



Lawyers' Christian Fellowship Newsletter

www.lawyerschristianfellowship.org

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WHAT FREEDOM COSTS

LCF MENTORING

William Wilberforce twice contemplated leaving politics in order to go into Christian ministry. On both occasions John Newton counselled him against this, urging him to serve God as a Christian statesman.

Persuading Wilberforce to combine the life of a Christian with the life of a politician is regarded by some as John Newton's finest hour as a pastor. What if Newton had given Wilberforce different counsel? The loss to British politics, to parliamentary history, and above all to the cause of the abolition of slavery, would have been devastating.

That is the difference that mentoring can make in the lives of young Christian women and men who are either studying Law, or have recently entered practice.

The Lawyers Christian Fellowship proposes to establish a mentoring program that will match up law students and young lawyers (less than 10 years post-admission) with older and more experienced Christian lawyers whose role will be to offer advice, encouragement and prayer support on professional and spiritual matters. The commitment of time will not be significant.

If you are interested in participating in this new program, please complete and return the enclosed response form. Enquiries may be directed to Tom Altobelli on 0418 210 794 or by email tom.altobelli@fmc.gov.au

'This year's opening of Law Term Address was given at St James, King St, by the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney the Most Rev Dr Peter Jensen. His text was 1 Kings 21

Do you now govern Israel?'

So said Jezebel to Ahab. A question brilliantly framed to sort him out, to offer him a temptation he could not refuse. To her mind he had acted both as a squib and a squirt. He had allowed a nonentity, Naboth, the farmer next door, to frustrate his desires. He had taken to his bed and refused to eat in a childish fit of sulks.

Was he not the King, and the king of Israel, too?

This was not the behaviour of the Kings she was used to. A princess of the Sidonian royal house, she had married the King of the neighbouring state, presumably on the expectation that he would behave in a kingly way. In her experience of royal power, Naboth was lucky to be given a fair price for his vineyard. The idea that the King would retreat baffled and frustrated did not accord with her view of the royal power. She exercised power without scruple.

'Do you now govern Israel?'

I admit that today's reading gives us a pretty simple story. In the long list of human sins and wickedness it may not rank especially highly. It is, after all, only the judicial murder of one common man and the theft of his property, motivated by greed. But it is a biblical story – and that makes a difference. For the very nature of the Bible is to give us those massive building blocks on which civilization is founded. We are meant to be confronted by this; we are meant to ponder it; we are meant to use this tale in order to check the foundations of our society; Jezebel and Ahab and Naboth live in our city; we are meant to ask about our own standards, our own behaviour; our own vulnerabilities, our own hearts.

'Do you now govern Israel?'

The sulking King could answer his wife in two ways. 'Yes' he could say, 'indeed I do govern Israel, and it is precisely for that reason that I have retreated. For Israel is a nation founded properly, as nations should be, under the rule and law of God. The true king of Israel is God himself and I am

merely his representative for the time being. There is an absolute standard of right and wrong in this universe. Thus I must myself respect his laws and am accountable to him for my administration of his will and purposes. This is so particularly when it comes to my own interests. You see how desperately I want to own that vineyard. But I cannot make use of my own position to enrich myself or to please myself or to favour my family.'

'Do you now govern Israel?'

The question undid him. Retreat, his first response, was correct. Israel was a monarchy not a democracy, but the monarchy was not a tyranny. He was bound himself to keep the law of God. But the shrewdness of his tempter's question lay in this: he could only govern Israel in accord with his position under God, if he could govern himself. When in due course Ahab met the judgment of God in the person of the Prophet Elijah, the prophet read his heart; he lanced him with the truth. Elijah told him: 'you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord'.

That is to say, there is such a thing as human evil; evil begins in the heart – with greed or envy or lust – and human evil is a form of bondage, of slavery. Evil is a habit. We sell ourselves into a pattern of life which has evil so written into it that when we come face to face with a choice of right and wrong the issue is no longer clear. We become vulnerable to temptation even when our first instinct has been right: how often have you chosen the right course unwillingly only to be easily seduced out of it by the person who knows how to play on your weakness? And who better than a family member or a close friend or colleague? You can only govern others when you can govern yourself.

Naboth is such a contrast. He may well have feared the King and Jezebel, and so complied with the request. He may well have wanted to please the King in the hope of a place and power, and so complied with the request. But in ancient Israel the land was seen as a gift from God given to the tribe of which the family was a part. Obedience to the word of God stood in the way of Naboth's compliance. Furthermore, he understood as Jezebel did not, that God is the true King and his will rules the world. He was bold enough to deny the King what he desperately wanted.

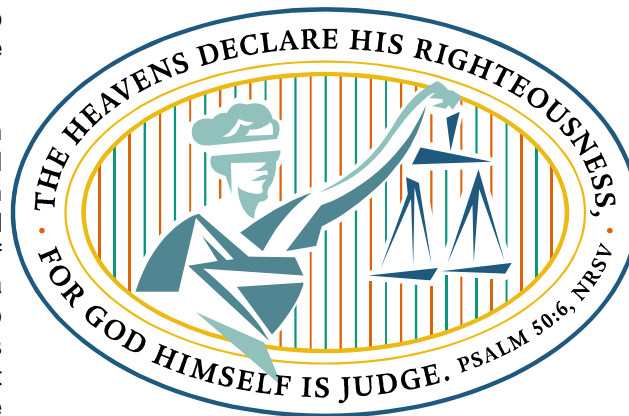
Ahab had done the right thing. But in the face of temptation, he could not govern his own heart. Doing the right thing sickened him. So weak was he that he did not do his own foul work but let his wife carry it out. So much for governing Israel. She had power without

scruple. Using the cloak of religion and the elementary legal system of the day she had the righteous Naboth murdered by his own neighbours.

The calling of the fast suggested that there was some evil in the community for which atonement must be made; the testimony of two witnesses was necessary for the court especially in a capital case; the charge was as serious as could be constructed; the executive branch of government with all its prestige and arbitrary power made sure that the judicial elders knew what they had to do; the deed was done and the estate forfeited to the crown. It is always easier as someone else once famously said when a murder was being plotted, that one man should die for the people rather than that the whole nation should perish. And it was all done according to the form of the law.

And so did Ahab govern Israel.

What guards us against such things here? Much, and yet nothing.



There is much in our inherited culture. Out of the various streams of thought and experience that have created our community, its customs and standards, one of the chief is the teaching of the Bible. We are blessed to be living in one of the least corrupt nations on earth, where the rule of law is respected and where elections are held regularly. Out of such disciplines arises an experience

of civil and personal freedom which is almost unique. We understand – or at least we have always up until now understood – that freedom arises from self-discipline, from the capacity to temper our own interests and desires to the good of others. Freedom is not infinite and untrammelled choice; it is bought with a price, the price of the practice of righteousness.

I know that the Naboth story is a simple one from an ancient world. But it is worth noting how blatantly the evil transgressed against one of our own most cherished principles, namely the independence of the judiciary. Had the judicial officers shown the steel of Naboth himself, the plans of Jezebel and the compliance of Ahab would have been checked and even exposed. It is obvious to us, but not obvious in many other places in the world that the executive arm cannot be allowed to determine the results of individual cases. We must have confidence in all judicial officers that they are not the lackeys of government or other interests.

I realize that you hardly need reminding about so fundamental a point. Perhaps you do not mind a layman offering you support in it, however.

So there is much which guards us against power with-

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out scruple. But, at another level, nothing will guard us, if we do not have the heart for it. It is worth noting here that in ancient Israel under the rule of God this too was supposed to be the case. The forms were in place to prevent the abuse; but the right people were not in place to make sure that the abuse did not occur. As far as we know this assassination may have been relatively covert. The point is, of course, that even our best aspirations and practices can be suborned under pressure if we ourselves are not committed to live out the truth however inconvenient this may be. For, like Ahab, we all have our personal foibles and weaknesses; we are all capable of becoming the servants of a sin which will fatally weaken us when the moment arrives.

I once observed a case of resistance to such a possibility. It was, if I remember correctly, a matter of the Court of Appeal lessening the sentences of some particularly unpopular criminals. The offence proven against them was extremely heinous, of that there is no doubt; but was the sentence just? Naturally, I am in no position to comment on the instance itself. But it struck me then how important it is that our magistrates and judges do not have to bend to popular opinion, do not have to do service to the media and are not the agents of government. Financial inducements and threats or subtle pressure by government may never be our experience: I would be surprised if they were, on any but the rarest of occasions; but the oppressive noise of the culture as expressed through the organs of the popular – or even the pretentious media - cannot be so easily ignored. We need to have the inner resources to do so.

The story goes on to reveal that Ahab and Jezebel were exposed by the Prophet Elijah, the bearer of the word of God. Like our judicial officers, the preachers of the word of God must find the courage to say and do the right thing no matter what the culture may say. We too are exposed to calumny and false report; but we too have duty to perform more important than pleasing the crowd and a God to serve higher than any human Governor. I find that I am tempted to court popularity; that I would prefer it when all people speak well of me; I find that it is easy to make decisions which I know will please the people in the room, even though they may be unfair to others. In short, I find that the chief battles are within, that my greatest enemy is my own indiscipline and lack of righteousness.

I also find this, though – that my greatest resource is faith in Jesus Christ. After all, he is my greatest critic. He actually knows the truth about me, unpleasant though much of it is. I regard myself as accountable to him; my aim in life is to please him in all things. And when I am faced with temptations far beyond my ability to cope, it is to his example that I turn, it is to his teaching that I turn, it is to his personal strength that I turn. And when I fail, it is before him that I come clean and try to fix the damage and it is his forgiveness which picks me up and which enables me to press on.

This personal relationship which I have with him is the cost which I gladly pay for the freedom I enjoy. I believe that it is also at the heart of what has made our community what it is. If we turn our backs on him, I believe that we will finally lose what we have, and find ourselves in bondage to our Ahabs and Jezebels, the men and women of power without scruple. Like Naboth, Jesus was the victim of such human behaviour. But Jesus also stands as the one victorious over sin and death and hell. We can trust him to share the fruit of that victory with us.

IDOL TIME -an interview with Tim Kelleher

Preaching and teaching in the heart of Manhattan, Tim Keller is no stranger to the allure of money, sex, and power. In *Counterfeit Gods* (Dutton Adult), the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church shows how these good gifts of God become idols. CT online editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey asked Keller how Christians can grow more aware of the temptation to bow down to these and other false gods.

How should Christians think of money, sex, and power?

All three are vying to be counterfeit gods in our culture because the living God is, culturally speaking, no longer much of a factor. In the Christian community, they shouldn't be calling the shots. Richard Foster wrote a book on money, sex, and power, which offered a good understanding of how a Christian view of society differs from the world's. His book was about how to do it in Christian community. I'm trying to do a cultural analysis, using the category of idolatry, to help Christians see how they get sucked in.

What makes these three so enticing and difficult to control?

We tend to worry about drugs, drinking, and pornography. But it's not bad and nasty things that are our biggest problems. Sex, work, and money are great goods. They are intrinsic to our being made in God's image. If God is second place in your life and one of them is first, you're cooked. These things are candidates for first place because they are so great. I'm not saying, "Let's move out to the desert and pray and read our Bibles."

Do Christians have blind spots when it comes to false gods?

An idol is something you rely on instead of God for your salvation. One of the religious idols is your moral record: "God accepts me because I'm living a good life." I'm a Presbyterian, so I'm all for right doctrine. But you can start to feel very superior to everyone else and think, *God is pleased with me because I'm so true to the right doctrine*. The right doctrine and one's moral record are forms of power. Another is ministry success,

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similar to the idol of achievement. There are religious versions of sex, money, and power, and they are pretty subtle.

How does someone identify their idols?

Look at your daydreams. When you don't have to think about something, like when you are waiting for the bus, where does your mind love to rest? Or, look at where you spend your money most effortlessly. Also, if you take your most uncontrolled emotions or the guilt that you can't get rid of, you'll find your idols at the bottom. Whenever I hear someone say, "I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself," it means that person has something that is more important than God, because God forgives them. If you look at your greatest nightmare—if something were to happen that would make you feel you had no reason to live—that's a god.

How do we get rid of idols?

I confess that I don't say much about that. Practicing spiritual disciplines is another book. I do say that analysing and recognizing an idol is a step away from its power over you. You also have to have a heck of a prayer life. That prayer life can't just be petitioning. There has to be encounter, experience, and genuine joy. You have to have Jesus Christ increasingly capture your affections.

Is it necessary to suffer disappointment before seeing that idols don't satisfy?

I fear you may be right. I don't want that to be true. Very often it's much stronger than disappointment. It's hard for me to look at a young person and know what their idols are, because usually something has to happen in their life to frustrate them for them to see that something has inordinate power over them. No one learned about their idols by being told about them.

What's your next project?

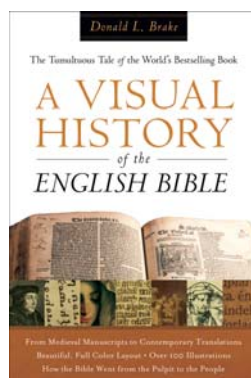
A book on suffering, which I'm hoping will be out next November. I'm planning to draw more on being a pastor than being an apologist. I'm trying to write a book every year during this last part of my career.

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The Tale of the World's Best Selling Book

Review

There have, over the years been a number of books written about the history of the Bible. John



Romer's Testament comes to mind and F.F. Bruce's the Canon of Scripture.

It has always surprised this writer that so many who ardently profess the Bible as God's word and consider it the most important book in their life are actually ignorant of its history.

At times you suspect they think that it was handed down by God, like the tablets of the law, to one of the disciples. Certainly that is the reaction you can get when you suggest that a particular verse should not be in the bible. We have all come across, from time to time, those for whom God only spoke in King James english.

For some it seems the history of the bible is threatening to their view of the authority of Scripture. I must admit I have always found the story of the bible a great testament to the sovereignty of our God and have always tried to cover its history in bible study groups I have led. To do this it was necessary to bring together a number of different resources—some of which were quite technical from a range of perspectives on the authority of scripture

Now much of the information to introduce people to the Bible's history in translation, is clearly and concisely presented in **Donald L Brake's A Visual History of the English Bible** (Baker 2008). Written from an evangelical perspective this is a beautifully illustrated book with pictures of the various earliest texts of the English bible and its translators. Its major weakness is that it does not deal with the issues of canon as it is only a history about the English translation rather than an analysis of how we come to have the books in the bible that we have. It therefore complements well a book like Bruce's "The Canon of Scripture".

We tend not to think of the process and history of translation when we are presented with a multitude of different translations of the bible in our bookstores. We forget about what a radical thing it was to translate the bible into the language people actually spoke as it broke the monopoly that the clergy had on scripture's interpretation. We forget how Wycliffe and Tyndale paid a great price for daring to translate the bible and how translation in those days was really "cloak and dagger" stuff. Many find it hard to believe that translations in English were so sought after and expensive that you would hire the book or part of it for a not insignificant cost (often by the hour) so you could read it or listen to it secretly. All of this is part of the colourful history of the translation of the bible.

This book is presently available at Koorong for the bargain basement price of \$7.95.

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