



BALANCE

AN EXPLORATION
OF BALANCE IN
CHRISTIAN LIVING

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Exploring Balance in Christian Living

1. Balance – What does it mean?

Balance is about equilibrium. Balance is about not falling. Balance is about constancy. There are many analogies for our understanding of the nature of balance.

We face a considerable amount of instability in our culture. This breeds uncertainty and fear. We seek integration but are often faced with disintegration.

In order for us to attain balance in our lives we have to pay attention to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs, both individually and in our relationships with others.

The human body requires balance in order for it to move and function properly. The consequences of imbalance can be serious. The organism of our bodies requires a healthy and balanced diet. There is need for chemical and hormonal balance to maintain healthy function. Righteousness means, to live a life of integrity, wholeness and right judgement through a life centred on God and there needs to be balance between the influence of the left and right hemispheres of our brains. Imbalance in our physical, mental and emotional functions can cause sickness. Our well-being demands balance between sleep and wakefulness, rest and exercise, work and play, mental and physical activity, emotional expression and quietness.

Scales are used as a symbol for balanced judgement. The fine balance of truth and honest measure are essential for justice. There is much in the Bible to emphasise the need for fair scales, because God is a God of truth and justice.

Wings are necessary for birds and planes to secure balance in flight. Roots are necessary for trees to maintain balance and nourishment. Balanced relations between instruments and between voices is an important factor in musical performance. Families need balanced parenthood with the father providing the male role model and the mother a female role model to the child. The husband/wife relationship contributes substantially to the stability of the child in the formative years.

Commerce is concerned with the balance of assets and liabilities, and in finance today, much is said about the balance of payments and balance of trade.

Lawyers and doctors alike speak of people being emotionally or mentally unbalanced and increasingly we see the need for ecological balance and recognise the significance of the balance of the seasons.

2. Balance – The Call to Maranatha

In the early days of the Maranatha Community a team of respected Bible scholars and theologians spent time together examining the nature, purpose and calling of the Community.

Drawn from the widest spectrum of traditions, they came to one basic conclusion, which, during the ensuing years, has been recognised as highly significant and crucially important. They unanimously concluded that God was calling Maranatha to be a *balanced* community. They explained this in terms of us being called to walk a tightrope. They pointed out that to achieve and maintain balance in this walk, our eyes had to be firmly fixed on one immovable point; this point, they declared, was Jesus Christ. They told us that we were raised to be a Christ-centred movement, proclaiming His Lordship, exercising His authority and in His Name being a servant ministry to His Church.

Following this, in all the years of our existence we have endeavoured to have a balance in all that we are, say and do. From the beginning we were led to the scripture - "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,...*" (Heb. 12.2). As we have fixed our eyes on Him, rejoicing in the riches of our diverse traditions, He has drawn us together as one. More recently, the Lord has given us the word 'alignment' - for the body to be aligned, it must be balanced.

3. Balance - Its Outworking – Unity, Healing, Renewal

Maranatha is a community committed to praying and working for unity, renewal and healing. To understand the meaning of the word *unity*, it is helpful to consider the fundamental balance and unity of the Holy Trinity.

The great prayer of Jesus in John 17 points to the need for us all to recognise that unity among all Christians is essential. Divided and disintegrated societies are imbalanced. In the Maranatha Community Christians of widely differing traditions have been drawn together for prayer, fellowship and action. We were led to bring Christians together for specific reconciliation and relief projects, ranging from the troubles in Northern Ireland and the miners' strike, to relief initiatives in Africa and other places in need, as well as street work with the homeless in this country. In each instance there has been a very close integration and balance between prayer and action.

Similarly, in the *healing* ministry it is important to recognise the necessity for a balance between the body, the mind and the spirit if we are to be obedient to Christ's call. It is equally important that we should understand that healing is not just a personal matter and that the Gospel clearly calls for corporate healing and the healing of the nations. Therefore the healing ministry has inevitably taken us into many areas of conflict and pain. At all times, there has been a balance between prayer and action, between the personal and the corporate.

In the same way, in seeking to understand *renewal* and *revival*, the Bible leaves us in no doubt that the way of Jesus is the way of transformation. It calls for radical change in the lives of individual people, churches, communities and nations. This new life in Christ is birthed through the Holy Spirit who brings a Christ-centred balance of prayer and action to our lives.

Over the years the Maranatha Community has endeavoured to maintain a healthy balance in its work and witness. Although God has led us into new areas, year by year, with numerous changing and challenging situations, a basic equilibrium has been maintained. This is repeatedly recognised by new members and by those outside the Community.

Imbalance in contemporary society is manifest in widespread confusion, chaos, insecurity and wrong relationships. Balance is evidenced in right relationships with God, ourselves, others and creation - this is righteousness.

4. Balance in our understanding of God

Balance between truth and love

The Bible teaches us that we are to speak the truth in love. If we exclude love from our words and witness our message of truth is impaired. Similarly, if we exclude truth our message of love is compromised. Much Christian teaching today is in imbalance. It is truth which set us free, but without love we have nothing. It is possible for Christians to be so wedded to the proclamation of truth that they neglect love. On the other hand, it is possible for some Christians to be very loving to the point where they are in danger of compromising truth.

There is a fine balance between encouragement and correction, both of which are needed. In giving encouragement we cannot turn a blind eye to the truth and in giving correction we must be quick to praise and slow to criticise.

Balance between immanence and transcendence

As Christians we believe in a God who is near, immediate and personal, but who is also overwhelming in His power, grandeur and glory. He is both Abba, dear Father, but He is also the high and Mighty One - the Lord of the cosmos. We experience Him with great intimacy, yet with awe as His servants and creation. This balance is crucial.

Balance of judgement and grace

There is an urgent need for Christians to emphasise the reality of God's judgement over us, but at the same time to point to the depths of His Grace and Mercy.

5. Balance in our encounter with Jesus

Balance between the personal and social

The call of Jesus is clearly to a life of personal holiness and social righteousness. To a considerable extent the one depends upon the other. The Gospel is about changing men and women individually and changing society as a whole. Lesslie Newbiggin strongly emphasised to Maranatha - *"the Gospel is public truth"*, but also stressed *"it is vitally important to know that God calls us individually by name"*.

Balance between faith and works

The Bible assures us that faith without works is dead. But we are not saved by works alone. We need to have an equal emphasis on both faith and works if we are to be true followers of Jesus. Imbalance leads to spiritual impotence.

Balance between our mind and our heart

Our calling is to put on the mind of Christ and also to have the sacred heart of Jesus beating within us. We bring our thinking and our feeling equally to the Lord for His blessing.

Balance between our intellect and our emotion

There is a danger that some Christians may over-emphasise the appeal to the intellect and render the Gospel cold and dead. Similarly, other Christians may emphasise the emotions to the exclusion of the intellect and this can be both shallow and distracting. The Christian disciple is called to demonstrate intellectual integrity and emotional stability. Without this our witness will be inconsistent.

6. Balance in our Lifestyle

Balance of movement and stillness

Maranatha was given a prophecy that God is calling us to 'sit and run'. The Lord said "sit, sit and run, run". This calling involves listening carefully and acting energetically. We are called to quietly receive and reflect on the words of God and positively respond to His call. Pope John Paul II declared that there would be no strong movement of evangelisation without an emphasis upon contemplative prayer. From the beginning we have been called to be pilgrim people, ever on the move, travelling light, but knowing stillness.

Balance between power and gentleness

The Bible depicts Jesus as both Lion and Lamb. He is mighty, but He is also gentle and meek. There is a great danger in presenting an unbalanced picture of the Lord. We too need to be strong but also humble and kindly. On the Cross God shows us the remarkable balance between triumph and sacrifice.

Balance between our prayer and action

Our service and action as Christians must be in harmony with and rooted in our prayer life in order for us to be effective. Mother

Teresa wrote specifically to Maranatha *"If you pray without serving, your prayers will be in vain. If you serve without praying, your service will be in vain. Go forward - pray and serve in the power of the Spirit"*. Prayer and service are inter-dependent.

Balance between being and doing

What we are matters more than what we achieve. God sees us primarily as we are and what He wants us to be, without our personal energetic efforts.

Balance between silence and words

In our noisy culture there is a need for deep silence before God. Jesus is Logos and our human words are important. We need silence to hear God speak. We need the inspiration of God's Spirit to be upon our lips. Just as words can be deafening, so can silence. The Bible says there is a *"a time to be silent and a time to speak"* (Ecc.3.7). We often tip the scales the wrong way, speaking too much or speaking too little.

Balance between the new and the old

It is good to hold fast to our inherited traditions, but this must not prevent us from recognising that Jesus says *"Behold I make all things new"*. In our worship it is right that we should have a balance between old hymns and new songs, between old and new liturgies. The Gospel is about change rooted in the inheritance of the Law and the Prophets. This is surely Radical Orthodoxy.

Balance of freedom and order

God has given us the gift of freedom as individuals, but this needs to be exercised in the context of justice and order. Are we prepared to recognise that human rights must be matched by human responsibilities? In the Church we need the dynamic charisms given by God operating within the order of the living Body of Christ. There is always the danger of rampant individualism displacing God's corporate order. Rules, regulations, committees and debates may have their place, but these must be balanced by the free movement of the Spirit at work amongst God's people.

Balance between simplicity and integrity

There is a need for us to proclaim the Gospel in simple, straightforward terms. We are to become as little children. The

wise will be confounded. At the same time we must not put in jeopardy the basic integrity and truthfulness of our message.

7. Balance in our Attitudes

Some Questions

Are we imbalanced in our attitude towards others?

Are we too quick to blame and too slow to praise?

Are we ruled by our emotions and prejudices?

Are we pro-active as well as reactive?

Do we look in too much rather than looking out?

Do we look back too much rather than looking forward?

Do we look down too much rather than upwards to God?

Are our eyes fixed on God or on ourselves or on others?

Have we adopted a false balance by fusing opposites into one?

Do we recognise, unlike the post-modernists, that there is a clear distinction between true and false, good and evil, right and wrong, real and unreal?

Have we avoided the need for genuine balance by putting ourselves in a position of compromise and political correctness?

Do we have a balanced attitude to other beliefs, recognising the dangers of triumphalism on the one hand and syncretism on the other?

When we say grace before a meal, giving thanks to God for His gifts to us, do we always balance this by praying for the hungry?

8. Balance in the Life, Leadership, Ministry & Prayer of the Church

The basic elements of the life, leadership and ministry in the Church have been evidenced both Biblically and historically. They are clearly complementary and not competitive. They are held in equilibrium and secure stability in fulfilling God's purposes.

The LIFE of the Church is held in balance between worship (*latreia*), fellowship (*koinonia*), ministry, (*diakonia*) and witness (*martyria*). This is particularly evidenced in the Rules of life of religious orders (especially that of St. Benedict) who live out this balance through the hours of each day.

The LEADERSHIP and MINISTRY of the Church is rooted in the balance of the principal roles of service defined in scripture - Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor/Teacher.

The PRAYERS of the Church are rooted in the balance and basic interlocking disciplines of praise, adoration, petition, intercession, confession, repentance and thanksgiving.

In all these things God gives His Church an integrity and authenticity through the balance of His Spirit. This has been evident in all the centuries during which His people have been corrected, encouraged and empowered. In Christ all things hold together.

9. Conclusion – the Lordship of Christ

The need for balance and a constant recognition of the real presence and authority of Jesus Christ is vital in our lives today. The need for a balanced approach to scripture is particularly evident with the equal dangers of rigid literalism and unbridled liberalism. It is important that we both study and pray the Bible.

Contemporary society is in crisis and it is, therefore, increasingly important that we should be aware of the dangers of imbalance. New belief systems and religions, invented or developed in the 19th and 20th centuries, are undoubtedly rooted in a very unbalanced approach to the Bible and its teaching. Often there is distortion or exaggeration of particular texts to the gross neglect of central truths.

Imbalance causes division, but division also causes imbalance.

To have balance in our faith does not mean that we countenance compromise or 'sit on the fence'. On the contrary, it comes from a true embracing of the seeming paradoxes of God and, fundamentally, from our union with him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Balance is rooted in total obedience to Christ. In order to do this, we need constantly to keep our eyes fixed on Him, to listen to Him and to be obedient to Him.

In walking the tightrope we may be assured that God *"is able to keep you from falling"* (Jude 24).



A Final Word

For the Christian “Balance” is the conviction that everything must harmonize with, lead to and flow from the worship and glorification of God. So, the “balance” is not a simplistic, legalistic, politically correct one, but a description of the life of the Christian with its many aspects. These are “balanced” on the life of the Holy Spirit, adoring, waiting upon and listening attentively to God in silence, for, on our own, we have got nothing to say.

The love we have for others can only be the one that flows from God through us. This balance is that of Jesus Himself, whose whole life was and is totally focussed upon His Father, a life of total submission and obedience to Him, listening constantly to the Spirit within from the Father. He had time with others, by Himself, with His disciples and friends, teaching, sharing meals, resting and taking exercise, but His relationship with His Father was at the centre.

It is thus the “balance” of the tightrope walker, not sticking rigidly to a prescribed exact middle course, but adjusting their body, mind and senses to their movement along the rope. Or it is that of a mountaineer, maintaining balance whilst climbing a difficult ridge, rock face, glacier or arête, or a cyclist in the Tour, manoeuvring and adjusting their body and the bicycle, trying to balance maximum speed and safety. If any of these took the rigid, simplistic and legalistic view of balance, they’d all be dead or seriously injured; they’d certainly fall off

Tom Berrie



