

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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DRESSING FOR GOD

PART 1 OF 2

"No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." (Mt. 9:16-17)

In the back of the plane, dressed in black - leather straps around their arms and forehead - shawls draped over their heads about ten men were continuously bowing and chanting. The plane actually danced in the air because of their movements. "Everyone please take your seats, as we make our descent to Tel Aviv," pleaded the pilot for the third time.

This episode was one of many experiences during my first trip to study in Israel. There today as in Jesus' day old garments and old wineskins are still around. With them people continue to think they're dressing up and drinking down divine approval, but they're still dressing in rags and are intoxicated with their own self-righteousness. They seek by the things they perform to make themselves presentable to God; to be involved in a system which brings them into divine favour; to somehow be in a position where spiritual forces would more likely occur. Yet, they continue to disbelieve the record that God has given of Jesus Christ.

The faith - life which is realized in Jesus Christ can never exist within the old systems of as-

ceticism and disbelief. Christ has brought a fulfillment. In him is the finality - the finished work of all that will gain God's approval.

Old garments and old wineskins are not just found in Israel. They're all over the world. You can see them in our own area as well.

It is found within some Reformed churches. On the surface, it appears rather genuine. For example it would be said that God uses means to accomplish his purposes in redemption and that he does not convert in a vacuum. So far so good. This means that God is sovereign and that he alone can bring about the faith - life. But here's the subtle shift which is then brought to bear upon the biblical necessity of salvation. When asking "What should I do to be saved?" sinners are told to put themselves in a position that would not further exacerbate their situation and exasperate the divine. In other words they are told a host of things except the biblical directive to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." (cf. Acts 16:30,31)

Unbelievers are instructed to read the Bible, attend church services, and other directives. If, however, conversion does not occur, less condemnation and wrath would eventually be laid at the sinner's feet than would otherwise be true if they didn't have these practices.

The preaching of the gospel or the offer thereof is then held indefinitely. Preaching on the holiness of God, the demands of the law, and human inability are proclaimed to fully "pen up" the sinner. At the preacher's discretion, the gospel is finally preached as the remedy. In other cases, the gospel is declared but then

withdrawn after describing all the ways sinners can't come to Christ.

This position has been held historically and labeled appropriately. Today it is still held in its classical expression and in more modified versions. It is known as "Preparationism." If one were to ask the Preparationist "What must I do to be saved?" The inquirer would be told "get in the way of God's saving means and wait; feel, agonize, and again wait-wait-wait!" On the surface this sounds prophetic, biblical, even reformed, and appears to be a plausible argument. But, it is superficial, unscriptural, and unwarranted.

PRIESTCRAFTISM

Before I get to some of the main distortions on the necessity of salvation in this system, I need to expose the ministerial manipulation which promotes such things. Intensive and extensive analyses of a person's mental or physical responses to gospel preaching become criteria for determining when to offer the gospel or whether or not conversion has occurred. Ministers who promote such are practicing "priestcraftism."

Priestcrafters persuade people to be enrolled, engaged, and encouraged in pursuing prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, catechism classes, etc. Without calling people to repentance and faith, they are endorsing a system of personal appeasement. This fits into a system which creates a "half-way" covenant. Confessing a historical faith without commitment to discipleship or attendance to the most basic commitments as attending the Lord's Table are viewed as acceptable. Marriage and baptism are then maintained as acceptable within this system even though neither person has confessed Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour.

Consequently, some system of penance or at least a form of Arminianism occurs which gives the person a twisted trust in not having hope.

This is surely a moth eaten rag of legalism and moralism. Thus, "priestcrafters" denounce the free offer of the gospel to sinners through faith alone thus denying the necessity of the righteous robe of Christ's salvation available through the royal fabric of sola fide (faith alone) and sola gratia (grace alone).

PROBLEMS IN THE PATCHWORK

There are serious problems in the "Preparationist Patchwork." One of the most dangerous is the belief that apart from faith Christ's church provides something complimentary instead of something condemnatory. Counseling the unconverted to put themselves "under the load" or devote themselves to reading the Bible, singing songs of the church, praying, giving an offering, preparing devotional essays, etc. (these things of course are not bad in themselves and should be part of the Christian's confessional, devotional life) actually condemns the sinner apart from faith.

Two examples from the Gospel of Matthew prove this point:

Matthew 11:20-24: Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades: for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

Matthew 12:41-42: The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than

Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

With both examples it is clear that greater opportunity means greater responsibility. There is no neutral position. There is no such thing as a "half-way" covenant relationship. Christ rebukes them for their lack of faith and warns them of the judgment to come.

If you are not a Christian, please don't think for one moment that I'm commending you to do anything other than repent of your sin of unbelief and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for acceptance with God. Otherwise you're dressing for God in rags not fit for heaven.

by Pastor Perry Brackin

FAMILIES IN FOCUS

MARRIAGE - A COMMUNICATION OF GOD



In our last article we saw that order in human relationships is structured by a God who is a God of order. This is necessarily so as God is Jehovah, a relational Being Who gives definition to all creation and gives a place and function to each creature and therefore defines their relationships to each other. Covenants are expressions of the terms of relationships as those expressed between God and man as well as man and man. This is why it is proper to speak of marriage as a covenantal union. Not only has God given man the blessed institution of marriage but He also has given very clear terms of relation in the area of purpose, position and function.

In this article we will look at some of the foundational principles which our culture has lost resulting in the breakdown of the marriage institution in our society together with the havoc that is wreaked upon so many other relations. The first grand principle that we notice is that marriage is an ordinance instituted by God Himself. In the church we tend to take this principle for granted but then we are sure to miss the very mark for which marriage was instituted. The world has lost the God of the marriage institution and so only upholds the marriage institution for its own pragmatic

reasons. If a marriage doesn't yield fulfillment to whatever end it was thought to achieve, the pragmatic worldling discards the institution for the gain of its ends by any other means such as common-law living arrangements. The result of this ungodly thinking is the decline of the marriage institution being entered into or its being under valued. Truly, for the wicked, God is not in all his thoughts. Ps. 10:4. Despite this, God has given man this beautiful ordinance for this life to communicate to us something of the blessedness of fellowship with God. Marriage pictures something of the glorious, though mysterious, harmonious relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. It is both an awesome and yet humbling thought that we are made in God's image and that the order and structure and to some degree the function of our marriages are a reflection on the triune God's inherent harmony. Our marriages, whether of the world or the church, reflect on God. They do so well or poorly, as our marriages are correspondingly shaped either by grace or sin.

Secondly, the marriage institution demonstrates to man the love of Christ to His church. The inspired metaphors for "church" include such an endearing term as 'bride'. In the Old

Testament a whole book is written as an allegory of a bride and her 'lover' depicting the loving communion between Christ and the church. In the New Testament Paul writes to the Ephesian's a lengthy portion on the relation between man and wife and then says in Eph. 5:32 "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Paul's argument is fascinating. The best and the inspired way to reveal the grace and love of Christ to the church is to use the metaphor of the marriage relationship and yet he is calling on the Ephesian believers to pattern their marriages after the relationship of Christ and the church! Is this circular reasoning? No! It is because marriage is an institution of God whereby He communicates of Himself to us. We look to God's revelation to teach us the nature of both His relations with the church and His standard for the marriage institution. Therefore it is only by the grace of God, in Christ, that we can have a right relationship with Him and a marriage, which serves the purpose of its institution, namely to picture the love and harmony of God and the church.

Our marriages, whether of the world or the church, reflect on God.

We have seen, then, that marriage pictures something of God to us. God also has His purposes for man in marriage. In the opening verses of scripture there are many benedictions. God pronounces that what He had made was good and when He had finished His work of creation He pronounced it as very good. However, in chapter two we read the first 'mal'-diction, "It is not good". This is not because there was something sinful in the creation. It rather was a pronouncement of God concerning the existence of Adam on his own without being complete. He was unable to express a reciprocating communion with one of his own nature and likeness. Adam on his own was unable to express the communion that the

triune God expresses in His three persons. He could not express a relationship with one of his own. He was therefore not complete. His relationships at this stage were that of creature to Creator or of the crown of creation to 'lower' (Psalm 8:6) forms of creation. His relationship to God was characterized by God's revealing Himself. Also God is a spirit and not flesh and blood. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." John 1:18 The revelation of God through His Son to man is one which is received in this life by faith and is realized by sight in the life to come. Marriage belongs to this life that we might have a tangible experience of spiritual realities but when the spiritual realities are realized in the life to come, then marriage no longer has a function. The relational communion between the redeemed sinner and God will be complete. "Beloved, now are we the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." 1John 3:2

Marriage as an institution serves to direct our thoughts beyond our this-worldly experience to Him from whom and to whom and by whom are all things. It stands to reason then, that a godly marriage will reflect more purely the character of God and vice versa an ungodly marriage gives a false view of God. Jehovah will not hold him guiltless. Ex. 20:7 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." Eph. 5:25-27 May our marriages be graced by Christ.

-Bill Kroesbergen



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

MISSION TO GUATEMALA

Dick Brokking shares insights after his trip to Cubulco desiring to spur us to prayer.

Cubulco is a small town of 5 000 residents situated in the Guatemalan interior some three hours distant, via automobile, from Guatemala City. It is positioned in a valley 3 000 feet above sea level surrounded in all directions by hills and mountains. A number of these mountains were created by volcanic activity. Thankfully, at this time, volcanoes in this area are inactive. These mountains are characterized by steep, inclines. Although in places jumbled rock and disjointed heaps of granite might be encountered, this is generally not the case. If you envisage an inverted funnel with the conduit removed, you'll get an indication of what it is I'm endeavouring to explain.

Due to the dearth of consistent, year-round precipitation (dry season extends from November to May), vegetation and foliage is relatively sparse. Granted, within a few days of the commencing of the rainy season, when rain falls daily in the afternoon, new life appears in abundance. In the words of Nigel Herfst, the "landscape is transformed". Transformations, however, are relative. Even at the height of the rainy season it would be tough to imagine the possibility of massive plants and trees. Yet, we are thankful that God does in his common grace deliver rain in this area. The resourceful locals have determined how to use it to their temporal profit and sustenance.

The town of Cubulco proper contains some Hispanics, but is largely comprised of native Indians who communicate in the dialect Achi and in Spanish. In the mountain communities (Spanish aldea), the majority of people speak the native tongue alone. Obviously, this creates some difficulty for Pastor Ken Herfst who

after some eight years knows only a few select words and phrases of Achi. Ken and his new assistant Nico Kattenberg are fluent in Spanish, but when the Scriptures are expounded a translator is required for those familiar with only the indigenous language. The translator is normally a member of the community. What is truly astonishing is that the majority of the translators are not gifted orators and yet the work is blessed. Fine speech and eloquence are not necessary qualifications for the saved to be edified and the unsaved to be given a holy restlessness. Praise God for the eternal value of His Word!

All community translators attend a one-week session in Cubulco each month where Ken teaches doctrinal truths of the Christian faith by working through the Westminster Confession. I would exhort you to pray for Ken, that he might be granted wisdom as he catechizes, and for the students, that they might have the foundational doctrines sealed upon their hearts and be given utterance of the Spirit of God as they evangelize.

More work is being transferred to the lay pastors. The transfer is vital as the Herfst's will be leaving the field in 2002 and the Kattenberg's are not committed to a long-term assignment. By transferring the responsibility to the laymen prior leaving, Ken will be able to harmonize the potential leaders, observe them in action and make suggestions for improvement. This, too, cannot be accomplished outside of God's favour and grace. Again we are reminded of our total dependency on God for all things both temporal and eternal.

By God's grace, five churches have been erected in the aldeas. Each church has two public worship services on the Sabbath, and a

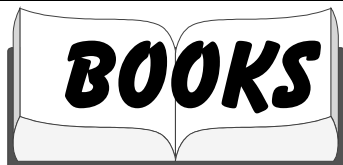
midweek prayer service/Bible study. The church in Cubulco holds one of their services Saturday evening to allow mountain people, already in town to do business at the Cubulco Saturday market, to join in worship.

One great obstacle and hindrance to the Gospel message is Roman Catholicism. When the Spanish arrived in Guatemala in the early sixteenth century, they brought with them their indulgences and idols. Within a few short years, the religion had infiltrated even the most isolated areas of the country. Mixed with native superstitions and witchcraft, a very mystical and charismatic religion has evolved. Witchcraft doctors, administer medicines and tonics charging exorbitant fees. The shaman's suggestions rarely succeed but their businesses survive. People have been brainwashed by spiritualists since their youth and cannot conceive of things possibly being different. It is as the communist slogan speaks, "Give us your child for the first seven years, and we will have him for life."

Although the majority of the locals are poverty-stricken, they maintain a positive and

jovial attitude. It may seem absurd, but rather than their poverty being a liability, it seems to be something they thrive off. How many members of civilized, developed nations are there who, despite all sorts of materialistic luxuries, admit to being despondent, engaging in drug addiction, alcoholism and sexual promiscuity? Now, don't assume that sensualism is unnoticeable in Cubulco. Heavy drinking is a favourite pastime with many civilians. But, very few depressed people are encountered. As Solomon so aptly wrote - luxuries profit a person nothing.

Nevertheless, there remain numerous locals, both in Cubulco and in the aldeas, who refuse the Gospel invitation. Many apostates are recipients of the universal offer, but continue in their labyrinth of superstition and cultism. Perhaps, when all objections and theories are proffered regarding the diametrically opposed approaches to everyday life that are demonstrated by the poor Guatemalan merchant and the rich North American who revels in temporal extravagance, one must say that it is the former who is the better performer; the latter who is more candid.



BOOKS IN REVIEW

The book is a collection of articles which have already been widely read and appreciated as editorials in *The Banner of Truth* magazine of which the author is the editor. Pointedly biblical, they are thoughtful and searching, humbling and exalting, challenging and encouraging.

THE THOUGHT OF GOD
Maurice Roberts
The Banner of Truth Trust
approx. \$9

These articles speak to the need of the times and have lasting value. They have God and his Word as their starting place, and their horizon stretches beyond time to eternity. The reader will appreciate their freshness, relevance and power, and will find in them a seriousness which has a sanctifying effect on the heart and a clarifying influence on the spiritual vision.

The articles are placed under five categories entitled *Our Great God*, *Fellowship with Christ*, *The Christian Walk*, *Life Together* and *The Glory to Come*. The articles are easy to read and short enough for use as a devotion at the beginning or end of the day.

-Cope Jonkman

E-MAIL TO APOSTLE PAUL

From: MissionCommittee@ReformedChurches.com
To: ApostlePaul@Greece.com

We recently received a copy of your letter to the Galatians. The committee has directed me to inform you of a number of things which deeply concern us.

First, we find your language to be intemperate. In your letter, after a brief greeting to the Galatians, you immediately attack your opponents by claiming they want to "pervert the gospel of Christ". You then say that such men should be regarded as "accursed" and call them "false brethren". Would it not be more charitable to give them the benefit of the doubt - at least until the General Synod has adjudicated the matter? To make the situation worse, you later say, "I would that they even were cut off which trouble you". Is such a statement really fitting for a Christian minister?

Paul we really feel the need to caution you about the tone of your epistles. You come across in an abrasive manner. In some of your letters you have even mentioned names. This practice has, no doubt, upset the friends of Hymenaeus, Alexander and others. After all, many persons were first introduced to the Christian faith under the ministries of these men. Although some of our missionaries have manifested regrettable shortcomings, it can only stir up bad feeling when you speak of these men in a derogatory manner.

Paul, I believe you should strive for a more moderate posture. Should you not try to win those in error by displaying a sweeter spirit? By your outspokenness, you have diminished your opportunities for future influence. If you had worked more quietly, you might have been asked to serve on a committee appointed to study the issue. You could then have contributed your insights by helping to draft a good committee paper on the theological position of the Judaizers, without having to drag personalities into the dispute.

Besides, Paul, we need to maintain unity among those who profess belief in Christ. The Judaizers at least stand with us as we confront the surrounding paganism and humanism which prevail in our culture. The Judaizers are our allies in our struggles against abortion, homosexuality, government tyranny, etc. We cannot afford to allow differences over doctrinal minutia to obscure this fact.

Questions have been raised about the comments of your letter, as well as your style. The committee questions the propriety of the doctrinaire structure of your letter. Is it wise to plague young Christians, like the Galatians, with heavy theological issues? In a couple of places, you allude to the doctrine of election. You also enter into a lengthy discussion of the law. Perhaps you could have proved your case in some other ways. Your letter is so doctrinaire, it will probably serve only to polarize the differing factions within the churches. We need to stress unity, instead of broaching issues which accent divisions.

In one place you wrote, "Behold, I say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." Paul, you have a tendency to describe things strictly in black and white, as if there were no gray areas. You need to temper your expressions, lest you become too exclusive. Otherwise, your outlook will drive people away. Church growth is not promoted by taking a hard line and remaining inflexible.

Remember, Paul, there is no such thing as a perfect church. We have to tolerate many imperfections. By reflecting on your own past, you might acquire a more sympathetic attitude. Be patient, and give them some time to come around to a better understanding. In the meantime, rejoice that we all share a common profession of faith in Christ, since we have all been baptized in His name.

This fictitious letter was adapted from an article by Kevin Reed which originally appeared in the Trinity Review.



YOUTH'S CORNER

DOWN ON THE FARM



Match each of the following names with a question from below.

Boaz
Joseph

Isaac
Jesus

Joab
Job

Joseph
Naboth

Samson
Uzziah

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. ___ Which farmer winnowed his barley at night?</p> <p>2. ___ On a Sabbath, who with companions, went through cornfields and picked ears of corn to eat?</p> <p>3. ___ Who beat out wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites?</p> <p>4. ___ Which king besides having a host of fighting men also "loved the soil". He had much livestock, farmers and vine dressers.</p> <p>5. ___ Who had his barley crop set on fire because he refused to meet with Absalom?</p> <p>6. ___ Who was told by a messenger that "the oxen were ploughing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans raided them and took them away"?</p> | <p>7. ___ Who reaped a tremendous crop, one hundred times the grain he sowed?</p> <p>8. ___ Who, during a famine, gave food and seed in exchange for Egyptians' cattle and land?</p> <p>9. ___ Who turned 300 foxes with burning tails loose in a grain field?</p> <p>10. ___ Who refused to give up his vineyard to a king because it was "the inheritance of my fathers"?</p> |
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-submitted by Gary Everts

ANSWERS

1. Ruth 3:2 2. Luke 6:1 3. Judges 6:11 4. 2 Chronicles 26:10,11 5. 2 Samuel 14:28-32 6. Job 1:14,15 7. Genesis 26:12 8. Genesis 47:13-25 9. Judges 15:4,5 10. 1 Kings 21:1-3

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