

Abandonment

There are some subjects that need great care in expounding and some that few talk about. This is one of those subjects. It is a matter that few understand because few attain to it.

The truth about progressing in Christ, growing in grace and becoming of greater use to the Father in the pursuance of his decree is often the very opposite of what modern churches teach and practice. For example:

Modern Charismatics seek power in order for them to exhibit healings and miracles for no certain purpose other than self-congratulation (their antics do not serve the kingdom of God). Thus there are multiple seminars, books, tapes, DVDs, TV programmes, conferences and sermons to teach you how to become powerful. In fact, the sanctifying strategies of the Holy Spirit in your life are all about making you weaker. In fact, they are about making you weaker to the point of death and hopelessness so that you have no confidence in your flesh.¹

Modern church leaders seek authority so that they can control not only their own congregations but also the congregations of many churches. No apostle of Christ ever did this, nor sought it. In fact, they taught against leadership domination of the flock.² Modern leaders give themselves lofty names that cannot be controverted, such as 'apostle' or 'prophet' or 'archbishop' or 'pope', but these are all rubbish and waste matter. True leadership is to serve and Jesus made this eminently clear by his precedent.³ Paul compared his ministry to the church as being like a nursing mother.⁴ Instead of seeking to dominate, true leadership is to serve and be worn out in doing so. In fact, true leaders are last of all.⁵

These are just two examples where the Christian experience is actually the opposite of what is commonly accepted as the Christian experience.

The cause of this is human arrogance and hubris expressed in decades of church leadership coupled with an appalling lack of good teaching of the Lord's people. This will not go unnoticed on Judgment Day.

The subject before us, abandonment, is another example where the way God leads those who seek to attain to the power of Christ's resurrection is the opposite of what is usually accepted. I will seek to explain this.

¹ Phil 3:3, 'For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh'.

² 1 Pt 5:2-3, 'Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock'.

³ Matt 20:28, 'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'.

⁴ 1 Thess 2:7.

⁵ Mk 9:35, 'And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all"'.

What is normally accepted as a corollary of growth in grace

Popularity is a sign of improvement and success in the world

The world teaches that popularity is a sign of improvement and success. The more people that follow you, the better a person you are. In fact, the case today is that young people aspire to become celebrities whereby people become famous for achieving precisely nothing, but are well known and popular.

This is a somewhat new phenomenon brought about by the domination of society by the media of various sorts; even social media can bring about such stardom (for a short while). In the past those that gained widespread admiration were those that achieved something great; perhaps in battle, statesmanship or academia. Statues were erected to such people to prolong the memory of their achievements. Today people seek fifteen minutes of fame through the most facile schemes; and the visual ubiquity of media outlets allows this to happen. Social media platforms even have ratings systems based upon 'Likes'; i.e. popularity.

There were also people that achieved infamy and notoriety for the bad things that they did; but these things were also great in terms of the size of achievement. Thus Genghis Khan was both popular and infamous for his terrible cruelty, brutality and victories.

The world has always prized popularity and fame.

Sadly, this human failing (for that is what it is) entered the church long in the past but in the 20th century it became commonplace in modern churches. Popularity was associated with success and success was tied in with God's blessing. Thus very well-known people (the original church celebrities) were considered to be very favoured by God.

Example: Billy Graham

One obvious example is Dr Billy Graham. From the early 1950s he became a worldwide celebrity for his ability (or the ability of his administrative machine) to draw crowds of many thousands to hear a modernised Gospel message, associated with entertainment (singing, testimonies, sponsorship talks etc.). This man was considered the pinnacle of success for decades and an example of the very peak of blessing by God. Presidents sought his advice and anything he said was treated as authoritative.

In fact, a sober analysis of Billy Graham showed deep concerns. At best his Gospel was Arminian and based upon human free will not God's sovereignty. At worst he was Pelagian and a universalist. In later years he would teach serious heresies, such as the salvation of those who did not know Jesus or the Gospel.

His Gospel presentation was unbiblical and was based upon pandering to human emotions and utilising the power of peer pressure in a heightened, superficial, feelings dominated show, not unlike modern rock concerts. Worst of all he shared platforms with known heretics and sent supposed converts into non-evangelical churches to be cared for (and fall away). The results of his methods are now understood – the falling away of the vast majority of 'converts'. After a survey in the 90s, the Billy Graham Association admitted that over 85% of those who came forward in crusades later fell away and were not registered in churches.

Now some were genuinely converted and remained (I know of such). We thank God that he used even this very flawed system to rescue some from the fire, but that does not alter the fact that the whole system was wrong.

So, the most popular Christian preacher of the last 100 years was a disaster. The popularity of the ministry or the person did not evidence blessing from God at all, nor did it support his teaching.

Example Jim Jones

Jones was very charismatic, in the traditional sense of the word. Even with his obvious errors and bad practices, he gained a significant following and developed a large church in Indianapolis and then Redwood Valley California, then Los Angeles and San Francisco. His errors increased to the point of claiming that he was Jesus Christ re-incarnated, as well as Buddha, Lenin and others. Despite his heresies, or even his drug abuse, he managed to convince a large number of mostly Black families to relocate to Guyana in a commune he called 'Jonestown'. In his paranoia, after his followers killed a party including a US congressman, Jones convinced over 900 people, 30% of which were children, to commit suicide.

The huge popularity of Jones was no evidence of his soundness or godliness whatsoever. In fact he was a murderer and had long been insane. Yet hundreds of people followed this insane person. Popularity means absolutely nothing.

Many church leaders seek popularity and publicity

It is a sad fact that many church leaders today develop plans and strategies whereby they may make their names widely known. The aim is to cultivate popularity or notoriety. There are ways of doing this.

Thus young aspiring leaders lay out career plans whereby they can rise up the hierarchy of church leadership. For instance, aspiring preachers develop interesting sermons, which they can repeat ad nauseam in an entertaining manner. They then seek to get opportunities to preach these sermons in local churches, such as by replacing the local preacher when he is on holiday or helping a church without a pastor. As they gradually get a local name, they then try to get on the conference circuit of this or that organisation or denomination. If they achieve this they have a chance to go much further. Then they try to manoeuvre themselves into more important conferences that have well-known names of the platform. Then they try to write articles that can get printed in this or that magazine or journal. And so it goes on.

I have heard of young men that have written out a plan like this on leaving a theological seminary, planning for years in advance. I have known others that achieved it. The church is full of such folk; yet the church is also full of deception, heresy, aberrations and chaos.

This is not the method of the Holy Spirit, nor is such casuistry⁶ affirmed in Scripture.

The cult of popularity

The church just copies the world and we frequently find the scourge of popular preachers. This is no different from teenagers chasing their favourite rock band.

Here and there popular preachers emerge, popular for various reasons, and not always because of their teaching. It is then common that Christians will travel huge distances in order to hear this popular preacher every Sunday, as if that is church life. In travelling these distances, they often drive straight past churches that are entirely suitable for them to be part of and contribute to. Instead they drive for an hour, get exasperated in traffic jams, sit and are entertained, and then rush back to cook the dinner.

⁶ Unsound reasoning.

Church is nothing like this at all and people doing this will not grow in grace. Why, because growing in grace is to do with sharing with others in fellowship – giving and taking, one-anothering, in short, *koinonia*. Paul makes this clear repeatedly.⁷

What is worse is that it is often the case that these popular preachers later start preaching errors, or commit some great sin or even completely apostatise. For example: one popular young preacher in Sheffield started committing fornication with female members of the congregation. Eventually the church exploded. Another popular preacher in Cambridge was flavour of the month for years with people travelling great distances to hear his speeches. Eventually he confessed to being homosexual, left his family and left the faith. We could multiple stories like this.

It is not just Charismatics and liberals. I know personally one situation where a very popular Baptist pastor, the minister of a very well known Reformed church in the south, a man on various boards and committees, committed adultery for years before confessing and resigning. All the while he was sinning, his congregation thought he was the best evangelical thing since sliced bread.

Then there is the case of good men that do harm by their extreme popularity.

A case in point is that of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. His preaching was so popular that people even took train journeys to visit him on Friday evenings or Sundays. I knew of people that travelled 50 miles to hear him. The Westminster Chapel was full, but not with locals; Westminster Chapel became just a preaching centre with no real community. Lloyd-Jones even told the local Baptist pastor that he was really the local evangelical pastor for the area, not him. When Lloyd-Jones retired the chapel became a shadow of its former self and eventually took to meeting irregularly.

Centring on popularity does terrible things to the church.

Popularity is a natural fleshly desire

We all want to be loved and we all hate being rejected; these are just normal attributes of human behaviour.

In fact, this desire is a weakness in the Christian life and can be a source of great temptation. Time and time again Christians have fallen away because they placed great importance on being loved and fell for a foolish opportunity.

The obvious example of this is a forbidden relationship with another person. I was going to say, ‘with a person of the opposite sex’, but today that can no longer be taken for granted even in the church. Many church people, including leaders, have apostatised by entering into a forbidden relationship. Being loved caused their downfall and perdition.

Only the love of God can be truly trusted; in most cases, even the best human love fails.

So, because the fleshly soul craves being loved, it seems logical to people that being loved by many is a sign of blessing, and thus a sign of God’s favour. In fact, very many heresies

⁷ Eph 4:15-16, ‘speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love’. Col 2:19, ‘the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God’. [Joints are points of fellowship, interactions, in the body.]

began because an erroneous teacher began to be adopted by a crowd and became popular, for a variety of reasons (not necessarily for the teaching itself). The popularity of a man, even though he teaches errors, is a great evil in the church.

Human popularity is not on God's agenda

God is not the slightest bit interested in whether we are popular or not; he just wants us to follow his word.

Many Christians have this picture in their minds that Jesus was massively popular like a modern beloved celebrity, and thus they think it is being like Jesus to be popular. This is far from the truth. Jesus ministry was met with contrasting receptions.

There were occasions where Jesus was locally popular as a result of healings that he had just performed. Thus there were times where he preached to crowded houses, or had crowds follow him through a street. Several thousand followed him into the wilderness on at least two occasions. Of course, his final entry into Jerusalem was a scene of massive celebration. And yet days after the entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was crucified at the request of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

But in addition to supportive crowds, Jesus had massive opposition. Just read John's Gospel where every reference to 'Jews' is one of antagonism, rejection and conspiracy to murder. Some towns did not want him and sent him away, as they had the disciples.

And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged *Him* to depart from their region. **Matt 8:34**

Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region. **Mk 5:17**

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. **Matt 11:20**

Then He said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country'. **Lk 4:24**

And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?' So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house'. **Matt 13:54-57** [Jesus was rejected by Nazareth twice.]

For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country. **Jn 4:44** [Galilee.]

Jesus was met with opposition at every step of his ministry. He was opposed by the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, the priests, the chief priests, the scribes, Herodians, the Gadarenes, Sadducees, Zealots, and individual tax-collectors, money-changers and rich people and then finally the Romans.

Jesus polarised people; he was adored by many but reviled by many more. If he did not have opponents he would never have been crucified.

Godly men have faced hatred

On the contrary, some of the greatest defenders of the faith have not only not been popular, but they were reviled by many and treated with disdain.

The outstanding example of this is the great Athanasius who stood virtually alone against the rise of the heresy of Arianism. So castigated was this theologian and bishop that he was banished by the emperor five times and had to hide out away from populated cities. In time Athanasius was vindicated but for years he stood virtually alone for the truth and his life was on the line.

Perhaps there has not been a man so unjustly reviled as Calvin. Though he was always popular in some circles, he was reviled by very many. Even to this day Christians that should be thanking God for him castigate him with lies and smear campaigns 500 years later. It is unimaginable to me that Christians and church leaders denounce Calvin. When you look at their arguments it is all smoke and mirrors; there is no substance to them and the denouncers speak out of ignorance. I doubt any of them have 100th of the capacity of Calvin's godly character. Indeed, he is the only church leader I know that asked the town council for a reduction in his salary and died poor because he gave all his money away.

So the majority of the church denounces Calvin, despite the fact that he was a great man of God that changed history and the world for the better. Calvin's unpopularity seems to be a necessary aspect of his godly characteristics.

Seeking church popularity is fatal

This is because the seeking of popularity is a human frailty, a fleshly weakness. It betrays uncertainty and insecurity.

The man who is motivated by ideas and by truth will not stop for anything in order to pursue God's end with zeal. A lack of popularity, indeed even persecution, will not stop him from teaching these ideas.

The man who seeks popularity is a man not motivated by ideas or even ideals, but by alleviating personal insecurity.

Yet so many church leaders are dominated by the need to make their numbers larger. Plan after plan is devoted to increasing congregation sizes as if this was all that mattered. The real reason is that the leader is insecure and wants the larger numbers to substantiate his authority.

Once this sort of leader gets a large local congregation, he then goes on to try to gain additional congregations using a variety of methods. He teaches the gullible flock that this is God's desire and that he has the answer to the church's problems. Soon he leads multiple churches and gives himself an appropriate title of authority that sounds Biblical, like 'apostle'; or 'prophet', but really the appropriate title is 'despot'.

This is how authoritarianism begins – from the insecurity of some church leader who wanted to be loved.

Popularity is not a characteristic of a man of God necessarily

Now do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that a godly man is objectionable in character. Indeed, those truly elect of God will love the godly leader and even give their lives for him.

However, godly leaders do not seek popularity, fame, crowds for the sake of them, and find their security in God not waves of affection from people.

Time and time again the man of God for the hour has not been popular; indeed, he may have made demands that nobody wanted to hear.

Jeremiah

We see this in the OT all the time; the man of God stands apart from the authorities and the people, and insists on changes that no one wants. Jeremiah is the great example of this.

Jeremiah was far from popular because he brought the misdeeds of the king and the people to light. He denounced wickedness, demanding righteousness and insisted that the nation followed God in truth according to his law. For this he was persecuted, tormented and even thrown in a foul, miry pit. Here are some examples:

Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. **Jer 18:18**

Shall evil be repaid for good? For they have dug a pit for my life. **Jer 18:20**

For they have dug a pit to take me, and hidden snares for my feet. Yet, LORD, You know all their counsel which is against me, to slay *me*. **Jer 18:22-23**

My eyes bring suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city. My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird. They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me. **Lam 3:51-53**

Eventually Jeremiah was martyred.

David

Surely David was beloved? Did not the maidens of Israel sing his praises in the streets?

David was, indeed, very popular in his early life. He was the great champion of Israel and then the great king that conducted victory over Israel's enemies. But in later life David had many enemies and even became very unpopular. Even in Adullam David only had 400 men.

More than once David had to flee from those he had loved. Initially this was Saul but years later it was members of his own family. David faced civil war started by Abner when he was about 30 and only Judah supported him. Later in life his son Absalom started a rebellion in Judah, of all places, and was proclaimed king. The people resented David after his taking of the census. David had to flee for his life after being a great king for decades. After Absalom's defeat Israel rebelled against David under Sheba. After about ten years another rebellion began to make Adonijah king led by David's own general Joab, but was averted by the crowning of Solomon.

David's pain at being persecuted by many of his own people, even his family and friends, is seen in his Psalms:

My enemies *are* vigorous, *and* they are strong; and those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied. **Ps 38:19**

Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up *his* heel against me. **Ps 41:9**

For *it is* not an enemy *who* reproaches me; then I could bear *it*. Nor *is it* one *who* hates me who has exalted *himself* against me; then I could hide from him. But *it was* you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. **Ps 55:12-13**

Some wrong methods of seeking success

As usual, the truth about God's dealings with men to bring them into positions whereby he can use them effectively is the opposite of what is being taught in most churches.

Churches today teach a whole raft of measures and concepts that are bitterly opposed to the way God deals with people. These are so obviously wrong that it beggars belief that they pass muster in churches. I will give some examples.

Wrong method 1: self esteem

This is now universal in scope and utterly erroneous. It centres upon restoring the self-esteem that people supposedly need to have to be secure and useful in society. Thus everything that upsets them is downplayed and sins are treated superficially. Repentance is rarely discussed. The 'patient' is constantly having his ego stroked to make him feel better.

This is really a form of self-righteousness, which the Bible utterly condemns.

The Bible never teaches the need for improving self-esteem; that is something straight out of the iniquitous world of human psychiatry and philosophical self-improvement. Instead the Bible calls for self-denial to the point of death of the self (mortification).⁸

It also calls for self-sacrifice in favour of zeal for the welfare others.

Wrong method 2: a focus on power

Huge numbers of churches take this approach and whole church movements have been centred upon supposed acts of power or on power itself.

The usual apologetic is that Jesus performed healings and miracles therefore the church is also able to do these things. Why this is accepted is a mystery to me.

Early signs of authentication

The apostles clearly explained that the works of wonder performed by Jesus and subsequently by early apostolic ministry (the period did not last long) were divine acts to authenticate the fact that the Gospel was from God.⁹ This was necessary because multiple movements had arisen at that time which drew many supporters, whether it was Greek mystery cults, Mithraism, Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Hermetism or something else. The Gospel needed the divine stamp of authority to demonstrate that this was from God and was not another cult.

⁸ Matt 10:38-39, 'And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it'. Matt 16:24, 'Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"'. Mk 8:34-35, 'He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it"'. Lk 9:23-24, 'Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it"'. Jn 12:24-25 'I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. **He who loves his life will lose it**, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life'. Rm 6:11, 'Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord'. Gal 2:20, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me'. Gal 5:24, 'those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires'. Col 3:5, 'put to death your members which are on the earth'.

⁹ E.g. Heb 2:3-4, 'how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?'

The miracles exploded with Jesus and were also manifest in the early ministry of the apostles but gradually ceased. Tongues disappeared fairly quickly and are only mentioned in 1 Corinthians (56-57 AD) and Acts. Paul's miracles slowed down over the years and the last recorded healing is of Publius and others on Malta (Acts 28:8-9; before 62 AD).

Certain miracles stopped by the end of the apostolic age but there were sporadic reports of healings by some church fathers up to the time of Augustine (354–430), but these cannot be verified. Pagan cults also claimed to produce miracles and healings during this period.

What is certain is that the multiple healings and miracles in the time of Jesus and the apostles is, as Jesus explained, divine verification that his Gospel was from heaven. After that period no further miracles were necessary, the testimony of Christians and the word of God was sufficient to produce disciples.

Seeking signs is fleshly and Pharisaical

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. **Matt 12:39**

This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it. **Lk 11:29**

Jews request a sign. **1 Cor 12:22**

In his multiple condemnations of the Jews, Jesus explains that they always seek for signs and were not convinced by truth. What could be clearer, it was an evil and adulterous generation that sought signs. Jesus reiterates the condemnation of God in the OT that the Jews were an adulterous race, fully justifying condemnation.

[Aside: the idea of some preachers, especially Jewish Root teachers, that this seeking of signs is a good thing is nonsense; the words are used in a condemnatory fashion.]

Paul also contrasts the Jewish seeking of signs with the preaching of the Gospel. What is important is the Gospel of Christ and his atonement, 'we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1:23-24). **The elect understand this and do not need signs.**

Paul further explains that the seeking of signs is worldly and God puts this to shame (1 Cor 1:25-29).

The Pharisees, whom Jesus directly condemned for seeking signs, became transfixed by signs when they later reconstituted Judaism in Babylon, writing the Talmud, and subsequently in the development of Gematria and the Kaballa. Judaism today is focused upon the mystical interpretation of signs and numerology in exactly the same way as followers of occult magic and divination. Sadly many modern church leaders have also fallen for this nonsense.

However, our point here is that seeking signs is a bad thing not a good thing. Why would Christians that have God dwelling in them, the Holy Spirit guiding them and who abide in Christ need fleshly signs? Christians do not need signs at all; not at all; they have the mind of Christ.

Think of some of the greatest, most godly men in all history who changed nations that never had any signs of any kind.

Authoritarianism

As well as powerful signs that are unnecessary, a bigger problem is the power that men seek to dominate the church with, which I have already alluded to.

The power of controlling a large church, or multiple churches, is seen as credit of heavenly authority. If that is true then David Miscavige, leader of the Church of Scientology, is a divine representative. The pope is a divine representative. The Dalai Lama is a divine representative. This argument is absolute nonsense. Human power over people is just a sign of human gullibility and weakness.

Wrong method 3: mysticism

Mysticism is very popular in modern churches and there are numerous forms of it.

There are those who know nothing about mysticism at all but practice methods that lead directly to enabling mysticism, such as repetitive singing, ambient background music, hypnotic services, suggestibility, which all lead to increasing passivity and then to mystical experiences.

Passing on a demonic force through laying on of hands, just as in eastern religions, so that a person falls over backwards and has an emotional, mystical experience which is claimed to be of God, is mysticism.

Using one of the various forms of Catholic contemplative prayer or meditation.

Using Catholic spiritual disciplines emanating from one mystic or another, such as Ignatius Loyola.

Using sacramental objects and fetishes to aid concentrated prayer and meditation or healing prayer. The list goes on and on.

People are attracted to mysticism and some denominations have completely centred upon it, such as Quakerism and various Quietist groups. However attractive, all forms of mysticism are fleshly superstition and merely serve to make you more subjected to demonic temptation and self-delusion. Thus the 'Inner Light' of the Quakers is not the inspired word of God but merely the delusions of gullible, emotional people.

Charismatic worship services are largely centred upon a light form of mysticism but radical expressions (such as the Toronto Blessing phenomena) are very hard form of mysticism and deeply damaging. In fact, people can be permanently psychologically damaged by such experiences (and have been).

None of these mystical forms contribute to genuine spiritual success.

Conclusion

There are many bad forms of seeking success in church building. We could list many more examples but these are sufficient. Methods that garner human submission or popularity are no sign of divine favour whatsoever. Indeed, more often than not, they are signs of God's displeasure.

Abandonment, betrayal and rejection are part of the path of God's training for true ministry

The simple fact is that God often uses hardship, tribulation, afflictions, loss, bereavement and suffering to forge a man of God. God brings a servant to an end of himself, a place of brokenness, so that he becomes completely dependent upon grace alone. Only then can God really use a person. We see this over and over again in the OT.

Example: Moses

Moses' whole life, after abandoning the Egyptian royal family, was a life of continual suffering. This is so obvious, as it is revealed in the Pentateuch, that I need not expound it in any detail.

He had to flee for his life and start a new life of poverty in the wilderness. He then had to abandon this new life and begin the difficult task of demanding Pharaoh to set the Hebrew slaves free from the foremost world power. He had to lead perhaps 1½ million people for forty years in the wilderness. He had to suffer constant attacks on his leadership. He had to suffer constant complaints of the people. He had the daily, arduous task of judging the people. He had to constantly admonish and sometimes condemn. He had to lead Israel in battle against hostile tribes. He had to teach a recalcitrant people the ways of God. He had to intercede and mediate for a rebellious people. He was even refused entry to the Promised Land.

Moses did not have an easy life, to say nothing of living in a tent in the wilderness for decades. Like many of God's people, he was abandoned time after time.

This is just a snapshot of the many sufferings of Moses. Yet he was also Israel's greatest leader and the man that most clearly typifies Christ.

Example: Joseph

Joseph suffered multiple forms of abandonment because he was a prime type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First he had the abandonment of his brothers who ridiculed the visions that he had out of jealousy.

Then he had the further hatred of his brothers because of the favour that Jacob gave Joseph, such as the special coat.

Then he had the physical abandonment when his brothers threw him in a pit and then sold him as a slave.

Then followed the abandonment of being in a strange land away from his family.

Then the abandonment of his master's wife who betrayed and slandered him.

Then there was the abandonment in a prison for a long period.

Then there was the abandonment of being forgotten by the people that he had helped while in prison.

Joseph suffered more abandonment than any other OT saint. However, this suffering enabled Joseph to become the wise Vizier of the kingdom of Egypt and protect God's

people in trouble. The line of the elect would have died out if Joseph had not suffered and rose to power.

Example: Hosea

Hosea is a neglected but important prophet; indeed the only writing prophet to come from the Northern Kingdom of Israel and his ministry lasted 60 years. For this reason his book is at the head of the Minor Prophets and one of the longest prophetic books before the captivity. Hosea is also either directly quoted (Matt 2:15, 9:15, 12:7; Rm 9:25-26) or alluded to (e.g. Lk 23:30; Rev 6:16) in the NT a number of times.

The most significant aspect of Hosea's life is his strange marriage, and this is where he knew great abandonment. This was necessary for Hosea to be able to feel how God felt about the rejection and adultery of his people against him, but it was still a huge ordeal for Hosea to go through.

He is ordered to take a wife of harlotry (Hos 1:2) and have children with her, all of which is typical of God's dealing with Israel. At some point she runs off in adultery again and becomes the slave of her lover. Hosea then buys her back for the price of a slave, despite her terrible sins (Hos 3:1-2).

Abandonment by friends, family and trusted ones in the life of Jesus

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. **Matt 21:42**

Firstly, Jesus suffered the rejection of his own people. Thus Jesus lived for many years suffering day by day the abandonment of the very people that should have been worshipping him. Instead of honouring him, they plotted against him and sought to kill him. We cannot downplay the seriousness of this abandonment.

Jesus saw many people abandon him when they could not accept his teaching (Jn 6:66).

Jesus saw the abandonment of Peter who denied him three times at the point of his greatest need.

Jesus knew the abandonment and betrayal by one of his own disciples that led to his death.

Jesus was abandoned by the crowds that a week before had worshipped him when he entered Jerusalem. They betrayed him for a robber and called for his crucifixion, egged on by the religious leaders.

Jesus' own disciples abandoned him at the crucifixion:

Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled. **Matt 26:56**

Abandonment by friends, family and trusted ones in the ministry of Paul

It is common amongst modern Charismatic preachers to cherry pick parts of Paul's life and portray him as some super-successful, miracle-working, revolutionary who single-handedly built the Gentile church. This is not a true picture.

Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles and did a remarkable work. However, this involved a team of co-workers and thought-out strategies that included sending delegates on his behalf.

However, what the modern commentators forget to mention is the terrible suffering of Paul that he experienced throughout his entire ministry. Paul was never without affliction, hardships and persecution. Read his summaries of his tribulations, such as in 2 Corinthians and see that no man ever suffered as much as Paul in the service of God.

Modern Charismatics portray Paul as a man of faith who was used in multiple powerful healings and ignore the fact that he himself was sick and ailing, that he often could not heal his friends and co-workers (such as Timothy, Epaphroditus and Trophimus), that he was often hungry and thirsty, that he never owned a house and that he was constantly persecuted, mostly by his own people the Jews, whom he describes as ‘enemies of the Gospel’.

Paul was a man that, as well as experiencing great triumphs for the Gospel, was constantly suffering and filled with anxiety for the churches.¹⁰

But perhaps the worst thing that Paul suffered, as Jesus, was the abandonment and rejection of beloved friends and co-workers.

All those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.
2 Tim 1:15

This is interpreted as either:

- All the disciples from Anatolia¹¹ that were present in Rome who had initially supported Paul but then deserted him when things became too hot.
- Or that a large number of disciples and churches in Anatolia apostatised.

Tradition says that Phygellus and Hermogenes were of the seventy disciples of Jesus who later became followers of Simon Magus.

Demas has forsaken [abandoned] me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica. 2 Tim 4:10

At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. 2 Tim 4:16

Without a doubt, Paul knew abandonment, and was especially forsaken when he needed support most in his trial at Rome.

The many tribulations in possessing the kingdom

In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.
Jn 16:33

¹⁰ 2 Cor 11:28-29, ‘besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern [*merimna* = anxiety] for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?’.

¹¹ Actually, Proconsular Asia, known as *Asia Propria* or simply Asia. The Roman province formed out of the kingdom of Pergamus, which was bequeathed to the Romans by Attalus III (bc. 130), including the Greek cities on the western coast of Asia, and the adjacent islands with Rhodes. It included Mysia, Lydia, Caria, and Phrygia. Therefore, only the western part of Anatolia.

We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. **Acts 14:22**

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church. **Col 1:24**

We told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation. **1 Thess 3:4**

So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, *which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer. **2 Thess 1:4-5**

Share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God. **2 Tim 1:8**

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. **2 Tim 3:12**

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings. **1 Pt 4:12-13**

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. **Rev 2:10**

We have to eradicate the modern church error about guaranteed prosperity by faith, success, financial security, automatic healing, visualising cherished desires and so on. All this is not just fatuous, it is occult.¹² It is the false spiritual preoccupations of people preoccupied with material desires.

This sort of doctrine is not just unbiblical nonsense for middle class western narcissists, it is a slander to all those Christian people suffering in Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, and Asia. These would love a guaranteed roof over their head and a water supply and the suggestion that they are not rich, filled with luxuries and enjoying good health because they have insufficient faith, is a disgrace to their God and Father.

The Charismatic snake-oil charlatans that promise wealth, health and success are a disgrace and should be run out of town. They are plundering the suffering people of God who donate money to rich leaders in the hope of getting things that will never happen just because some charlatan preacher said so. God have mercy on his people.

The truth is that the church will never have the sort of success, wealth and happiness that these Charismatics claim. In God's providence a few may become rich in order to help the kingdom, but the vast majority will not. But even those who get rich still come under the proviso of God's word, 'in the world you will have tribulation'. If Jesus said this then no man can countermand it; you will have tribulation of some sort. Get used to it.

This tribulation takes many forms: afflictions, health problems, persecutions, slanders, violence, rejection and abandonment. Different people have different types of affliction and different amounts. Some people have a great deal of tribulations covering various forms. Paul was one of those people. There is no escaping that Christians will suffer afflictions. The claim of Charismatics that life can be rosy by faith is a pure lie.

¹² Various occult practices claim to enable the adept to demand his desires by means of spells, rituals and charms; whether this be love of someone, damage to someone, power, or gaining material possessions. The Charismatic teaching of visualisation and faith to gain a desired material object is no different. God is not some heavenly slot machine dispensing objects at the push of a button. God gives us what we need, when we need it (2 Cor 9:8); he also gives us pain, grief and suffering when he chooses for our greater good (Job 1:21; Rm 8:28; 1 Thess 5:18; Jm 1:2-3).

Having established this, I then affirm that abandonment is going to be one of those afflictions. If you grow in grace, you will know what it means to be betrayed and abandoned.

Eschatological abandonment

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. **Matt 10:22**

You will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. **Matt 24:9**

You will be hated by all for My name's sake. **Mk 13:13**

You will be hated by all for My name's sake. **Lk 21:17**

The first text refers to the sending out of the 12 during the ministry of Jesus on earth; however this forms a precursor to the later mission of the apostles, which itself is a formula for the mission of the church, especially at the end. When we, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations', (Matt 28:19) we also become, 'hated by all nations for My name's sake' (Matt 24:9)

When the end comes and the sin of mankind is complete, there is a worldwide hating of Christ and those who belong to him. The church is the target for annihilation. If you weren't abandoned already, you will be then.

In the process of the world coming closer and closer to the end, before the fierce global persecution of the church there will be a gradual cooling of people towards Christianity by stages. It will be in this period (of an unknown time) that those who have been fortunate not to experience abandonment will then experience it for the first time. Abandonment will be a characteristic of being a Christian in the end time.

The divine purpose in abandonment

The key to fellowship with God in power and fulness is dependency.

There are many levels of fellowship with God, beginning as a newborn baby in the faith after regeneration. Once regenerated we have a relationship with God but are far from being effective in that relationship. It requires years of growth in grace and understanding before God can continually use us and trust us with grace.

Now occasionally God does use a relatively young Christian to do extraordinary things. Timothy was one of the people who served as an apostle's colleague and evangelist while yet a youth. David Brainerd and Murray M'Cheyne were both greatly used by God and yet died before they were thirty. These are exceptions. In these cases the training of God had been accelerated; often God uses sickness to do this and Timothy, Brainerd and M'Cheyne were sickly people.

In most cases it takes years of learning how to be dependent upon God. Far too often Christians resort to trusting in their own strength and abilities. When they do this they cannot operate in grace.

Bit by bit God shows us how our abilities fail and why we need to die to them and trust in his power through our weakness. Grace essentially means 'power through human weakness'.

David slaying Goliath is the great illustration of this. The great armour of Saul (i.e. the old nature) was of no use in slaying the giant Philistine; David had to approach Goliath in human weakness. Thus the young man, without human armour went to battle. He chose five smooth stones polished by the stream. Five is the number of grace and the stream is an allusion to the flowing Holy Spirit. With a mere pebble provided by the stream (the weapon of the Spirit) and a sling (leather; i.e. dead flesh), David killed Goliath 'stone' dead. The weakness of David, with no human advantages, won the battle. This is grace operating in man. David could not have killed Goliath in Saul's armour.

The secret in serving God is mortified flesh and the power of the Spirit. Paul talks about this in various ways but in Philippians he says,

Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. **Phil 3:8-11**

The fellowship of Jesus' sufferings are the means the Holy Spirit uses to conform us to his death. We learn to die to ourselves, deny ourselves and trust in the power of Christ's resurrection life in us by the Spirit.

One of the key sufferings used by God in this training is that of abandonment. This is an exceptionally powerful form of suffering and it results in an exceptionally powerful ability to trust in the fellowship of God.

This abandonment can take various forms. In Calvin's case it was the very early death of his beloved wife after a short marriage. From that point, Calvin was married to God alone.

There is speculation by some commentators that Paul had been married. It was unusual for a trained Pharisee not to be married and Paul's counsel to married people shows considerable wisdom that required experience. Thus they speculate that Paul's wife died young leaving Paul a widow. This makes eminent sense. In which case, Paul also, like Calvin, knew the pain of abandonment by death and thus became more dependent upon God.

This is God's goal – to make us completely dependent upon him.

Conclusion

I write this paper out of personal experience. I have known multiple cases of abandonment, betrayal, false accusation, slander and libel. These are hard things to deal with. However, as you get older, wiser and more used to human desertion, even of close friends or family, you begin to understand and to be able to cope.

I write this paper for those of you that are beginning to experience abandonment. Far from being sad about this, embrace it and thank God for it, for it's the beginning of deeper training. You are not alone, all the saints that God used in history knew the pain of abandonment.

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