

Getting On Board

"Torture is abhorrent both to American law and values and to international norms."

Daniel Levin, head honcho of the Office of Legal Counsel for the Bush regime, kick-started an official opinion with those words on December 30, 2004. Two important things happened after and before Levin detonated this verbal IED beneath the wheels of the administration's interrogational Hummer.

After he released the opinion, he lost his job.

No big surprise there. His boss had recently gotten the boot for expressing similar squeamishness about torture. They replaced Levin with a guy who held more sanguine views on interrogation techniques.

Before he released the opinion, he asked to be tortured.

Levin knew that instructors waterboarded military pilots and special ops troops to prep them for possible capture. He went to a military base where, at his insistence, they strapped him to a plank, elevated his feet, and drenched his shrouded face with water to simulate the feeling of suffocation caused by drowning.

Personal experience of suffering emboldened a career bureaucrat to risk his job by telling a dangerous truth. Virtual death on a slab of wood imparted courage to speak up for the value of life. Torture became intolerable for others to one who endured it himself.

Experience of suffering informs Christian preaching and emboldens believers to suffer the consequences of faithful proclamation. Death to self drives truth-telling despite the consequences.

Hebrews 5.8 embarrasses us with incarnation. Jesus, we read, "learned obedience by the things which he suffered." Learn here is essentially the same word as the noun that describes Christ's twelve followers. The one who called out disciples underwent discipleship. Dissatisfied to hurl thunderbolts of judgment with Olympian indifference, our Lord chose to endure torture. Spiked to a wooden stake he felt his face muffled by a thick thread-count of darkness that hid him from the Father. Waves of our sin soaked this shroud and sank him drowning down to death. Blood and water sluiced from his side as a spear-thrust tore the scupper to drain this excess of evil.

Jesus earned the power to rebuke sinners because he personally felt their fate. Jesus dared preach hell though he knew the doctrine offended, because he felt the horror of separation from God. Jesus dared preach grace to an edict-addicted religion because he knew the unchecked agonies of judgment. Christians who can lightly consign souls to Hell confess that Calvary remains to them a matter of speculation. If we once take up our cross and follow Christ, we will learn that eternal torture must never be permitted while the blood of Jesus avails to prevent it.

All Aboard!
Doug