another tribe or people group as our enemy. Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbour and hate your

¹ Common Worship Holy Communion The Archbishop’s Council, 2000. Partly quoted.

enemy". But I tell you, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". "You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth". But I tell you, "Do not resist an evil person". (from Matthew 5:38-48).

Jesus wants us to show our Christianity by responding in a positively Christian way to the hatred and disrespect we receive. Our Lord demonstrated His own response as He chose to allow Himself to be nailed to a cross and judicially murdered, by the very human beings whom He had come to rescue for heaven! Jesus' submission to God's will bought salvation for us! Matthew 26:39. From apparent disaster, eternal triumph!

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, see Luke 10:25-37, Jesus taught we must do good, even to those who are our traditional enemies.

I am not saying it is *easy* to do this, but I am saying this is the *right* way to live. If our tribal or national leaders tell us to do something which is against what the Bible tells Christians to do, then we must choose to follow Christ and stand against the flow of public opinion. By doing so we automatically accept the consequences which will follow, Matthew 5:10-12; Matthew 6:31-33.

3. Remember the Kingdom of God transcends tribalism, nationalism, and even Christian denominationalism.

At **Rome** in Paul's time, the Roman Christians were judging one another concerning their outward ritual observances for their faith. They would split off from one another saying something like, "If you do that in your service I cannot be with you".

The teacher's response was to see the bigger picture: "the kingdom of God is *not* a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", Romans 14:13-23.

If we respond the Christian way when we think we are wronged, God will bless us with such peace and joy in our hearts. It will be a good witness to those who mistreat us. (See for example, Peter & John in Acts 4:1-31; Paul & Silas in Acts 16:22-32).

In **Corinth** the Christians were divided over which leader to follow, 1 Corinthians 1:10-12. Paul's teaching emphasised the cross of Jesus Christ. Fellowship around the cross of Christ, and everything seen and unseen that happened at Calvary, is the uniting factor of all true Christianity, 1:18, 1:23-25.

James was concerned that rich people were given privileged places in Christian worship while poor were deprived. He rebuked the leaders saying that, "God has chosen those who are poor ... to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love Him", James 2:1-8. How rich in faith are you? (am I?).

Peter encouraged Christians to live outstandingly different Christ-like lives in the middle of a community who lived otherwise. He urged resistance to communal pressures, the cultivation of good deeds to all, and submission to God *and* human authority *where possible*, 1 Peter 2:11-17. It is helpful to remember that he said our actions will always speak more loudly than our words.

I finish with a reminder that even if you think you (or your people) can't live this way – God says that, with His help, you (and your people) can! Fellow disciples – live on!

Pastor Colin Salter. (Please share these thoughts with others and refer them to my website for more study resources!).