

The Unreliable God

I've been on the dole for just over a year and have come to know what it's like to be utterly dependent on something, or someone, else for my basic needs.

If I don't give the right information when asked, or fill in the right forms in the right way, I could lose it all. It is a worrying position to be in. Recently, benefit cheques didn't arrive, the result of which is I was unable to pay bills without running up an overdraft.

In that moment I realised how dependent I am on others. Without the money they supply I cannot buy food, pay the rent or the utility bills. I don't have control on what money comes in or when. I'm in a state of total dependency until I can find a way out.

When the benefit system works, everything gets paid and the children get fed. But when it doesn't, I'm one step from eviction or hunger. That's what it means to be dependent.

The system has proven itself unreliable and untrustworthy many times to many people. And it's not just the benefits system that's unreliable. The economy, your employer, the insurance company, our leaders, our football club... And yet we are, to one degree or another, dependent on them and it hurts when they let us down.

Through this we lose our trust in others and in the world we live in and that lack of trust seeps into our spiritual lives. We become more suspicious of our minister, our deacon, our fellow Christians, other churches. We start to distrust God himself.

We become more self-sufficient, more independent, less willing to give up our trust. We cease to be dependent on our God.

Like a poison, the sometimes reasonable distrust of the human world in which we exist becomes unreasonable distrust of a God who has never let us down, and never will.

If God doesn't answer our prayers, we see him as unreliable. When good people suffer,

we see God as an untrustworthy guardian of humanity.

We all know the scriptures in our head. Our academic knowledge of good and evil is unparalleled. But we have allowed the over-academic world in which we live to overrule what we can feel in our hearts and spirits. We have allowed Satan's cold heart to dominate our own at the expense of the warmth of the heart of God. We forget that we have emotions and allow the coldness that underlies much in this society to override our lives.

We should not allow the defences we erect in response to the evil of the world to ruin our spiritual lives or our relationships with each other. We need to take control of our reactions to our fellow travellers and the imperfect churches which we attend.

God is not a human designed benefits system. He is utterly dependable. How do I know this? Despite being at the receiving end of the worst parts of the 'system' for over a year, I have never been without a roof over my head, nor been hungry; not have the red bills piled up. I may have a large overdraft, but I don't have debt collectors at my door.

God understands my weaknesses. He is helping me deal with them and, where possible, change them. He listens to my weak prayers and my frustrations. Then, he finds some small way to comfort me in my distress.

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