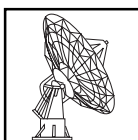


in their forty-eight settlements exercised a restraining influence on the people around them, but the history shows that the general standard of conduct was as far below the ideals that had been placed before them, as with Christian lands in modern times.

In our survey of the Law in its practical bear-

ings we have to remember the frequent intimations that the people of Israel never inherited anything like the amount of land or the degree of prosperity that might have been theirs if they had been faithful. In the full sense of the apostle's words, they "entered not in because of unbelief" (Heb. 4:6).



Science

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Science and the Creator

Let him that standeth take heed

David Burges

A GOOD NUMBER of everyday human activities are used in Scripture as figures of spiritual exercises. Familiar examples are seeing, hearing, sleeping, walking and standing. The last of these is used in two particular ways. The first is of standing firm in the faith now, during our time of probation. Thus the Apostle Paul urges us: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to *stand* against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11); whilst Peter writes of "the true grace of God wherein ye *stand*" (1 Pet. 5:12). The second use is of our appearance before the Son of God at his coming: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? . . . for we shall all *stand* before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10).

In these examples, the action of standing carries the sense of remaining stable and upright, whilst the obvious counterpart to standing is falling. There is a clear danger, if our faith in the Word of God becomes weak, that instead of standing we may fall away. In fact this is precisely the meaning of the word 'apostasy', a falling away from the true faith (see, for example, 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Hence the apostle's admonition: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Standing upright

Standing seems to be one of the actions in life that is most simple and automatic. We just do it with scarcely a thought, unless we are forced to

stand for too long! Yet scientists in the United States, researching the tendency of elderly people to fall and injure themselves, are discovering that the physical process of standing still is in fact a very complex one.¹ They first devised a special type of weighing platform capable of measuring the vertical, horizontal and rotational forces exerted by the feet of a subject simply trying to stand still.

This yielded the surprising result that everyone, whether fit or not, actually sways. The centre of pressure of the feet—the points on the soles where the body's weight is supported—constantly moves around as muscles twitch, the heart beats and the lungs inhale and exhale. It required the application to this random movement of a type of mathematics known as statistical mechanics in order to study what was happening. This revealed that a series of stages is occurring as we attempt to stand still. For a few seconds we 'drift', and then a reflex response changes the muscle tension in an attempt to bring us back upright. Every now and then a more accurate response, probably based upon visual cues or our balance organs, activates to bring us fully upright, before we start drifting again.

It is remarkable that this apparently simple activity should prove to be so complex. Clearly,

1. "Still Standing", Bruce Schechter, *New Scientist*, 14 Apr. 2001, pp. 39-41.

complicated automatic processes are continuously taking place in the brain to control our muscles and maintain an upright stance. Man is marked out from almost all other mammals by his ability to stand and to walk upright, and this is one more example of the Creator's marvellous works, which reach their pinnacle in the human frame (Ps. 139:14).

Furthermore, this analysis of the physical process of standing seems to have interesting spiritual parallels. Standing firm in the true faith requires our constant attention, to correct our innate tendencies to 'drift' and to 'sway' as different influences come upon us. And we need both the visual cues of "looking unto Jesus", and to maintain a right balance, in order to retain the fully upright position.

The danger of falling

Further mathematical modelling has been carried out by researchers to try to predict the effects upon patients of such disabilities as seized joints, and their response to a knock or push, or a dizzy spell. It is hoped to develop these techniques into a system for diagnosing proneness to falling amongst the elderly and frail. Falling is a major hazard for older people that can lead to severe injury or death. If a tendency to fall can be predicted for particular patients then it might be possible to provide corrective physiotherapy to improve their balance.

In the spiritual sphere, the danger of falling is by no means restricted to the elderly; in fact it might be thought that they are less prone to this problem than the immature in the faith. Never-

theless, as in the medical world so in the ecclesia, prevention is better than cure, and the daily attention to the healing Word of God, to prayer and to fellowship, provides the surest way of avoiding the dangers of loss of balance and of disastrous falls.

To stand before the Son of man

The physical activity of standing seems to be mundane, yet it is proving to be remarkably complicated, demanding the most modern mathematical techniques for its elucidation. It is another testimony to the wonders of God's creation that something so apparently simple is in fact extremely complex.²

At the same time, the spiritual lessons should not be lost on us. The warning of the apostle to "take heed lest [we] fall" (1 Cor. 10:12) must alert us to the need for constant attention to our spiritual fitness, so that, in the grace of God, we may be received into His Kingdom by our Lord and Master when he comes again: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36).

2. Remarkably, this ability of humans to stand upright was elaborated as an example of Divine design in William Paley's *Natural Theology*, first published in 1802. See *Paley's Watchmaker*, Bill Cooper, 1997, pp. 109-110, a modern edition of the original work. Copies can be obtained from Brother Donald Pearce, 76 High Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, CV21 4EE. Price: £6.25 plus postage.

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