

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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CHECK YOUR WATCH FOR VIRTUE

Though it is my desire, in the coming years, to compose this quarterly article with devotional matters in mind, I would like to take a few lines of your time to discuss something which leans more toward the intellectual side of things.

Many of us are familiar with the debates surrounding the recent decision of the Canadian courts supporting gay marriage. Likewise, we are familiar with the typical structure of such debates. On one side, we have the representatives of what is called the "traditional" view of family and sexuality who stand opposed to gay marriage. On the other end of the court, we find those who label themselves as the "progressive" voice, who support the moral legitimacy and constitutional legality of gay unions.

Driving home the other day, my wife was privy to such a debate on a radio talk show. As she shared with me the essence of the radio discussion, she made note of one debater's puzzlement concerning those who do not favor gay marriage. Said this fellow, "Why can't these people just progress beyond outdated beliefs?"

Upon hearing this quotation, my intellectual ears perked up. "How often," said I to myself, "do we hear that kind of argument. How often Christians (and even non-Christian moralists) are categorized as 'behind the times,' 'medieval,' or 'archaic.' And perhaps there are some who are not unaffected by this seemingly forceful line of reasoning...even among God's people." With these thoughts in my mind, I

decided that a brief article on this issue might well be helpful to you all.

Is it true? Are Christians behind the times?

MEDDLING IN ABSURDITY

Think carefully about how our debating friend on the radio phrased his question: "Why can't these people just progress beyond outdated beliefs?" There is a philosophically massive assumption being made. Can you discern what it is? Essentially, he is assuming that truth is a chronological matter, that right and wrong are to be discerned by the turning of the clock. What was appropriate for one moment in history is inappropriate for another. Concerning our issue specifically, our friend might phrase his argument in this way, "It may be true that certain Christian views of family and sexuality were normative in a bygone era; but now, with the passing of the years and the moral-religious broadening of culture, we have matured beyond such limited assumptions."

The problem with our friend's philosophy is that it robs him of just the kind of moral certainty he desires to have in order to justify his position. He wants to state assertions about the propriety of gay marriage, yet the roots of his very argument undo his cause. His central assumption is that the passing of time has made what was once unthinkable permissible, even laudable. Yet, who's to say what tomorrow will hold? Will homosexuals become the object of violent public persecution? Fifty, or even twenty years from now, will society gradually decide that the presence of homosexuality is so vile and harmful that

imprisonment, or even immediate public execution upon demonstration of guilt is a moral necessity? Though I am not advocating such a position, there are some, at present, who would. Are they the voice of the future? Who's to say they are not? And if they are such a voice, then ultimately their position would be the more "advanced" according to our friend's philosophy, not those advocating gay marriage (and gay everything else). Thus, the opinions of our friend would become so much archaic silliness that we need to "get beyond" if we are going to be a mature, advanced society. Our friend's own philosophical assumptions have just turned around and bit him in the hand.

What it boils down too is that our friend is not a prophet. He cannot claim to know what The Future is in any way. He may discern patterns favorable, at present, to certain trends. But the fact of the matter is he cannot predict what will be with any certainty. The very views which he presently labels as "out-dated" may come to be the predominant view in the very near future. Likewise, that perspective which he sees as "the future" may quickly go the way of the do-do. His philosophical moorings have no moral or argumentative power. They provide neither a true understanding of what is "to be," nor can they grant to the believer in them any guidance as to what "ought to be." To accuse an opponent of being "behind the times," therefore, is meddling in absurdity. The "times" cannot really be known as they relate to the future; thus, we can have no idea who is "behind" them and who is not. It is my suspicion that calls to "get with the times" are more a matter of wishful thinking than legitimate argumentation. Such rhetoric may carry some degree of emotional power (especially if we buy into the lie of an ongoing, unstoppable moral progress in the race), but in the end it is little more than what logicians term an ad hominem argument...which means that it does not address the issue at all, but merely seeks to win the argument through belittlement and personal attack.

Not everyone is as aggressive or offensive as the gentlemen in our radio debate. Yet, many many millions of unthinking, unsuspecting people steer their lives according to the same philosophy (the same religion, one might say). Whether struggling with a life crisis or simply dealing with day to day decisions, these "keep their watch handy," making ethical choices based upon the motions and opinions of their present age (either consciously or unconsciously). What we have here is nothing less than peer pressure on a global scale. And the same philosophical difficulties ultimately exist for these well-meaning souls, too. These poor folk, seeking to find meaning and direction as all men do, are in fact "penniless," philosophically speaking. If these could but discern the implications of their decision-making method, they would be left feeling bankrupt. They would discover that "checking their watch" can provide no answers. How can folk know whether or not the "is" of the present is the eternal "ought to be?" What if the flow of current times is evil rather than good? How can one judge whether the times are evil or good if the only standard of criticism we have is the standard of the very trends which we are needing to evaluate? Critical thinking, and thus moral decisions of any kind, become impossible.

ROOTED IN CERTAINTY

In the first Chapter of Romans, Paul is commenting on the state of the natural man before God. Specifically, he desires his readers to understand the "why" of humanity's present condition. Says he, "...when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful." (Rom.i.21) If we read on, we discover that Paul blames the brokenness of the human estate (including homosexuality specifically) on this initial act of rebellion in the hearts of men in which they reject God as their God. The words immediately following this claim are enlightening for
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FAMILIES IN FOCUS

THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN - PART 2



Everyone loves a teacher that excels. This is not surprising as we all enjoy the confidence that comes with being prepared and equipped for that which lies ahead of us in life. We appreciate those who help broaden our perspectives on the issues of life, that help us to think of both concrete and abstract concepts, and then to make practical application of what we have learned. We appreciate those who have taught us much and those who have made learning a pleasurable experience.

In our last article we noted that education has a goal, either a godly focus or an ungodly one. There is no area of knowledge and education that is 'neutral'. This is true because knowledge and truth reside with Christ (Colossians 2:3), and our relation to him shapes our perspective on education. We also saw that a godly education is an education that is shaped by scripture. What then, does scripture teach us as to who teaches our children?

The plain teaching of scripture is that the education and instruction of our children is our parental responsibility. "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck." Proverbs 1:8-9 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:1-4 More particularly, the responsibility of bringing up the children falls on the shoulders of the father. This is clear from the order in the marriage relationship in which children are conceived, brought to birth, and raised up.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and he is the savior of the body." Ephesians 5:22-23 Obviously, if the husband carries the leadership and responsibility over his wife, then when they beget children, he, as husband and father, carries the same responsibilities into their relationship with their children. For scriptural proof, think on the covenantal context Deuteronomy 6 and in the law itself. " ... I the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments." Deuteronomy 5:9-10 See also Ephesians 6:4. This is not to negate the role of the wife and mother. She is his help and without her he is incomplete in these functions.

Already a serious objection needs to be dealt with. The argument goes like this: the bible places the responsibility of training the children on the parents in the sphere of spiritual matters but in earthly matters our children are probably better educated by "qualified teachers". There are two aspects to this objection that need to be addressed. The first is the strong dichotomy, or separation, between learning from general revelation and from special revelation. The second is that "qualified teachers" are better instructors of our children.

It is certainly true that when the scriptures address training our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, the end of such training is that our children will know and love the Lord. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with

all your strength. And the words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." Deuteronomy 6:5-7 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Proverbs 9:10 Jesus, in describing what life is ultimately about, says, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." John 17:3 Certainly, teaching spiritual truth to our children is of primary and foundational importance. It's blessing lies in it being the means of grace that God uses to extend the covenant blessings to our children. And if our children attain, by the grace of God, a right and intimate relationship with God, then they have what they need for this life and the next, no matter what they may have to do without. Whether our children grow up in affluence or poverty, whether they become laborers in menial tasks or attain high and prominent positions in the corporate world or the sphere of political power, only those who walk with God and are his children are blessed in this life. Jesus expressed the same truth in these words, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mark 8:35-37

But what are we to think about science, arithmetic, languages, arts, history and all the other academic disciplines? Surely the Bible doesn't teach that this is the parent's responsibility, does it? Yes, it does teach that this too is the parent's responsibility! The reason for this is that these disciplines are subservient to the training up of our children in our Lord's fear, to

love and worship him above all and to love and serve our neighbor. It is a myth to think that there are some subjects of education that are neutral. God the Creator is the author of all his words and works. All truth that exists has its source in the God of all truth. After all, he put into existence the laws of nature and by sustaining the created order, he orders whatsoever comes to pass. Speaking of Christ the apostle writes to the Colossians, "For by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through him and for him." Colossians 1:16 To think of any subject matter apart from its connection to

God is to fail to glorify God and consequently it is sin.

Parents have the immediate responsibility

under God to teach their children and bring them up in the fear of the Lord. They are, in the good and kind providence of God, in the best position to educate their own children. Our children are educated in the fear of God when we know his love and see ourselves as stewards of God's heritage (Psalm 127:3). But this does not mean that parents should not use all the help that they can avail themselves of for this task. The parent has to answer to God for how he or she has brought up and educated their children. Though a teacher, designated by the parents, might communicate the grammar, logic, and rhetoric to our children the direction and application of the subject matter falls to the parents. This means that the parents must know what their children are being taught! There is no such thing as leaving the education of our children to "qualified teachers" as though our only responsibility were to see that the children go to school. May our children know the fear of the Lord.

-by Bill Kroesbergen

It is a myth to think that there are some subjects of education that are neutral.

YOUTH'S CORNER

A LIVING HOPE & SURE SALVATION (1 PETER 1:1-25)

I	S	E	A	R	C	H	G	T	P	G	F	S	H	I	J	R	F
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C	L	I	R	S	O	A	U	I	A	R	X	R	E	Z	I	O	E
C	O	N	I	L	E	A	D	S	I	S	N	E	U	T	E	M	A
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S	C	O	N	F	O	R	M	E	D	U	E	C	I	O	J	E	R

ABIDING	HOPE
APOSTLE	IGNORANCE
APPEARED	LOVE
BEHAVIOR	OBEDIENCE
BLOOD	PRECIOUS
BURN	PREDICTED
CHRIST	PROPHET
CONDUCT	RAISED
CONFORMED	REJOICE
DEAD	RESERVED
ENDURETH	SALVATION
FAITH	SEARCH
FEAR	SEEN
FIRE	SINCERE
FOREVER	SOULS
FUTILE	SPIRIT
GOSPEL	SPRINKLED
GRASS	TESTED
HEART	WITHERS
HEAVEN	WORD
HOLY	WRITTEN

POINTS TO PONDER

THE PERFECTION OF GOD

(Newman Hall, "Leaves of Healing from the Garden of Grief")

FULL PARDON!

(Spurgeon, "The Joy of Salvation")

Oh! rejoice in the richness of our salvation! When the Lord pardoned our sins, he did not pardon half of them, and leave some of them on the book- but with one stroke of the pen he gave a full receipt for all our debts!

When we went down into the fountain filled with blood, and washed, we did not come up half-clean, but there was no spot nor wrinkle upon us- we were white as snow!

God's wisdom cannot err.
 God's holiness cannot sin.
 God's love cannot be cruel.
 God's immutability cannot change.
 God's eternity cannot end.
 The perfection of God is a source of sweetest consolation to us, in our feebleness and foolishness.
 If He were not omniscient, we might suffer and He not know.
 If He were not omnipresent, we might cry and He not hear.
 If He were not omnipotent, we might perish and He be unable to help.
 If He were not good, He would not care for us, or might crush us.
 "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just."
 Deut. 32:4



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

MINISTRY TO THE PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY IN TORONTO

This is an article from Jorge Barros. It gives some details as to how he came to be in Toronto and the work that he is carrying on in the Portuguese community there.

We are a small congregation that was born from the desire to meet with, and to be a faithful reformed church.

We came from the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, whose history began in 1859, when a missionary called Rev. Ashbel Green Simonton arrived in Brazil, sent by the Presbyterian Church of the United States.

After living and ministering for almost ten years in a Presbyterian Church, and our children (Rafaela, Eli and Elizabete) growing up, my wife (Carmen) and I started to consider the possibility of moving to another city. This city had a public university which was a free university.

Meanwhile, we became acquainted with the Immigration Program of Canada and started to think and pray about a move to another country. After our application, we received the immigrant visa. Then I asked my presbytery for a license, my wife left her job and we came to Toronto.

Soon we looked for a faithful Portuguese speaking Presbyterian or Reformed church in Toronto, but we could not find one. Then we decided to meet with faithful Presbyterian or Reformed English speaking brothers. We found and became members of Bethel Canadian Reformed Church. Through this church, I was presented to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I was examined, had my ministerial credentials recognized and finally I was installed January 6th, 2004 as an evangelist and church planter in Toronto.

At that time, we had met a family from a Baptist and Pentecostal background. They were outside of any congregation mostly because they were frustrated with the lack of church discipline in the churches. This family (Tom, Naedja and his son Andre) had already become members of the Bethel Canadian Church. Also we were working for a few months with a young lady who used to be a Jehovah's Witness. Unfortunately, a few months later she decided to move to an "evangelical pentecostal reformed" congregation.

Thanks to the Lord we were immediately increased with a very young couple (Elias and Celia), who were looking for a reformed worship service. A few months later, another couple, of whom I had been pastor before, surprisingly came to Toronto and joined us. This couple (Nilcelio and Elimar) has three children; the youngest (Geovane) was born in Canada, and is three months old. The two others (Sara and Lucas) are still in Brazil, but God willing they are coming about Christmas Day. Currently, this family has a tourist visa, but they want to live in Canada. Please, ask God in their favor. Ask for a work permit for Nilcelio, and for an immigrant visa for his family. I am sure they will be very good citizens to Canada, for they are intelligent skillful people, friendly and hard workers. And I am sure also, they are very important for our congregation because they are faithful believers.

Recently, a young woman (Rosemary) with whom we had already studied the Bible started to attend our Sunday worship services.

Most recently, a new couple (Paulo and Neuza) attended two of our worship services. They have two children (Paulson and Nathalie). They have been living here for more than fifteen

years. Today they are half Brazilian and half Canadian because in these fifteen years they rarely contacted Brazilian people. They have a Roman Catholic background, but they became Pentecostal almost seven years ago. But Paulo is very interested in the Reformed Faith. He has a good understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and he likes to read reformed literature especially R.C. Sproul. We have talked about the Reformed Faith, by telephone, after the worship service and at home. At this moment they are living in a new neighborhood and looking for a new church. He has problems with certain Pentecostal doctrines like speaking in tongues as the evidence of Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second blessing to be pursued separately after the new birth. They are not living near our worship place, but I invited him to consider our congregation and denomination. His and their family's destiny is in God's hand. Please pray for this family. Paulo also is living in important moments in his professional life. He has to do important negotiations with his company. Neuza is looking for a new job.

I have contact with two other brothers of whom I was the pastor in the past. They are interested in immigrating to Canada with their young families. Marcelo is living in Brazil and is pursuing his graduation as a geography teacher. Levi is a mathematics teacher and at this time he is studying English in the United Kingdom. Please pray for these two families and ask God to show his sovereign and perfect will to them.

Currently we hold one worship service in a Lutheran Church building on Sunday afternoons. It is close to downtown Toronto, an area also called Little Portugal. At the same place we will set up a Reading Room with reformed literature. We have already ordered some books from two publishers in Brazil. Our intention is to invite people to come, read and talk about the Christian Faith.

We also get a half page twice a month in a Brazilian newspaper. In that space we always write an article and invite people to come to our worship service and seek contact with us by telephone or email address.

We are seeking to evangelize through: our website (www.igrejareformada.com), distribution of pamphlets, and Bible studies at home. Our plans also include broadcasting a weekly radio program and to hold a Reformed Conference in the next year.

We thank God for all the support that we are receiving from the Presbytery Michigan-Ontario, the Committee of Home Mission and Church Extension of OPC and from Bethel Canadian Reformed Church in Toronto. We also are thankful to each of the people who anonymously support us through prayer and giving financially.

In the last three months we have preached on the book of the prophet Isaiah, which shows us how God brings judgment to the world and to the unfaithful church, but preserves the faithful church, like a stump of a great cut tree. This small stump is the holy seed that will grow up again. It seems to us that the faithful church is very small today. However, this is also all that God pleases to use, because "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Co 1:27)

The very essence of our religion lies in love, and one of the first-fruits of it is to make us care about the salvation of our fellow-men. We owe everything to the grace of God, and, if God has given us grace in our own hearts, and saved us with the precious blood of the Only-Begotten, how can we sit still, and allow others to perish?

Surely it is an intolerable disgrace to any one to profess to be a man of God, and to have no care about the souls of others, while they are perishing by millions. (C.H. Spurgeon)

CHECK YOUR WATCH FOR VIRTUE

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER)

our present subject: "...[they] became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." This rejection of Jehovah has had effects which are not merely moral, but very much intellectual. Unbelieving people have become, individually and as a race, "vain in their imaginations," which might also be translated "they have been given to worthless speculation." They have become incapable of thinking truly or clearly as to the eternal realities of the universe, including discerning what is right or wrong.

The idea that ethics or virtue finds its foundations in the movements of the times is but one example in a host of methods by which men endeavor to discern for themselves what is real and what is false, what is right and what is

wrong. Each of these human schemes has as its end vanity. Each will, upon examination, prove itself impotent as a source of moral decision-making or discernment of truth. This is because each of these systems has been developed by a creature whose mind has been turned over to absurdity by his rejection of God. Universal certainty, knowledge of Truth, has only one reliable source: the mind of the God Who is Truth. And this God is not silent, but has spoken graciously and abundantly to men, that they might not only know Truth, but practice it unto eternal life. Never forget the encouraging words of the Psalmist to the seeker of Truth: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psa. 119:105)

-by Pastor Ludt

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