

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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CHRIST IS OUR LADDER

PART 1 OF 2

And he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Genesis 28:12.

This ladder which Jacob saw was no other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who was, under that notion and resemblance, represented to him. What else should it be? And a very clear notion it is, and very helpful to our understandings, to apprehend what he is made of God unto us—a ladder.

You all know what a ladder is, and what use it is for. Now just such a thing our Lord Jesus Christ is—our ladder; and of the same use he is to us spiritually, for the good of our poor souls.

But, says some one, it was only a dream. I answer, It was a divine dream, sent of God; a vision, than which nothing can be more certain.

THE PROPERTIES OF THIS LADDER

It is a ladder in all respects extraordinary; there never was any other like it.

1. It is a living ladder. In the same sense in which, as a way, he is called a new and living way, Heb. 10:20, in the same sense, as a ladder, he is a new and a living ladder. Other ladders are dead things, but this ladder lives. It is true he was dead, but he is alive again, and lives for evermore, Rev. 1:18. And it is well for us that he is so; for if he live, then we shall live also.

2. A long ladder. The longest that ever was, for it reaches from earth to heaven. That was the posture in which Jacob saw it—the foot upon the earth, and the top of it in heaven. Hereby were signified his two natures;—his divine nature, as God; his human nature, as man. As man—he was set upon the earth, a son of Adam, born of a woman, lived here upon the earth for a time, as other men do. As God—he was always in heaven, begotten of the Father before all worlds, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. The uniting of these two natures, the nature of God and the nature of man, in one person, is the mystery of all mysteries, 1 Tim. 4:16. That the glory of the Godhead did not destroy the meanness of the manhood, nor the meanness of the manhood debase the glory of the Godhead, is mysterious indeed. The bush which Moses saw, burning and not consumed, was an emblem of this.

But what need was there that the foot of the ladder should be upon the earth—that our Redeemer should be man? I reply, There was need, that he might have a body wherein to suffer and die; such a body as ours that had sinned, for whom he was to die.

But what necessity is there that the top of it should reach to heaven—that he should be God? I answer, That the Godhead might give virtue and value to the sufferings of the manhood, and that he might support it under them—which else would have failed. Besides, to bring God and man together, it was requisite he should be both God and man; God—that he might deal with God, which man as man was not fit to do; man—that he might deal with man,

which God as God, a holy God, could not do, without consuming him, a sinful creature; as a consuming fire, with stubble. Here is the meaning of his being Emanuel, God with us; God in our nature; which if he had not been he could not have been Jesus, a Saviour, Matt. 1:21-23. Now our duty hereupon is,

a. To adore infinite love and infinite wisdom in the contrivance of this way, which no other could have found out; saying, Lord, who is like unto thee? And,

b. To say also—"What shall we render unto the Lord?"

3. A lasting ladder. Other ladders wear out in process of time, and fail, and come to be good for nothing but the fire: says the workman, I dare not venture to climb it, I shall fall and break my bones, it is worm-eaten and rotten. There is no danger of that in this ladder, Heb. 13: 8. The righteousness which is brought in by him is everlasting righteousness, Dan. 9:24. All the saints from the beginning have made use of it, and it never yet did fail any, nor never will to the world's end. "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him," Heb. 7:25,—to the utmost of times.

4. A free ladder, open and common to all; whosoever will may come, and make use of it, and welcome. If we do not by unbelief exclude ourselves, God hath nowhere excluded us. The promise runs in general terms, Isa. 55: 1; Matt. 11:28; John 7: 37; Rev. 22: 17. The fountain is open, not sealed, Zech. 13:1. Our Lord Jesus was born in an inn, which is free to all comers;—died with his arms stretched out upon the cross, and was nailed so, to signify his readiness to embrace all that will come to him.

5. A firm ladder— steady and strong. Our Redeemer is mighty, Heb. 7:25,—able to save. From what? From our sins.

From the guilt of them: how many, how great soever; crimson, scarlet guilt; by the infinite merit of his blood and passion.

From the dominion and power of them, by his Spirit and grace. Though the devil himself steps in to strengthen the snare, he is able to burst and break it, and to set us free. Therefore fear not, nor be dismayed; greater is he that is with us than he that is against us.

6. A ladder fitted every way for the use for which it was intended. But,

OF WHAT USE IS THE LADDER TO US?

1. That by it blessings might descend from heaven unto us. If our Lord Jesus had not interposed by dying to make peace, this could not have been. Curses, wrath, light-bolts, thunderbolts, might have come down, and would have come, without this ladder; but, no blessing, no token for good, no beam of favour. There would have been fire and brimstone, as on Sodom. The reason was, because man had sinned, and thereby God was provoked, and till divine justice was fully satisfied, mercy could do nothing. The way was blocked up. Now Christ comes, and by dying makes satisfaction, and so takes out of the way that which hindered, and now blessings are showered down of all sorts, temporal, spiritual. Concerning the life that now is, and that which is to come. "God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," Phil. 4:19,—not some, but all. And how? By Christ Jesus. He is the ladder by whom they descend, the conduit pipe for conveyance of all our fresh water from the fountain above to the cisterns below.

It is by this ladder that all our pardons come. We are needing of them every day; give us this day—and forgive us this day; and we never have them but when we come for them in his name. All the infinite mercy that is in God did never forgive one sin out of Christ.

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FAMILIES IN FOCUS

MARRIAGE - ITS CHALLENGES AND ITS REDEMPTION



As one looks at the marriage institution in our culture, one becomes aware that secular society has largely abandoned any biblical notion of marriage. Close to half of all marriages end in break-up. Countless others hang together for the sake of personal convenience, even amid unfaithfulness. Many others stay single to avoid the 'entrapments' of married life though living in sexual promiscuity. It becomes clear that man's rebellion has led him a long way away from the pristine purity of the pre-fall days.

Even more disheartening, is that in the broadly defined, evangelical church, the statistics are virtually the same. For all the preaching of the transforming word of God, the church doesn't appear any better off than the secular world.

What is the root cause of all this heartache and brokenness? Why are there so many 'dysfunctional' families? Why does 'love wax cold'? Why does the marriage institution appear so antiquated and irrelevant? Why does the church seem to fare no better than the rest of the world?

In this article we wish to reflect briefly on how sin has brought such devastation to so many marriages. The institution of marriage itself is secure because Christ is its guarantee. But because in this sinful world sinners participate in the things of marriage, its success is possible only through the grace of God.

In the Garden of Eden, the devil set up a temptation before man, which would separate him from God, and therefore, after the fall, having no moral reference point to which he would submit, he was estranged from his wife as well. Sinning willfully by rebelling against his Creator, man abandoned the one paradigm that could structure his marriage, the blessed

and orderly relationship amongst the three Persons of the divine nature. Their relationship was now distorted by sin. The woman sought to handle the temptation in her own strength, and the man placed his blame at the feet of his wife, not accepting his responsibility. Now the curse has fallen on man. "... Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Gen. 3:16. It is just this sin and its consequences that frustrates marriage. And there is not a present or prospective marriage partner in the whole world that is free from the corrupting influences from sin. The amazing thing is that the potential devastation in marriage is not more completely realised. God, by his grace, restrains sin. So long as man is convicted by the law of God written on his heart and terrified by an accusing conscience, which speaks of just retribution, he is kept from utterly corrupting himself in marriage. It is to be remembered that there are no good marriages outside of union to Christ. Though there are many seemingly decent and happy marriages among graceless persons, it is only because God allows them to enjoy good things in this life, out of His grace, which they will ultimately have to account for. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption." Gal. 6:7-8b

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal. 4:19-21. It is sad to see the works of the flesh manifested in marriages where men are unregenerate and

even sadder in the lives of those who belong to Christ. Sin's dominion has been broken in the life of the believer. All the believers' sins, past, present and future have been pardoned and the penalty paid. The believer is also cleansed from the pollution of sin by virtue of his union to Christ. But sin remains present with him in the flesh. This brings so much misery in the life of the believer. His married state is also affected adversely. Reflect for a moment on how the works of the flesh, when given into or indulged, bring devastating consequences into marriage.

The sins of adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lewdness bring rather obvious problems in marriage; the loss of trust and fidelity, the defiling of the temple of the Holy Spirit, betrayal, diseases, and so on. But these actions are the result of subtler sins that have been indulged in. All it takes is a look to feed the vice of lust which can be kept so private that it is indiscernible by others. A more open or visible practice of this sin can be done via pornographic materials. But this sin ties a tight web. "Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope." Isaiah 5:18. "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." James 1:15. Therefore, lust indulged, will bring death, spiritually and physically. It must be repented of, confessed, and forgiven.

In our ungodly culture lust is not thought of as a sin. It is exploited with great advantage for the purposes of wickedness. Consumer advertising, aiming at extracting as many dollars from the public as possible, is laced with poison. Lust is a powerful passion, difficult to resist. That's why it is so easy to gain many through such advertisements. Yet Jesus taught how a lustful look has the same root as an act of adultery. "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew

5:28. In our culture we have become blinded by the 'in your face' exposure of temptations to lust. But there will never be cultural reformation unless there is personal reformation first. In fact, when there are personal reformations taking place, the culture is being changed.

No amount of laws and ordinances can prevent the sin of lust. It is a heart issue. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications..." Matt. 15:19. No one can claim to be free of the sin of inordinate affection and desire, whether of material things or personal ambitions. We need to be cleansed in heart and clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, take your heart, full of sin and lust, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. If we come to Him He will not turn us away. He will

No amount of laws and ordinances can prevent the sin of lust.

grant us the indwelling presence of His Spirit that we would walk, not after the flesh to fulfill its lusts, but after the Spirit in righteousness. Trusting on Christ, you will be enabled to war against the lusts of the flesh. Make a covenant with your eyes not to look lustfully on a woman as Job did. "This I say

therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man, which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." Eph 4:17-24.

(to be continued)

-Bill Kroesbergen



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY

The New Testament presents the church as the body and bride of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:16, 22-23; Rom. 8:9-11; Col. 2:10; 1 Cor. 11:3; 12:21). She is called out of the world and, consequently, the church and society are (or at least ought to be) two distinct entities. They each have their own goals, program, and standards. In fact, the church is destined to be a counterculture to the prevailing status quo. She is meant to function as society's conscience. The conscience doesn't impose. It gnaws and convicts. The image of a fellowship of the Spirit (Acts 5:32; 13:2; Rom. 5-8; Gal. 4, 5:22; 2 Cor. 3:17) means that the Spirit possesses the church in divine Lordship, liberating it from sin, death and the condemnation of the law, to create a holy fellowship bound together by love, fortifying it in times of suffering, and equipping it to praise God, to nurture new believers and to be a witness to the world. She is meant to be a body which, though in the world, is not of it. What impact can a church which has separated itself from the world have on society? Past efforts to impose church standards on the world have led instead to the world's standards being imposed on the church. This, in turn, led to a reaction among various Christian groups who tried to disengage from society--the "evil world" out there--to live within their own self-created utopias. The early history of America is replete with groups who escaped from societies in which they were an oppressed minority to found new settlements. Even today various pacifist Mennonite and Hutterite groups continue to live apart. Admirable though their stance may seem, their history has been one of running away when things got difficult. Although running was possible when there were still places to run to, it is no longer an option in today's global village. There is simply no place left to run. Christians today face a stark choice: they are either going to

make the best of the society in which they live, or let the society in which they live get the best of them. For the Church to effectively gnaw at and convict as society's conscience, her conscience needs to be educated.

Before turning our attention to "Christian" socio-political programs we need to answer two questions: 1) How can you talk about a "Christian" socio-political program when Christians disagree so often on the agenda? 2) If the church and the world are supposed to be two totally different entities, why should Christians even try to make an impact on society? Even if society does turn against them, should they not be content to suffer in silence?

Limiting the definition of the word "Christian" to mean those who are like-minded would solve the first problem--but would create a new one. A limited definition tends to lead to one type of Christian imposing his/her view on other Christians, an approach which was strongly advocated by Augustine. "Rome has spoken; the debate is over," he said. The Roman Catholic church employed the services of the Inquisition to squeeze everyone into its mold, while the Reformers persecuted the Anabaptists. Limiting the meaning of the word Christian is not the answer. The "invisible" church overlaps to a greater or lesser extent with virtually every Christian denomination.

The promotion of a narrow "Christian" socio-political program is altogether different from suggesting a pragmatic political agenda based on certain Biblical absolutes. Some might argue that the Church is thus condemned never to put into practice what it stands for, that it is no better than the opposition party in parliament. Unlike a political party, the Church doesn't seek to impose its

ideas from the top down but from the bottom up. It seeks to work as a humanizing influence in whatever society it finds itself without being a revolutionary threat. It is precisely because it has been content to work quietly within the political status quo that the enormous growth of the Evangelical church worldwide has attracted as little notice as it has.

What are the "Christian values" the Church should espouse vis-à-vis the society in which she finds herself? What principles should govern the church in its relationship to the world? When and how should the conscience convict?

First of all, the church's primary responsibility with respect to the world is its missionary obligation. It is called to proclaim the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ to "every tongue and tribe and nation". People who have experienced God's love and forgiveness develop inner resources which make them better husbands, fathers, wives, mothers and citizens.

Secondly, Christians believe in personal responsibility toward God. People are culpable for their actions (or inactions) irrespective of their background or personal frustrations. Society looks increasingly to government to solve all of life's problems. In order to meet the public's expectations, governments have had to keep expanding, something which alarms the Christian. Christians fear--and not without reason--that an all-embracing government will not just endorse but impose "ungodly" standards of behavior. A typical example is the fear that some government social worker will take their children away from them because they believe in the efficacy of corporal punishment. Furthermore, Christians tend to believe that the welfare society undermines people's sense of personal responsibility for their own lot.

Evangelical Christians can afford a "smaller" government. Ideally at least, in their own time of need they are supported by their church, and

often their family. Furthermore, tax savings earned by screwing back the welfare state can, for instance, be re-channeled to non-government agencies targeting the genuinely needy. The fact that Christians believe in personal responsibility also makes many of them proponents of capital punishment--and certainly of firm punishment--for heinous crimes.

Evangelical Christians are strong proponents of freedom. Governments' tendency to draw more and more power and privileges to itself is a danger for the church. Christians, with their absolute sense of right and wrong, will be persecuted by any state that feels its prerogatives are jeopardized. Freedom of religion and basic human rights are more likely to be enforced by a smaller government. Christians in free countries have many more opportunities for reaching their fellow citizens with the gospel and for being a positive influence on society.

Christians are pro-family. Various types of governments have sought to crush institutions it perceived as being inimical to its own interests. The one institution no government has been able to crush is the family. Strong families are the ultimate challenge to the authoritarian government. That is why Christians resist any attempt to weaken the traditional concept of the family -- something which also puts them at odds with the gay and feminist movements.

Evangelical Christians are pro-life. This places them at odds with the pro-choice and pro-euthanasia lobbies.

Christians believe that there are certain values worth dying for. Consequently, most Christians believe that there are certain wars which are worth fighting. Even most Christian pacifists concede that there are evils which need to be resisted and will volunteer for non-combatant roles in support of the effort.

Should Christians support or vote solely for Christian politicians? --Not necessarily. It is unrealistic to expect any politician without the inner resources available to Christians to live up to the Christian ideal--few, if any, Christians manage to! Give us godly pastors and elders to prepare us for heaven, and give us political leaders who are hard-nosed, capable, worldly-wise, have a strong sense of right and wrong and a respect for the rule of law.

The facts that the church reflects a radically different set of values and that society should have no hold on the church are potentially, the sources of its greatest social good. The revival blessings of the Great Awakening demonstrated that a church with no administrative ties to the state can have a tremendous social impact when men of God preach the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. On a level playing field a revived and living church need not fear the competition of rival ideologies, doctrines and religions. The only thing the

church needs to fear is herself. Her concern for public opinion, doctrinal drift away from Biblical foundations, and a selfish desire for personal peace and financial security are greater sources of concern than any governmental or social pressure.

The fact that the playing field is no longer level limits the impact the church has on society. By enacting legislation which removes Christian influence from public life, society is doing itself a great disservice. The starker the difference between society and the church, the better the church will look, though the social impact the church will have may be reduced to providing a haven for those who are disgusted with society. In that case, church history will have come full circle. The church will once again be what it was in the first century: socially and politically a fringe phenomena, but one which was a source of hope and life for its hard-pressed adherents. Not a bad prospect, really!

-P. Pikkert

YOUTH'S CORNER

BREAK INTO SONG

Match the correct person to the singing event in which each had a part.

- | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|----------------|----------|---------------|
| 1. John | 2. Josiah | 3. Jehoshaphat | 4. Moses | 5. Saul |
| 6. Barak | 7. Silas | 8. Israelites | 9. David | 10. Disciples |
- a. ___ At the end of a meal they sang a hymn, then went to a mount.
- b. ___ While in a dungeon with another man, he sang hymns at midnight.
- c. ___ He had a vision of a choir 144,000 strong, singing a new song before God's throne, but "no man could learn that song but the 144,000 which were redeemed from the earth.
- d. ___ At the death of two men, he composed a dirge for them and commanded that it be sung throughout Israel.
- e. ___ This slain king was mourned by temple choirs, and to this day sad songs are still sung about his death, the songs being officially recorded.
- f. ___ At the end of this man's life God gave him a song he was to teach to the children of Israel
- g. ___ He had a choir lead the march into battle, and when they began to sing, the Lord "set ambushments" against the enemy.
- h. ___ After winning a battle with the help of a woman, he sang with her a song of victory.
- i. ___ He became jealous when singing women included another man in their songs of praise.
- j. ___ When a well was dug, they sang a song.

ANSWERS

a.10 b.7 c.1 d.9 e.2 f.4 g.3 h.6 i.5 j.8

CHRIST IS OUR LADDER

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

It is by this ladder that all the grace and strength we have comes. Of this also we have daily need, for doing duty, resisting temptations, bearing afflictions. It comes down to us by this ladder, therefore it is called the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, because we have it only by him, and from him, and through him, John 1:16.

It is by this ladder that all the returns of prayer come in, John 16:23. We had lately a day of prayer, wherein special mercies were prayed for with reference to present affairs. Which way must those mercies come, think ye? Certainly, down this ladder.

2. That by it we may ascend from earth to heaven, and go to God. From earth to heaven is a long way, and uphill too. There is no ladder from hell to heaven. Fly it we cannot, Luke 16: 26. We have no wings for the purpose. But climb to heaven we may; and how, but by a ladder? Christ is that ladder.

By this ladder our performances must all ascend while we live; our prayers, and praises, and alms-deeds, our fastings, and humiliations. You would have them go to God, would you not? and be accepted of God, would you not? Then they must go by Christ, 1 Pet. 2:5; Matt. 3:17; 17: 5. He is the high priest, his intercession is the incense, Rev. 8:3.

By this ladder our persons must ascend when we die, John 14: 6. No man cometh to the Father but by him; to the kingdom of the Father, the glory, presence, vision, fruition of God.

It was the merit of his death that purchased it for us; that is the price of it. It is the working of his Spirit in us that fits us for it. It is the efficacy of his prayer that brings us to it, John 17:24. We never begin to climb this ladder till converted, and then step by step; gradually is sin weakened, grace strengthened; not all at once.

-(to be continued) Written in 1691 by Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry.

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