

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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APPLYING THE WRATH OF GOD

"Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly." (Jon.ii.1)

Can a Christian experience the anger of God? I should hope that years of covenant education and countless sermons have answered this question for you. If not, consider the above phrase of Jonah's prophecy. Here we have a Prophet of the High God, an ambassador of truth, one of the privileged of Israel...and where is he? In the belly of a whale. And the whale? The very embodiment of divine anger; a source of punishment prepared by the Lord for the express purpose of bringing sorrow and misery to the faithless Prophet. What was it like for little Jonah, I wonder? In the dark. In the slime. In the heat. In the breathless stench of that creature's belly. A pleasant place, yes? I think not. Jonah had sinned against the LORD. He had turned his back on Jehovah's purpose...and now he was paying the price.

In some things we pay the price too, don't we? We don't always encounter a chastisement as obvious and terrible as Jonah's, but they are there none-the-less, aren't they? Jehovah sends tension and dissatisfaction into a marriage because one or the other member of the marital bond refuses to obey the LORD's standards as to covenant union. We are enslaved to what seems to be an endless cycle of lust because we permit our eyes to view or read that which is impure in magazines or movies. Childrearing becomes torturous and filled with sorrow due to the fact that we neglect discipline...or we discipline too harshly. We are robbed of the joys of Christian fellowship

because of a critical spirit. We grow distant from God and weak in our assurance because we neglect Church or other of God's means of grace. These, together with a multitude of other examples, typify the kind of wrath Christian's encounter everyday in their lives. Wherever sin is found, we may be sure to find punishment fitting the crime. Just because there is no thunderbolt shooting from the clouds doesn't mean there is no wrath to be dealt with. Generally, Jehovah's discipline is built right into the natural order of things. What shall we do, then, when we "sit in the whale's belly" in a certain area of our lives? What did Jonah do?

RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEM

The worst thing possible in reference to sin is to deny it altogether. To ignore sin is spiritual self-annihilation. Consider the words of David, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old within me...for day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me." (Psa. 32:3,4) So was David's experience when he dared keep silence before the LORD concerning his iniquity. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," but should we hide our sins from Him, He'll "put on the pressure," as He did with His servant David. Our sorrows will escalate, our sin will deepen and broaden, and more and more distant shall we grow from our God. And should we continue to refuse to humble ourselves, we may receive an even more terrible punishment...He may harden us altogether concerning that particular sin. Satan, in a sense, will be given the victory for a season, and our enemy will move on to fresh territory...a new realm in which to tempt us,

entice us, enslave us, and eventually harden us. And thus, the awful cycle will begin again. We will grow more and more crippled in our service to Christ.

Says Jonah, "I am cast out of thy sight." (v.4) In other words, "O God, my sin has separated me from you. You are a God who will not look upon iniquity...and iniquity I have committed. Thus, I am where I am." All the words of Jonah's beautiful prayer begin here, principally speaking. With the recognition and confession of sin, the Prophet sets foot on the right path. Without these words, every heartfelt phrase and desperate plea of his prayer falls to the ground useless. But with them, He may be assured of Jehovah's good graces, and the bounty of His mercy.

LAY HOLD ON THE SOLUTION

Deliverance from sin is not found in confession. It's heart is not there. True enough, deliverance from sin is not possible without confession...but it is not rooted in it. Confession, or repentance, is not viewed by God as meritorious. Should we pray for forgiveness until we sweat blood, still we could not purchase grace for ourselves by repentance alone. Forgiveness has but one root...the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is at the Cross that our sin is slaughtered, our guilt forever executed. Christ has "made peace through the blood of His cross." (Col. i.20) And again, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Eph.i.7) Redemption and peace are found in the blood according to these texts, not in the acts of repentance. (This, by the way, is the great error of the Catholic Church in their doctrine of salvation. Repentance is viewed as the cause of forgiveness rather than a means to forgiveness. But according to the Word, the Law leads us to desperation. Desperation leads us to repentance. Repentance leads us to the Cross. The Cross grants us deliverance. Rome would forget this Scriptural order, and thus rob men of hope.)

As we have said, redemption and peace are found in the blood. Jonah understood that fact. Says the Prophet, "I am cast out of Thy sight...yet I will look again toward Thy holy Temple." The Rev. Matthew Poole instructs us as to this Temple: "[It is] where the ark of the covenant, where the mercy seat, where propitiatory sacrifices are offered, where is God's High Priest, types of the great Redeemer, Mediator, and Savior, by Whom sin is expiated, sinners pardoned, grace and favor communicated, where God commands His blessing...life forevermore!" Beloved friend, once you have confessed your sins to your God, lay them at the foot of the altar in the Temple! Lay them at the feet of your Christ! There you will find sufficient blood to cleanse all your stains! What more do you need to rid you of sin's guilt than the precious blood of the Lamb of God? Nothing, I tell you! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing at all! Jonah, that rebellious and bigoted little Prophet, found it so. Should you come to the Lamb of God with your sins, you will find it so as well!

REST CONTENT IN JUDGMENT'S SOURCE

Particularly striking in this prayer of Jonah are these words: "For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me." (v.3) Note that Jonah gives full and free credit to the LORD for his present terrible circumstance. It is the LORD who has cast him into the deep. Even the instruments of judgment are proclaimed to be God's: they are His billows, and His waves. The fearful hour Jonah was encountering stemmed from one source alone...the very hand of God. In one sense, such a thought is quite terrifying. Nobody can punish like God can punish. Yet, on the other hand, there's something quite comforting in Jonah's thought.

When a child is in the disciplining arms of his father, it's a terrifying experience. Daddy is
-continued on back cover

FAMILIES IN FOCUS

THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN



I suppose that there is an unspoken assumption that our children need an education. Somehow the helpless and totally dependent infant is expected to become a contributing member of society after about twenty years. This, it could be argued, is a natural thing; what parent does not want to see their child well provided for and also well prepared for whatever may be his lot in life?

Christians need to pause and think concerning the goal of education, and even to consider the nature of education itself. Our western, post-modernist culture has a definite direction in mind relating to the education of our children. This influence has a very widely impacting effect on, not only the way we look at the process of education but also at the very substance of education. It is of paramount importance that we who name the name of Christ look at the goal of education from a scriptural point of view, and make the necessary adjustments so that our children do not adopt the world's mindset and values.

So what is the goal of education? Proverbs 9:10 teaches us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." It might be rephrased as follows: true wisdom is to fear the LORD and true understanding is to know the Holy One. Since we confess with the words of the Shorter Catechism that the chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever, it stands to reason the education of our children must serve this priori purpose. In other words, the education of our children must serve to direct our children to and in glorifying God and enjoying Him. Certainly Jesus Himself underscored this in His summarization of the law of God. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your

mind." (Italics mine) Matthew 22:37

There is a profound difference between the Christian's biblically based view and the view of our ungodly culture, concerning the purpose or goal of education. The purpose of education for the ungodly is ultimately self-oriented. In the final analysis it is self-serving, or serves the worship of the self. Education serves self-advancement, self-fulfillment; it advances the means at our disposal to achieve success any way that we might choose to define it. It answers our carnal question, "What can I get out of life?" Opposed to this stands the wisdom of scripture. "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD." Proverbs 15:26

Though the godly versus the ungodly goals of education are diametrically opposed to each other, yet Christian education and the education in our culture often look very much the same. There are some significant reasons for this. For one thing, the goal of education for the Christian is a high ideal that he never attains to, as he desires, due to sin and weakness in the teacher and in the student. Also, in the restraining goodness of God the ungodly are never as wicked as they could possibly be, for they would be devils and would soon destroy themselves. In God's mercy there remains some sense of lofty virtuous ideals that shape the patterns of the world's education systems. For another thing, there are truths that are recognized by Christians and non-Christians alike. This often puzzles Christians and can lead to many methodologies in education, apologetics and evangelism. Things such as concrete mathematics, two plus two equals four, are shared by Christian and non-Christian alike. Also in science there are so many areas that

the Christian and non-Christian agree, two hydrogen atoms connected to one oxygen atom makes for one water molecule, for example. We also make use of doctors, lawyers, mechanics, plumbers, electricians and a host of other 'specialists'. We even acknowledge that some of them are very brilliant in skills and academics. The world could not function apart from some adherence to certain truths.

The Christian believes that all truth is God's truth, both in special revelation as well as in general revelation. Speaking of Jesus we read, "In whom are hidden ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Colossians 2:3 emphasis added But the dichotomy in education between the godly and the ungodly shows up in the areas of knowledge where the impact of truth on our lives brings with it logical claims in the area of worship, or our ultimate commitment. This means that creation for example, humbles the Christian as he recognizes his utter dependency on God and that his life fits into the purposes of God. Because God works faith in the hearts of his people, they believe this and commit to it.

But for the unbeliever it is a different matter. Because his heart is at enmity with God, he refuses to acknowledge his dependency on God and desiring to be God; he interprets everything around him in such a way as to give a rational reason for everything in life apart from God. Refusing to acknowledge God, he must explain the present world by some process without God. No wonder that their views keep changing! They recognize that they keep losing face with the contradictions that keep coming up. Sadly, though, they will never admit that this is the case. They are committed to the worship

of self and therefore cannot acknowledge God. Now this principle makes the definition of education a matter of prime importance to the Christian parent. Who will teach our children, and what will they be taught?

One more thing needs to be stated at this juncture. As we have stated at the beginning, the Christians goal in educating their children is to educate them so that in their lives they would glorify God. Since scripture is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God, then it stands to reason that we need to

define the goal of education from scripture and to let scripture guide us in the process of educating our children. Our children's and our education need to be formed by scripture. This by definition means that we also need to teach them the scriptures. We are to train them in the

admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) and teach them His commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Psalm 78:5-7).

A godly education brings with it great blessing. Only read the words of Proverbs 2:1-9. "My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk uprightly; he guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path."

-by Bill Kroesbergen

The education of our children must serve to direct our children to and in glorifying God and enjoying Him.

YOUTH'S CORNER CODED MESSAGE

Use the key below to reveal a good rule which Jesus gave.

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

The Certainty of Faith
by Herman Bavinck

We live in an age of where there is much discussing of opinions that are supposed to be logical. It is considered the highest form of courage and honesty to believe that there no absolute truth. They claim that we are always on our way toward it but will never attain real truth. What is true today may not be true tomorrow if something new is found. No time has been more in need of the reminder that "certainty is the normal, natural condition of the spirit, as health is of the body." The author of this small book calls doubt the "sickness of our age".

In this book the author briefly and clearly expresses that there is such a thing as certainty. He first tells about the loss of certainty in this world. He then defines what certainty is by examining the difference between the certainty of science and that of religion. He then reviews several ways in which many historically have sought for certainty. Lastly he shows the way to certainty and the indispensable role certainty plays in the Christian faith and religion. He shows how experience can never be the ground of certainty, but that the gospel is on only ground of certainty. It is the Word of God alone and faith in Jesus Christ as promised in the gospel that gives certainty in a world that is constantly changing. This book can be obtained from Reformation Heritage Books in Grand Rapids.

-Cope Jonkman



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

HOW CAN WE PRESENT JESUS TO A NEW CULTURE WITHOUT BRINGING OUR OWN?

Editor's Note: This is the second of a two part article by David Learner. Pray that despite some of the controversial ideas included in this article, it will encourage us to 'think outside the box' and spur us to obedience in evangelism.

The most obvious areas where I needed to strip away my own culture and cultural expectations were in my styles of worship, both private and public. As I taught my new friends worship, I taught the elements of worship, not style or form. This was not easy. What was natural for me was foreign for them. I learned to ask questions as I taught. When I introduced prayer, I asked them how they would pray. The Bible teaches we are to pray. They began to pray in a way that was familiar to them and directed toward the God we all knew and loved. When I introduced singing, I asked them what songs they would sing. They had none. I gave them none. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write their own. It sounded like their music, and it gave glory and honor to God. When I introduced teaching, I asked them how they would teach God's word. The style was different from mine, but normal for their culture. When I introduced preaching, I asked them how they would exhort others to follow the teachings of Christ. The resulting form of preaching was different from what I was used to, but it met their needs and was acceptable to their culture. When I introduced church leadership, I asked them how they would lead a group in their community. The results were different from the congregational approach I would have taken, but it fit them and their way of doing things.

For my new friends, worship and church were a daily and day-long life style that was apparent and obvious to their community. It was despised by some and spoken against by others, but was much more acceptable to the community than

anything I could have presented to them or lived out before them. It had impact.

Regardless of how careful one is to deculturate one's message, there are teachings in the Bible that are simply against cultural norms. For instance, in a culture where the norm is multiple wives, the teaching of one wife for life is difficult to accept. In these situations one must teach God's word, but more importantly teach that all of us are to obey God's word. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) includes the admonition that we are to teach others to obey everything Christ has commanded. I have learned that teaching doctrine and teaching obedience are two very different things.

I went overseas with all kinds of doctrinal material to present to the new believers. I discovered that doctrine was another area where cultural baggage can be found. Doctrine is basically my church or denomination's teachings on what they believe the Bible says and how it is to be lived out (in my own culture). Doctrine often includes forms and traditions that are outside the biblical context, though acceptable within the biblical and cultural context under which the doctrine was developed. Church polity, church staff, ordinations, the practices of baptism and the Lord's supper, the teachings regarding clergy and laity, and more can carry significant cultural baggage that may be extra-biblical without being disobedient to the Scripture in a given culture. The cross-cultural witness must be able to identify the cultural areas and eliminate them from his or her teachings.

The focus in discipleship has become obedience to the Gospel, not adherence to a doctrine. With a doctrine centered discipleship program one must teach everything to assure a

person has the knowledge to be obedient. With an obedience centered discipleship program the emphasis is how we can be obedient to Christ in every area of our lives and in every circumstance. When a new disciple asks a question, my answer is always the same: What must you do to be obedient to Christ? I may have to help them to find the appropriate passages in the Bible to answer the question, but the question always remains the same.

During one baptism it was observed that the village leader was agitated. He and his family were to be baptized, but as the time approached, he became more agitated and angry. He was overheard mumbling that "this is wrong," and "this is evil." He was referring to the baptism. A wise worker allowed him to voice his feelings and then asked him to explain what it was about the baptism that was wrong or evil. The village leader explained that it was wrong for a man from outside the family to touch the women in his family. The doctrinal teaching was that an ordained minister should administer baptism. The worker was quick to ask himself the question, "In this, how can I be obedient to the teaching of Christ?" He quickly asked the leader if it would be appropriate for him to baptize the leader, and then the leader could baptize the rest of the new converts. A change was made, and the baptism continued.

We learned that the form of baptism we had been practicing was a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel. Many women were refusing to be baptized because a man other than a family member would be touching them. Baptism by ordained ministers was not a requirement of the Bible, but was simply a tradition of the church. With a simple change in form, baptisms increased from a few each month to tens if not hundreds each week. What's more, the leadership transferred to the village was significant. Many who may have stayed on the fringe of the work became key leaders as they accepted the spiritual responsibility of baptizing their families,

and went on to become the true spiritual leaders in their homes and villages.

As you may have discerned, baptism is primarily of family groups. The Gospel is presented to families, much the same as the pattern found in Acts. This avoids extraction evangelism, and conversions usually result in a church being established. A child or a woman may be the door into the family, but the head of the household usually leads the whole family into the decision to follow Christ. This is different than found in some cultures, but if the traditional, individual conversion approach had been maintained, then the growth of the church would have been hampered.

There are more examples of how form and practice from one culture may have a negative or neutral impact on another culture. You probably have many examples from your own ministry. Part of the job of the cross-cultural witness is to eliminate the cultural aspects of his or her own understanding of doctrine and practice, and to help those in the host culture discover Biblically acceptable ways of expressing their own love, devotion, and worship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the question remains: What color is Jesus? For the cross-cultural witness the color is always neutral. When Christ is in the culture, He will look just like the members of that culture. He will represent God and His righteousness to the culture. He will become the measuring stick by which everyone in the culture is measured.

If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

APPLYING THE WRATH OF GOD

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER)

strong. Daddy is angry. Daddy is angry with him. Daddy has a hold on him, and there is no way to escape. The child knows what's coming, and isn't looking forward to it. Yet, the child is experiencing quite a different set of emotions in his father's arms compared to how he would feel in the grip of an unknown attacker in a dark alley. At the same time there is terror at Daddy's anger, there's security too. The father loves him. He knows this. And with this knowledge, despite the fearful circumstances, comes well-being...well-being in the face of dread. This is what it is to be a believer in Christ in the hands of an angry God. "For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." (Prov. iii.12) The LORD has adopted you, child of heaven, into his fold. You have not only been forgiven, you have been

accepted into the House of God. You are His son. You have nothing to fear. The billows that cover you are His billows...the billows of your loving Father. The whale which has become your temporary residence is His whale...where will it take you that your Father has not ordained? And what will be the end of your punishment? Your destruction? Certainly not: "...for now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom.i.8) Your end will be holiness, salvation, glory.

Thus, let the billows roll. Let the waves break. Let the leviathan come. Our Father loves us, and we shall yet praise Him. Even if from the belly of a whale.

-by Pastor Ludt

Elders: Pastor Ed Ludt
182 McBay Road, RR#1
Brantford, ON
N3T 5L4
(519) 770-0846
b.baggins@sympatico.ca

Mr Barry Everts
1405 Seaton Road, RR#1
Cambridge, ON
N1R 5S2
(519) 623-8208
beverts@execulink.com

Mr Bill Kroesbergen
2244 2nd Conc, RR#1
Lynden, ON
L0R 1T0
(519) 647-2659
bkkraes@execulink.com

Deacons: Mr Gary Everts
RR#2
Branchton, ON
N0B 1L0
(519) 623-9674
gary.everts@primus.ca

Mr Ray Halma
2310 5th Conc Rd W, RR#2
Branchton, ON
N0B 1L0
(519) 647-9833
rhalma000@sympatico.ca

GRACE COVENANT CHURCH

For Christ's Crown and Covenant
Services: Sundays at 11:15 am and 6:00 pm
(meeting at Knox Presbyterian Church, Sheffield)
P.O. Box 12-4
Sheffield, ON
L0R 1Z0
(519) 770-0846
email - gcc@execulink.com
web site - <http://www.execulink.com/~gcc/index.htm>