

Who Will Stand in the Gap?

Joe Slater

Ancient cities relied on fortified walls for security. Unlike brick walls on modern houses, these walls were scores of feet high and thick enough for residences to be located within them.

Punching through such a wall required siege engines, battering rams, and a great deal of time! But once a gap (breach) was made, enemy troops could pour into the city. Defenders needed to stand in the gap to prevent such a calamity and repair the breach. Such work endangered one's life, but an open breach spelled the end of the city.

God's word likens the wickedness of His people to a gap in the wall. *"Therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach (gap) ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly in an instant"* (Isaiah 30:9). God would send enemy nations to chasten them, endangering their physical wellbeing. But of greater concern, was their spiritual, eternal condition. Therefore, He sought faithful people to stand in the gap, promoting righteousness by example and by teaching. Tragically, *"I sought for a man . . . who would . . . stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one"* (Ezekiel 22:30).

Where are the men and women of God today who will stand in the gap? We have a morality gap where good and evil are reversed. We have a doctrine gap where the word of God is sacrificed on the altar of cultural change. We have an integrity gap where professing Christians, especially religious leaders, are fleecing the sheep rather than feeding them, often being caught up in criminal activity and sexual misconduct.

Indeed, where are the men and women of God today who will stand in the gap? Will you?

No Letdowns from Jesus

"On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Mark 2:17 NIV).

So, what do you think? Is religion is crutch? Karl Marx is credited with the statement that "Religion is the opiate of the masses." Freud's view of religion is well known. "Religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis." Atheists are quick to ridicule religious people as infantile and the only reason we cling to religion is because we are psychologically weak and cannot learn to cope with the stark realities of life without it. Mocking, as they do, puts us on the defensive to justify our faith in a personal God who loves us.

First, if I were crippled or injured, I would want a crutch. When my wife had knee replacement surgery, she needed a walker. Although the atheist won't admit it, we are living in a fallen world. We've all been damaged through sin and crippled spiritually to the point that we need the help and support of our God. It isn't a sign of weakness to admit our need, and if someone wants to call my faith a crutch, so be it. I cannot walk the path that God has set before me without His assistance.

Second, I do not think one can properly evaluate the value of our faith by looking at fanatics who have mental challenges. It's like Freud and others who only evaluated mentally ill people to try and figure out how normal folks work. Atheist, Bertrand Russell, had no scruples to judge the whole of Christianity by a brand of religion that did not follow the Bible.

Third, Josh McDowell points out that there are two questions to ask concerning the need for a crutch: what is the problem, and is the remedy the correct one for the problem? For us who acknowledge reality, the problem is sin, and the solution is a faith (religion) that commits to the Lord in complete surrender. With such "assistance" we will do well and reach our destination of heaven.

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)

Batten Down the Hatches!

"I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:1-2).

"Batten down the hatches," the captain yelled. The sailors on his ship knew what that meant. A storm was approaching, a storm that could ruin the goods in the ship's hold or sink the ship. The hatches were the ship's doors and windows. A batten was a long rod used to secure doors and windows after they were closed.

Like the raging ocean water that could enter the ship and destroy it and its cargo, sin can weaken and destroy us spiritually. How can we guard ourselves from sin? What are our battens?

The first is *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30).

The second is *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Mark 12:31).

The third is the strength we have through His Spirit in the inward man, knowing that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Ephesians 3:16-19; Philippians 4:13).

The fourth is to *"pray without ceasing"* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

The fifth is God's promises, especially the "promised eternal inheritance" with Christ in glory (Hebrews 9:15). We know that Jesus is preparing a place for us and will come again to take us to Himself (John 14:3).

The sixth is Jesus' promise. *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5).

If you were to list the ways God helps us and strengthens you, which would you list first? Which last? Each of these guides and promises from God is precious. May we remember each one in times of hardship and temptation.

--Donna Wittlif (Ft. Worth, TX)