

Encouragement and Upliftment

By Hendrik Joubert

There are many things in this life that may bring us down emotionally, some of which may be totally beyond our control. Those things resulting from poor choices we have made tend to be a little harder on us because they could have been avoided. All of us need encouragement and *upliftment* from time-to-time and for many the church is to fulfill this role. *There are enough depressing things in our daily lives; we do not need negative sermons making us feel even worse.*

The Bible contains the most uplifting and encouraging news imaginable, however the question is whether we understand what this true encouragement and *upliftment* is about when we make such a general demand of the church. Do we have a right to be encouraged simply because we are depressed by our circumstances, and is it the duty of the church to make us feel better?

The statements: *For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.* (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10 NKJV) and *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”* (Luke 5:31) contain some irony as in fact *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) The point being, not unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, many do not realize that they are lost in their sins because they have prematurely *lifted* themselves up to a status only God can promote sinners to. (Acts 2:47; Revelation 3:12)

The good news of the gospel highlights the negative news concerning our sin and its consequences. God condemns us to eternal punishment in hell. Reminiscent of how we do things in this life, we tend to want to put the cart before the horse; we want to lift ourselves up before we have humbled ourselves before the Lord, so that He would be the one doing the *lifting*. James supplies us with the proper order, announced also more than once by the Lord Jesus: *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.* (James 4:10; Luke 14:11) It is not the realization of our guilt, but rather the desire to simply *make the pain go away* which seems to be the driving force in our lives.

The sinner who gets the full impact of the statement *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* without rushing, or even skipping to *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* (Romans 3:23-24 NKJV) as if the gracious justification seems as automatic as the incriminating sin, will realize that the frivolous concept of encouragement and *upliftment* we expect simply because we hurt is not only presumptuous, it's insulting to the death of Christ. The Son of God was not crucified so we may live a happy life on this earth; Jesus died to save us from our sins so we may live eternally in heaven, away from the things of this life which so easily entangle and distract us.

Eternal damnation makes any other problem one may face seem frivolous. The sinner who understands the seriousness of sin is transformed by the renewing of his mind (Romans 12:2) so that he may *present his body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* (Romans 12:1) Because his confidence is not in himself but rather in Christ, he may say: *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:13) The change is not immediate, however the awareness results in a hungering and thirsting after the pure milk of the word so that by it he may grow *in respect to, or into salvation,* as other translations read. (1Peter 2:1-3)

How would we react if we were asked to die for our faith? When we talk of these things the conversation gets a little heavy...*surely God does not expect of us to live as the apostle Paul did...* These were the words of a Christian, no longer faithful. While facing a hostile court, and even while he was being stoned to death, Stephen could glorify God because he was truly lifted up by Jehovah. (Acts 7:51-60) The apostles rejoiced because *they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.* (Acts 5:41)

There are many passages which suggest that we may have confidence, however the confidence is not in ourselves per se, but rather in Christ who loved us so that we may be *conquerors* over this life and sin. (Romans 8:37) *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38-39)