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3 CONFUSION

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CONFUSION

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CONFUSION

What is your cause? I don't necessarily refer to the banner-waving or placard-carrying kind - those are more often "happenings" than genuine causes - but to the real convictions that make life worth living for you. For, of course, we are all committed, intentionally or subconsciously, to some cause. The question is, What is it?

There are some people today who have the ideal of an uncommitted life. "Play it cool. Keep a safe distance. Don't get involved." But that is a commitment in itself. An inverse commitment to a life of non-involvement. To withdrawal from life. But, sooner or later, we all make commitments, and if we evade them, then life has a way of making them for us.

Some people slip through life accumulating unintentional commitments, allowing the shape of life to be determined by the circumstances of the moment. They just commit themselves to the life that looks easiest, the group that is most popular, the style of life that looks most convenient or comfortable.

Alternatively, you may commit your life consciously to a purpose worth pursuing, a life worth living.

Viktor Frankl, famed Austrian psychologist writes, "Life has a meaning only if there is a purpose, a life task. The more difficult the task, the more meaningful the life." Agnostic philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, agrees when he says, "You will never find peace and happiness until you are ready to commit yourself to something worth dying for."

Now we have begun here, with the meaning of a committed or dedicated life, because I believe that this is the "positive" pole, of which our topic tonight, "Confusion" is the "negative." What I want to argue is, that the confused world of which you and I are a part is a result of the inadequate or false life commitments that are offered to men and women, and that the resolution of much confusion is to be found in the re-ordering of those commitments. In the end we can't get "clear" by an exercise in positive thinking. Confusion is only removed by a radical change of life.

Confusion is all of a kind (that is to say, our various experiences are pretty confused in the way they occur; we have to impose a sense of order on them), but it comes in several (in)conveniently packaged doses.

(i) There is an intellectual confusion. "I don't know what to think. Last year they taught me _____, but now I've read this book which says ..."; or perhaps, "I swotted it for exams, but I haven't really got a clue if it's true or not." It's always hard to know what to believe, but especially hard now when, as Dr. Francis Schaeffer points out, scholars find it impossible to live by what they believe. Scientism, for instance, says that Science can answer all questions, or some philosophy claims life to be absurd, but the practitioners avoid living in test-tubes or padded cells!

(ii) Then there is a moral confusion. "How should I behave? I mean, everybody else is doing it but, somehow, I don't know ..." "Live for kicks, and live now. By the time you're 30 you're finished." The confusing thing is that morality is not a matter of personal choice; to say "it's all right as long as no-one gets hurt" in moral decisions - that's in matters of personal integrity and honesty and respect and responsibility, as well as sex, by the way - is to argue that you can choose to jump in front of a moving bus as long as you don't get hurt. It is just not possible. And significantly, if people today can't live by what they believe, they can't die the way they live either. I haven't met anyone who wants to die for the cause of "kicks."

(iii) Then there is a social confusion. The newspapers tell us that every day. And as tonight I'm talking primarily to young people, you know by experience of the confusion and tension of living in a family.

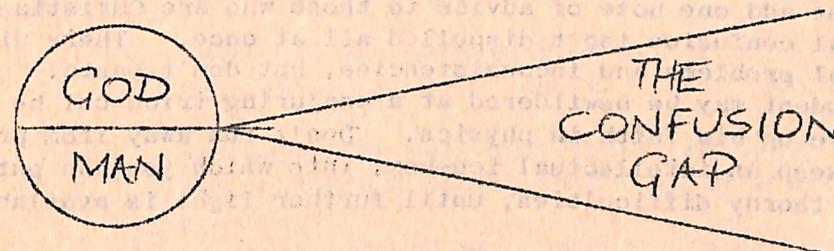
(iv) Through it all, there is a sense of personal confusion. "I don't know what it is: I just don't know where to begin." "Who am I? And what am I doing here?", or just plain "Aarrgggh!"

Now it is in answer to this that people like Frankl or Sartre, (and many other ordinary common-sense people, too), say that the solution is commitment. Not just the unintentional

sort, but the conscious, purposeful step which says, "I'm going somewhere, and I'm going to get there." The thing most people don't tell us is what we should commit ourselves to. And this is where the Bible speaks so clearly. When it speaks of commitment to God it leads not only to "I'm going somewhere", but also "and I know where I'm going." The key to all life is theological.

First of all, the Bible offers a diagnosis of confusion. It says that it is a natural result of man's rebellion against God. Look at the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis - a document which "tells it like it is", which paints the backdrop against which the drama of the Bible story is acted out; which says, this is what life is about, this is what is real.

We can represent these chapters diagrammatically:



To begin with, God and man are in intimate fellowship. The result is order, peace, certitude. Then in the rebellion that theologians call "the fall", man jumped out of line. He wanted to arrange things himself, and as a result was alienated from his position of trust and dependence on God. This occurs at the beginning of Chapter 3. Then in succeeding events the blight of this alienation affects - nature (3:14); family life (3:16); man in his environment (3:23); man and religion (4: 4 & 5); man in his relationships (4:8); and so it could go on. In place of order, peace, certitude has come discord, strife, confusion. The cause is sin, and the solution beyond the reach of man. The Bible, of course, goes on to point to the good news that the "confusion gap" has been bridged. The Cross meets the problem of sin, and God is reconciled to man. A life commitment is possible which begins to restore to man the sort of life which he was always meant to have. (2 Cor. 5:17; John 16:33; 10:10).

Christians don't find that confusion disappears. But they

do believe that the basic problem is being dealt with. Consequently, they can begin the clearing operations so necessary to effective living.

Intellectually - and here I'm not speaking of the so-called intellectual problems of belief (they are mainly pseudo problems and in time come to be seen as such) - intellectually we can begin to take a point of view. We've got somewhere to begin from, and if we want to we can begin to integrate our studies and our world on the basis of our commitment. Everyone has a point of view (that's where we began) and the Christian humbly asserts that his point of view takes more into account, is more comprehensive, and consequently has the potential to answer more far-reaching questions, than any other life commitment.

Let me add one note of advice to those who are Christians. Intellectual confusion isn't dispelled all at once. There will be many real problems and inconsistencies, but don't panic. A physics student may be bewildered at a conjuring trick but he doesn't give up his faith in physics. Don't run away from problems, but keep an intellectual ice-box, into which you can put the really thorny difficulties, until further light is available.

Then morally, Christian commitment helps you to step into a set of moral values, that are increasingly to become your own. There is a scale against which you can measure right and wrong. You can know where you stand. And it is wise to remind yourself of this and make a firm stand upon this commitment.

When Joseph got caught by Mrs. Potiphar, in the archetypal "bedroom scene" of the book of Genesis, he didn't sit down then sexual activities. He ran. The worst place to sort out your moral attitudes is when you're in the position of making a moral choice. It's not that there is a cut and dried blueprint, but in the big decisions, the Christian can know beforehand how he should act.

Socially much could be said, But the Christian who has his own source of self-respect, and a healthy scepticism about his self-importance, has a real basis to move through social confusion with dignity and a minimum of bruised toes.

Personally, the Gospel points to the possibility of real fulfilment. This much has already been said. Jesus once taught that "he who gives away his life, shall find it" (Matt. 16:25) and it's true. In renouncing my self-centredness I begin to see who I am. "I'm a son of God; I'm going somewhere and I know where I'm going. I'm going to see the King!"

All of this is tremendously real, and I'm sure that all of us who have begun this life of self-renunciation and life commitment, have also begun to prove that what the Bible says is true.

But there is another confusion. A problem that confronts every Christian who is genuine in his desire to serve God and live for Him. And for the remainder of this address, I want to consider this sort of confusion, a spiritual confusion, that St. Paul describes like this:

"I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't. I do what I don't want to - what I hate.

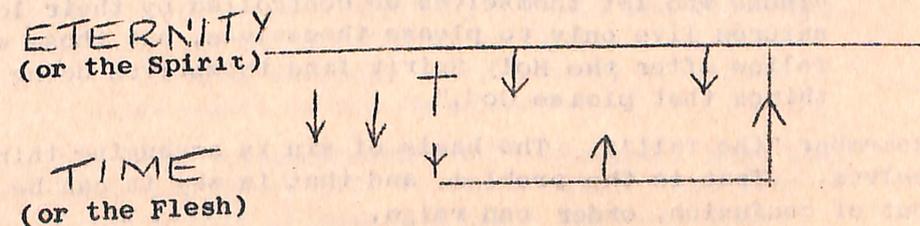
I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking.

But I can't help myself, because I'm no longer doing it.

It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things." (Romans 7:15-17 "Living Letters")

Does that sound like you? You really need to read the whole section, Chapters 5-8 of the Epistle to the Romans, to see what Paul is getting at, but what it says is that we are involved in a civil war (and not a very civil war, at that!), which is part of the whole war between God and Satan - and that the battle ground is in us.

Let's return to the world of "art" for a moment, and represent the argument like this:



Paul seems to argue that we are caught in the middle of a two-party system. The eternal, unchanging God intrudes into our "time" - (the whole world of limitation in time and space, of disorder and disruption) - until eventually by that act of capitulation at the foot of Christ's Cross, we are caught up in that quality of life which is called eternal (John 17:3; I John 5: 11 & 12). Eventually that state will be actually realised, but in the meantime, we live at "split levels." Optimistically this is the "best of both worlds", but, at the same time, it is a matter of conflict. Read through the remainder of Chapter 7 some time. In it the Apostle starts to show the terms of this conflict when he makes the assertion of Verse 18 -

"I know that I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned",

and from this point he is now ready to point to the appropriate solution. If the problem really is sin, then the answer is never just good intentions - sin demands a saviour. And this he indicates in Verse 25 -

"Oh, what a terrible predicament I am in! Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature? Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free."

Chapter 8 takes up the argument -

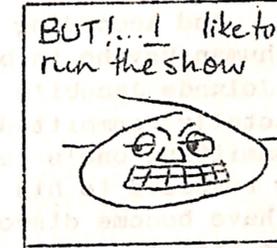
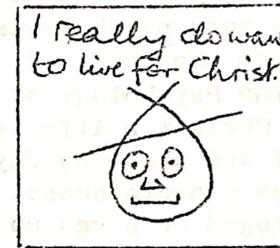
"... the power of the life giving Spirit ... has freed me from the vicious circle of sin and death."

Here is the reminder. We are involved in a triumphant cause. We have started to win the war. It is still a matter of choice, but not self-sufficient effort. When we remove our various reservations, then God can start to do something for us. As Verse 5 puts it:

"Those who let themselves be controlled by their lower natures live only to please themselves, but those who follow after the Holy Spirit find themselves doing those things that please God."

Remember "the fall"? The basis of sin is arranging things ourselves. That is the problem, and that is why it can be beaten. Out of confusion, order can reign.

Paul's argument in Romans Chapters 7 - 8.



Read to the end of Chapter 8 and see the result of doing things the Lord's way. And then compare your findings with Galatians 5:17-22.

I was struck this week by reading some words of A. W. Tozer, "It may be said without qualification that every man is as holy and as full of the Spirit as he wants to be. He may not be as full as he wishes he were, but he is most certainly as full as he wants to be." And that puts it in a nutshell.

The thing is, this attitude of willingness is a daily decision. Confusion is a result of trying to live in the past, and realising that the problems of the present don't quite fit. And then we get discouraged and make-believe, or else try to get along anyhow. The Christian victory must be won daily.

Let American layman and author of "The Taste of New Wine", Keith Miller, explain his experience:

"I have always pictured my inner life as a sort of cavern inside my head out of which I look at you, the rest of the world, through my eyes in the wall of the cavern. This cavern has a pool of liquid filling it about two-thirds full. The part above the surface of the pool is my conscious life and the larger part, beneath the surface where I cannot see, is my unconscious life. The day I decided to commit my life wholly to God, I scooped up everything I could see above the level of consciousness and offered it to Christ. I felt free; but then, several mornings later a hoary head came up out of the slimy pool, an old resentment.

I was filled with discouragement and I thought I must not have really committed my life to God at all. But then I realised joyously that of course I had - that all a man

does when he commits his "whole life" is to commit that of which he is conscious. And according to many psychologists, the major part of the human Psyche is below the level of consciousness. (See Jolande Jacobi's 'The Psychology of (C.G. Jung)'). So the totally "committed" Christian life is a life of continually committing one's self and problems day by day as they are slowly revealed to his own consciousness. I think many Christians have become discouraged or given up because they have at some time made a new beginning with God and then found their minds filled with lust, resentment, and jealousy. Discouraged, they have assumed that they are not in right relationship with God at all. Naturally they do not want to admit these problems in their Sunday School classes, since they assume the rest of us are not plagued with such horrible and unchristian thoughts.

But since I now wanted to commit my future to God, I had to find out specific ways to align my rebellious and wavering will to His. I had always "prayed" sporadically; but my prayer life was a rather mechanical monologue. I had prayed about big things (cancer, success, deliverance) but didn't want to disturb God over the little problems of every day living (resentment, jealousy, slothfulness). Now suddenly I realised that there are no small decisions - since every deciding either takes one closer to or further from God's will."

Which, of course, brings us right back to the matter of commitment, and the question, what is your cause? Maybe you experience confusion because your cause is just not big enough to answer the real-life problems you run into. Or if you're a Christian, perhaps there are so many causes, that the triumphant cause of Christ just doesn't get a chance to become real in the things that really count.

What I'm saying tonight is just that Jesus Christ alone is worthy of every man's life commitment. And that includes yours.

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Some other Trinity publications that will help to dispel the darkness of confusion:

How to Get Guidance (S25-15c)

by Robert Banks. Clear Scriptural principles for the Christian seeking to know and obey God's will.

Certainty (S16-15c)

by Lance Shilton. Christian certainty is entirely reasonable if one believes that God is true to His word.

Doers of the Word Book 1 (SB6-50c)

A 12 - study course on how to receive guidance from God, how to witness and how to practise discipline.

And for those confused on this particular subject -

Chariots of What Gods? (D62-10c)

Hugh Prentice assesses the book "Chariots of the Gods?" in the light of the Bible.

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CONFUSION

All the people are not confused all of the time, but there is no one who is not confused any of the time. This problem, says Philip Thomas, is partly the result of our being mere mortals, but more the result of our being out of fellowship with our Heavenly Father. To know God is to have light on our complex lives. Philip Thomas calls us to follow the Leader.

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