

THE TEST

P.F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

When I was in primary school I had an American friend called John who used to live in Dover Heights. I have a vivid recollection of visiting John one day, with my brother Phillip. He took us climbing in a nearby gully, and two things about this have stayed in my memory.

First of all, there was a childish but serious conversation, in which John told us that he reckoned that he knew what life was about. It was, he said, in his own opinion, a sort of trial period, a time of testing by God to see whether you were to go to heaven or hell. This made an impression on me, but I doubt that I would have remembered it except for the second thing that happened. Endeavouring to follow John and my brother over a rocky outcrop, I found myself without foothold or handhold, and gradually slipping downwards. The fall below was on to rocks about 20 or 30 feet down. Fortunately for me John and Phillip grabbed a hand each and hauled me to safety. Danger was averted, but you can see why I think John's philosophy of life was branded into my memory - there was an exquisite moment there where I thought that my personal trial period was over!

I wouldn't say that John's remark has directed the course of my life to any great extent. Indeed, one could scarcely argue that the rich complexity of life can be reduced to viewing it as a 'trial period'. On the other hand, there is a fundamental truth here, and it may be well for all of us to reflect upon it.

For life does provide a choice and a test, and what we do here does have a bearing on the hereafter. The God who made the world also created you and me. That means he owns us, and we owe everything to him. The fact is, however, that we keenly dispute his right to rule over our lives. We do not wish him to control us.

We use all sorts of excuses to avoid having anything to do with him or his people.

This rejection of God means that he has the perfect right to wipe us out. He owes us nothing. But instead, in his love and mercy he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, to call us back to himself. When Jesus appeared, he, too was scorned and rejected. Nevertheless, it was through his death that God saved us, and his resurrection from the dead proves that this is true. Now Jesus is alive and he continues to call us back to God, promising us forgiveness for our rebellion, if we will, even at this late stage put ourselves under God's rule. But if we continue to rebel, we will be cast out in the end, because this is God's world, and he will not endure continued rebellion.

This ultimate judgement by God means that John's childish description was substantially true. It should give us much reason to think about ourselves and the course our lives have run. Are we God's servants, trusting him for forgiveness, and trying now to obey him? If we are not, every breath we draw takes us one moment closer to the horror of an eternity spent in opposition to God. But to know God now, is to enjoy his presence for evermore. If you were going to slip over the edge of that rock, where would you be tonight?

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