

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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WE HAVE AN ALTAR

"In that day a man will look to his maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel. He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands...." (Isaiah 17:7, 8a)

BACKGROUNDS

The ancient world was filled with religion and its associated altar sites. Some altars were legitimate most were false. From the beginning of history this was true even down to the time of the Apostle Paul. While in Athens he saw many altars, even one dedicated to an unknown god. (Acts 17:22,23)

The presence of an altar in the pagan sense was an acknowledgment of the reality of a superior being or beings and the reality of sin or guilt. At the altar a person hoped to personally (or through a representative) appease the anger of the gods. He also wished to remove personal guilt. How would this be done? Well, the sinner must do something.

In all of this, however, the pagans were merely aping and distorting what God had originally given. God gave a picture of how his justice and wrath against sin was to be satisfied. Likewise, he alone showed how sin would be removed. The Old Testament is clear about this.

OLD TESTAMENT PROMISE

After the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3, God showed that he alone could provide covering and rescue from man's guilt and shame. Only he could restore the relationship. How would this be done? Well, man couldn't do anything.

Perfect obedience and a substitutionary sacrifice were needed. An animal slain and the skin used to cover the man and woman's nakedness were demonstrations of God's initiative.

The hope of redemption was not linked with that event but with the promise of Genesis 3:15. With this promise an altar and sacrifice would become prominent features of the history of redemption. They were to be pictures of the ultimate sacrifice for sin that God alone could supply. Abel, Noah, and Abraham's altars illustrate how God continued to reveal this promise and endorse this practice.

Under Moses' leadership and prophetic ministry God instituted an elaborate sacrificial system for the Israelites. With careful deliberation and description Moses described the place of meeting, the priests, altars, sacrifices, lavers, lamp stand, table of showbread, etc. The appointed place and the appointed prescriptions were not the reality but pictures or shadows. The place and the prescriptions were all pointing to a person who fulfills them all. There would come a time when the sinner would no longer be called to a place and all those prescriptions but to a person.

NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT

In the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, all the rituals of the Temple would be fulfilled. He would leave nothing unfinished. This is clear from the Gospel accounts. Jesus began his ministry saying that he was the temple (John 2:19-22). Throughout his ministry he proved that he was the true prophet of

God; the only son who offered absolute obedience; the only king who could protect and rescue his people.

Then upon the cross the reality and totality of Christ's role as the High Priest of God was demonstrated in graphic color. There the imagery of priest - altar - sacrifice was fulfilled in the person and work of Christ.

Christ having been consecrated for his priestly office at the baptism of John now offers the sacrifice for atonement. He is the sacrifice. He is the altar. From his head, his feet, his back, his side, the blood of the spotless Lamb of God was offered.

While on the cross, Jesus, knowing that everything had been fulfilled, said, "It is finished." (John 19:28-30) At that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:51; compare Heb. 10:19,20)

What did this mean? It meant that Jesus had personally fulfilled every aspect of the Temple. This of course included the physical altar and its sacrifices for sin. Those who chose to remain with the Temple's inferior objects once the fulfillment and reality had come were warned of the dangers.

THE ALTAR DEFINED

The definition of the term "altar" gives no support at all for endorsing anything apart from the Christ of the cross. Remember, an "altar" was a place where the wrath of God was appeased and the sinner's guilt removed. Until the cross event, this had never occurred in all of human history.

In what way does the Bible support there being a possibility for the sinner who is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-9); completely without righteousness (Rom. 3:10-18); having a wicked heart (Jer. 17:9); and a mind which is against God (Rom. 8:6,7) to present himself in such a way that God is appeased and sin is

removed? In no way, apart from Christ!

THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL

Some believe that the Gospel is what God has done in the experience of the sinner. What God has done in the saving of sinners is important. Telling others what great things God has done for you is not only interesting but also a confession. It's confessing the power of God and not the power of self. But this testimony is not the Gospel. The Gospel is what God has done through Christ for sinners as the once for all and only propitiation for sin. (Rom. 3:25; 1 Jn. 2:2)

The word "propitiation" means that God's wrath and justice have been appeased or satisfied and that sin has been removed or expiated. Christ alone brought both to pass.

Some translations of the Bible render "propitiation" as "sacrifice of atonement" or "atoning sacrifice." Others translations render the word as "mercy seat." This captures the reality of Christ as the Mercy Seat - the Altar.

We have seen that the Gospel is the accomplishment of redemption by and from a holy God for helpless, hopeless, wicked men. This has occurred through Christ as the Altar of God.

THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL TO THE LOST

The church has been given the privilege and mandate to proclaim the Gospel. There is an internal and effective call of the Gospel. Only the Holy Spirit can perform this. He applies to the sinner what Christ accomplished. There is also an external call of the Gospel.

The Gospels and the book of Acts show how God used human messengers to call sinners to repentance and faith. Those messengers spoke and illustrated the truth about the sinfulness of sin and accountability before a holy God. They challenged all forms of
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FAMILIES IN FOCUS

MARRIAGE - GOD SEEKING A GODLY SEED



Psalm 127 and 128 speak of children in a way that has become almost completely foreign in western culture, in our day. They are called 'a heritage of the LORD' (Ps. 127:3a), a 'reward' (Ps. 127:3b) and a 'blessing' (Ps. 128:4). The thinking of the world is twofold. First, children are fun to have if you are a family sort of person and if your children do for you what you expect of them. This includes enjoying the things that you do, not being any trouble and being successful in a career. All of these would reflect well on you. The other mindset seems rather opposite. Children are a nuisance to be avoided at virtually any cost. If you are unfortunate to have them, then you put them in 'child care' so that you spend as little time as possible with them. Both perspectives, however, are synonymous as both are viewed from an ungodly selfish point of view. Thankfully, God's restraining grace keeps this worldly mindset from being completely carried out. There are parents who do love their children and genuinely want the best for them. But let's not be fooled, this doctrine is being propagated by principalities and powers in high places, governing bodies, media and entertainment. Just how far have we fallen? What is the standard that should be looked up to?

In the previous issue, we discussed the fact that one of the purposes of marriage is that husbands and wives are to assist each other in this life. A second purpose for the institution of marriage is the raising up of a godly seed. (Malachi 2:15). Not only was man to be fruitful and to multiply (Genesis 1:28) but God is seeking a godly seed, a seed who will love, serve, and worship Him. And this mandate that God has given, is given to His covenant people. See the context of Malachi 2:15, one of warnings to God's people of the old covenant. For a new covenant example see the contexts of Acts

2:39, 1 Cor. 7:14 and Eph. 6:4. The means that God has appointed to achieve this goal of a seed to serve Him is obviously the godly family unit.

Just as nature shows that a male or a female all alone can not bring forth a prodigy, the necessity of a husband and wife team is required to father and mother the children. Children need both parents. In our day the single parent family makes up a significant portion of the population. The reality, though, is that children miss out on very important relational aspects. No mother can ever make up the absence of a father or vice versa. Neither can they play a dual role of functioning for both a father and mother. The best that they can hope for is to be the best mother or father that they can be without the support of a partner. Therefore, normatively, it is the wisdom of God that places children in families with mothers and fathers who also are husbands and wives. It is either due to the providence of God or the sin of man, that children are reared without both a father and mother. Sadly, in our day there are also those who conceive of family life with gay couples constituting the parents. This is abominable. Children need to be reared in a godly context where a godly, married couple live out a picture of what God is like. Yet God in His rich grace is more than able to give to children what they lack in their upbringing when parent-child relationships suffer from sin and death.

There are also married couples who end up never experiencing the privilege, joy and the responsibility of raising children. In our time of selfish pleasure seeking it is increasingly becoming the choice of couples not to have children. There are, however, many who painfully experience that the Lord in His

providence has prevented them from having children. But this does not mean that they have no place in the rearing of a godly seed. As part of the covenant community, childless Christian couples have a role supporting parents with the nurturing and training of covenant children. There are mutual obligations in the family of God to encourage, edify and warn one another. The joy that can be realized in this way will be much deeper than to merely have biological offspring. Paul joyed in his 'son' Timothy. Isaiah encouraged the old testament church with this understanding. "Sing, O barren ... for more are the children of the desolate." Isaiah 54

One of the reasons that children are raised in a family context is that God is seeking a godly seed. He has mandated the fathers to bring up their children in the fear and the nurture of God. God gives him his wife to be a helpmeet but the responsibility lies with the father. Normally a man's wife is also the mother of the children. God demonstrates His wisdom in this arrangement. First no one will naturally love and care for the children as the mother and father will. They will be the ones who will most deny themselves for the good of their children. They will be the ones who will try to achieve the best for their children. This is true of the created order though sin does wreak havoc on family relationships also. Second, the fathers and mothers marriage relationship pictures to the children truths of who God is and of the relation between Christ and His people. This lends itself beautifully to instructing the children in the fear of God and the knowledge of His covenant relations with its attending blessings.

The raising up of children for Christian parents is a great privilege. God seeks a godly seed. Psalm 127 and 128 show the blessings for the people of God, who raise their children in covenant faithfulness. Joy, peace and protec-

tion are blessings that come their way. But God does not leave parents to their own resourcefulness either. All the grace that they stand in need of is found in Christ and extended to them in covenantal promises. The wisdom needed is revealed in the word and the Spirit's enabling is granted them in Christ. God Himself is the pattern for raising children. He instructs His children, He cares for them, He loves them, He has a deep and intimate relationship with them, He disciplines and corrects them. He does this that they might be partakers of His holiness and so be truly happy with Him.

The United Nations Rights of the Child Convention of this past year sought to deal a fatal blow to God's purposes in child raising. They wanted to grant children autonomy, or self rule.

Thus they with one stroke would destroy the very context which is most conducive to raising up a godly seed. It would make biblical child raising a criminal activity. The world will experience that such policies are very destructive, bringing children and parents into a ruthless bondage to sin. Thanks be to God that He by His Spirit continues to beget children through a birth from above. The means that

He uses will always include the bringing up of children in Christian homes. There they not only hear the gospel but also see it lived out in the lives of their parents.

How do you view children, from God's purposes or from a present world perspective? Let us seek to raise up children who fear and love the Lord. With God this is possible. Speak to your children of the goodness of God and His holiness. Speak to God of your children, their need of grace and of His promises. Show the children the grace of God at work in you and in your marriage. A seed shall serve Him.

-Bill Kroesbergen

God
Himself is
the pattern
for raising
children.



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

MISSION TO THE SOUTH ASIANS IN TORONTO

Dear Congregation at Sheffield Reformed Church,

I am ordained and called to be a missionary to the South Asians in Toronto by the Covenant Christian Church (affiliated with the United Reformed Churches of North America) of Wyoming, Ontario. Presently there are 400,000 South Asians in the Greater Toronto area and 120,000 are Sikhs. I am learning the Punjabi language, the mother language of the Sikh people. According to official statistics the Punjabi language ranks #5 in Canada (after English, French, Italian and Chinese). It is the language spoken in most Punjabi homes. I am told that over 60% of the Sikh seniors are illiterate. They have only very recently, in the last ten years or so, immigrated to Canada from small villages in the Punjab, India.

Sikh literally means “disciple” or “learner.” Sikhism, is a relatively young religion, separate from Mohammedanism and Hinduism. It began in A.D. 1469 in North India. Although it has some Islamic elements, it is basically Hindu in its worldview. Sikhism is an inclusivistic religion which tries to unite all religions under its umbrella. They are physically identifiable as they wear what is known as the five K’s -- kes (unshorn hair), kangha (a comb kept in ones hair), kara (bracelet), kachhehra (undershorts) and kirpan (sword).

Our ministry is gospel-centered. We have a small centre called The Hope Centre primarily used for Christian guidance and instruction. It is a place where we introduce Jesus, as the only and exclusive Saviour (John 14:6) to many who have never heard the True Story of Salvation. Ministering among a people who have little or no Bible background demands much prayer and patience.

We act on the Biblical principle that just as Christ came to SEEK and to save the lost, so too we must seek them out. In other words, we must go to them with the message of life. We must go into the graveyard, a place full of dead mens bones, in order to show them the way to the Lords vineyard. Our aim is to see a church planted among them, the Lord willing.

NOTE: The following is a condensed version of Rev Zekveld’s December newsletter which he sent to various churches and individuals. He hopes his introduction and newsletter will give us a glimpse into this ministry.

We approach this community with the Gospel by:

- 1. Speaking in their community centers.*
- 2. Distribution of fliers for the Saturday evening Bible study. We go from home to home to let them know who we are and why we are here.*
- 3. Writing columns and advertising in their newspapers.*
- 4. Hospitality is a key.*
- 5. Bringing the Word of the Lord at times such as births, weddings and funerals as well as hospital visits.*
- 6. Distribution of Bibles and literature in their own language.*
- 7. Contacts in streets, homes and temples. There are about 20 Sikh temples in the GTA.*
- 8. Discipleship and Bible Study*
- 9. Continual follow-up.*

Greetings in Jesus, our Saviour and King.

Have we had a hectic schedule! In addition to some outside preaching, preparing Bible lessons, language classes, writing messages for two South Asian newspapers, responding to distress calls, visiting and my apologetics course, I also spoke in area Reformed churches. What a blessing to see the Lord implanting an awareness and vision for cross-cultural missions in our own cities!

Cross-cultural missions, call for much understanding, prayer and long-term perseverance (Psalm 126:5-6). We see this in our calling to the Sikhs. They are inclusive, tending to incorporate everything you say into their world view. For example, the term Sbd meaning "word" is one of the central concepts in the Sikh religion. I went to their temple to find out what they mean by "word". They bow before their holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, consisting of Sbd's which is considered living and personal. My aim is to show that what Christians believe and confess, is not the same as their Sbd. There is a contrast. We are not feeling two different sides of one elephant (to use a proverbial metaphor in Hinduism) but two different animals. I am planning to do a short series of messages on Punjabi radio on Jesus, the Living Word.

We continue to offer a class every second Saturday evening. Attendance varies. So many have not heard the creation story. Reading Genesis 1 is a prerequisite for doing missions. The historical account of creation is what plainly differentiates the Holy Bible from the mythological accounts in other religions.

Phone calls and questions we receive also show that they are a lost people looking for answers. One asked if I knew when her birthday was. This was her test to see if I could foretell her future. Poor soul. Another came asking about her mothers' future. These are opportunities to point away from searching for a word in the stars to the Word of God and the God who created these stars. Many are gripped with fear. Deshdeep, a Sikh man, wanted "a word" concerning spiritual matters. Why all this misery in the world? What is our purpose in this life? What happens after we die?" I concluded our time together by saying that the Lord Jesus, the Creator and Judge of this universe, asks every man "What will you do with Me?"

Tariq, a Muslim journalist asked me to write a series of articles on the Bible for his newspaper. "Feel free to write whatever you want to write." he said. I wrote another message for his Christmas issue covering Gods work in redemptive history from the Creation to the New Creation. We thank the LORD for the use of this medium for broadcasting the message.

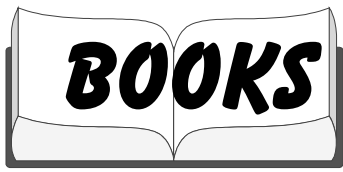
We continue to praise God for the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jasmine. She has Bible lessons regularly with Arley-Ann. She is becoming more aware of who Jesus is and the life of obedience. But she also requests prayer. She continues to face growing challenges against her faith. As well, her immigrant status is still in question. You may want to encourage her by sending a short note or a Christmas card to our address (Jasmin Kaur; 72 Stevenson Road; Etobicoke, Ontario , M9V 3H5).

Please pray:

- 1. that we may have wisdom and understanding to communicate the message of God in our classes.*
- 2. for Sangtokh & Manjoo, Aneel and Renu who have been attending the Saturday evening classes.*
- 3. that I will have clarity as I communicate the message of the Gospel on Punjabi radio.*
- 4. for Deshdeep that the Holy Spirit may use the message powerfully in his life.*
- 5. for Jasmin Kaur and to thank the Lord for His work begun in her life.*
- 6. for the readership of the newspapers which field the message of the Gospel.*
- 7. for the upcoming Christmas program at one of the Sikh community centres.*

We appreciate your prayers, support and notes of encouragement. May God continue to build His church as we seek to bring His message of salvation to a lost and perishing world.

Sincerely, Rev. Tony Zekveld and family



BOOKS IN REVIEW

Celebrating the Sabbath
Bruce A. Ray
Presbyterian and Reformed
Publishing

Is the Christian Sabbath just another day, or a special gift from God worth keeping as he commands? Walter Chantry states that we live in a day when a tidal wave of anti-Sabbath influences are crashing against the modern church. Fortunately, new books are being written in defense of Christian practice of celebrating the Sabbath and Pastor Bruce Ray added his voice to help the Christian in the understanding and practice of Sabbath keeping.

In this book, the author explains what is so special about the Lord's Day and how we can make the best use of Sundays in a fast paced world. His desire is to rescue the Sabbath from both extremes, namely either a non-observance or a legalistic observance without any delight.

The author shows that God is sovereign over our time, work and rest. He first gives the Old Testament roots of the Sabbath both in creation and exodus and then proceeds to give the flower and fruits of the Sabbath in the New Testament as related to the resurrection and eternal Sabbath. He also shows how God's original intent of the Sabbath had been twisted by the nation of Israel creating a great conflict which continues even in our day. He shows how Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, liberated the Sabbath and resolved the conflicts for his people, by his teachings and practice.

In conclusion, he gives general instructions on how we may keep the Lord's Day holily, happily, honestly and humbly. The author states that those who do not follow a biblical practice of keeping the Sabbath lose grace that God intends to give through the keeping of his precepts. This is a very thought provoking and encouraging book. -Cope Jonkman

WE HAVE AN ALTAR **CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE**

self-allegiance, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness. They demonstrated how foolish it would be to ignore the Gospel. They warned of the consequences of judgment if there was not repentance and faith.

In every biblical example where people were called through an external witness, never was the sinner called to a place or to human plans and programs. They were called to a person. People were called to acknowledge that they were sinners, justly deserving God's displeas-

ure and without hope except in God's sovereign mercy. They were called to receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation as he is offered in the Gospel.

Unbelieving men are commanded by believing men to repent and believe. Paul's words at Athens are representative of this.

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30)

When this call is given, there is no other focus except the finished work of Christ. There's

never an appeal to present oneself, as if before an earthly altar, for acceptance.

The writer of Hebrews said those who try such tactics have no place with the true Christian:

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. (Hebrews 13:10)

THE ALTAR AND THE CHRISTIAN

A Christian understands there remains no more sacrifice for sin. Christ is his altar. He, however, will come to understand there does remain the factor of consecration or sanctification.

God has called and converted the sinner by convicting him/her of the reality of sin and convincing of the rescue in Christ. Christ has called the converted to a life of commitment to his will and way. These are found in the Holy Scriptures and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is one brought about by grace through faith, and it's in this grace and faith of Christ that the Christian must walk.

The Christian's walk is a spiritual walk of faith in which the Christian struggles against the flesh, the world, and the devil. Using the means that Christ provides in the Word of God and in prayer, Christians are a spiritual house and a holy priesthood unto God.

As priests, Christians are to offer spiritual sacrifices unto God. These sacrifices are acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ. (1 Pt. 2:4,5)

My prayer is that the opening passage truly receives an "Amen," from all of us. If this is so, rejoice - rejoice - rejoice! God's justice has been satisfied, and our sins are gone. We have an altar - Jesus Christ the Lord.

"In that day a man will look to his maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel. He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands...." (Isaiah 17:7, 8a)

-Pastor Perry Brackin

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