

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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THE LAW OF KINDNESS

But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. --Leviticus 19:34

Every culture has its strengths and weaknesses.

Imagine, for example, a people who have gone through difficult economic times...perhaps even a Depression. Such an experience instills in their future generations a spirit of thrift. They are less apt to go into debt. They are more likely to save. These are more careful, when making purchases, to buy a product of good quality and long-term endurance. In this sense, the culture has benefited from their past experiences.

On the other hand, the same culture may gain a tendency to be cheap. Others may come to view them as "money-grubbers," stingy, tightfisted in the face of others' need or want of happiness. This tendency toward miserliness may even be felt among their own children, who are robbed of recreational activities which the family could well afford, or who might be required to eat their sandwiches with only one slice of meat at a time. The culture is still living in the Depression, but the Depression is long over. In this sense, I believe the culture's experiences have had a negative effect.

MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN LUNCH MEAT

It's not my intention to spend our time in this article consumed with matters of delicatessen dogma. To some degree, what we do with our smoked turkey is an issue of family conscience,

so I'll not pretend to make lunch meat a Confessional matter.

In other realms, however, cultural norms may be expressed in ways that either genuinely benefit or terribly harm Christian faith and practice. Consider, for instance, how we respond to strangers. If a congregation has, as its context, a warm, welcoming culture, imagine how such behavior might soothe away the many discomforts which confront the average church visitor. The awkwardness and alienation so often experienced by the congregational newcomer would be significantly reduced, making way for a more joyful first-time visit for them, and perhaps providing for more likelihood (humanly speaking) that they would return. Not to mention the fact that such an environment would go a long way in refuting the accusations of those skeptics and enemies of the Church who would describe Christianity as inherently unloving.

Let's now picture another kind of congregation. In so many ways the culture of this second congregation has proven a benefit. Theirs is a heritage of solid orthodoxy, pure worship, a deep love of missions. Their legacy has spared them exposure to many of the evils in the world, and the inherent traditionalism of their upbringing continues to protect them from the evils of a different stripe found within the Church. In all these matters they prove themselves to be a great blessing to any newcomer who might choose to darken their door. But something's lacking. Or, perhaps a better way to express it might be to say that a certain awful Something is present which serves not as a boon, but as an obstacle to good. It is a

Something which has been inculcated into the behavior patterns of every man, woman, and child there. Just as truly as one might pass down a family quilt, the cultural reality in question has been handed down from generation to generation. And what is it we're talking about? We're talking about coldness. And what harm can such a cultural pattern inflict? Incalculable harm. The wounds that coldness inflicts are to be found in every realm of congregational life. And as far as its capacity to do damage to the outreach ministry of such a church, coldness is a terminal illness.

JUST HOW NICE DO I HAVE TO BE?

We're all familiar with the tendency of so many (including ourselves) to draw too much of a line of demarcation between the Old and the New Testaments. Usually, what comes to mind when we think along these lines are the false theological distinctions people make (such as the claim of classic dispensationalists that there existed under the Old Covenant a different means of salvation aside from faith in Christ). But we make the same false distinctions in practical areas, too. Consider, for instance, how we so often view the Old Testament as the "blood and guts" Testament, filled with blood-spattered ruffians who were summoned to a faith somehow more gory and less "nice" than ours. Conversely, we might unconsciously think of the New Testament as the "Tidy Testament," populated by bright, smiling, hygienic figures who are delightfully nice to people and are more like Gandhi than Joshua. Well, we're wrong on both counts. Frankly, if we were to investigate closely, we may be shocked to find more "blood and guts" in the New Testament than we might have anticipated (for instance, cf. Rev. 19:19ff), along with a surprising amount of tenderness in the Old Testament.

It's this "tender side" that we witness in the passage I have quoted above. Along with the many laws, statues, ceremonial rites, and judicial concerns in the Books of Moses (which

served as the foundation-stone of Israelite life), there is much in those writings which is concerned with the behavior of Israel toward what was called "the stranger." The Hebrew term translated in Leviticus 19:34 as "stranger" means "sojourner," a person traveling through. The word may either concern itself with one who was literally traveling through Israel on the way to another locale, or it may be concerned with the many non-Jews who lived within Israelite borders. The stranger was not a "brother," he was not a fellow Israelite, but was a foreigner.

What is the command of Jehovah to His people concerning these "strangers" who dwelt in their midst? Consider our text: *Thou shalt love him as thyself. In other words, love the stranger, the foreigner, the unfamiliar (and often unwanted) soul who comes among you with the same love with which you regard yourself. And what's the nature of that love? We're fixated on ourselves. We think constantly about ourselves. We're fascinated with ourselves! It's not unjust to say that we practically worship ourselves! If we had a dollar for every minute we spent thinking about ourselves...what we need, what we want, where we're going, where we've been, who likes us, who doesn't like us, what we're wearing, how our hair looks...if we had a dollar for every moment so spent we'd all be living the rich life on our own tropical island! And where was Israel commanded to direct this overwhelming attention? Toward the least likely object: the unwanted, unclean, unlovely, out-of-place stranger.*

You can see how this text and a right application of it has much to say about the environment of our churches. And you can also see, I hope, how a cold culture can do so much injustice to the radical kind of love Jehovah is encouraging here in the hearts of His people. Already, in the Old Testament, the Lord desired warm churches (if I may speak anachronistically). How much more, in this age of the Spirit, ought that warmth to overflow toward the stranger?

-continued on back cover

FAMILIES IN FOCUS

THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN - PART 4



The Christian parent, desiring to raise its child to know and serve the Lord with all its heart, mind, soul, and strength, cannot give its child over to a secular school. This is because the education that a child receives from such an institution is rooted in a worldview that is in opposition to God and His revelation. But not only this, but also the Christian parent is required by God to bring up its child in the training and nurture of the Lord.

In our culture, particularly in the last couple of generations, there has been the growth of Christian schools. This is largely because many Christian parents have seen the inconsistency of the goals of state education as compared to the biblical mandate to bring up their children to fear the Lord. These parents, rightly, have refused to sacrifice their children's souls to the god that is worshipped by a secular state institution's education philosophy. In consequence, there has arisen a Christian school movement, a movement that has as its goal to be an institution that educates its students from a Christian worldview. There are a number of different approaches to developing a Christian school philosophy. These include church schools where the families of a particular church, under the leadership of that church, educate their children with their own distinctive doctrinal positions, with an express purpose of educating the children in those doctrinal positions, along with other academic studies. There are also Christian school societies which emphasize academic instruction, taught from a biblical framework and holding to the most elementary principles of the Christian faith, leaving to the member families to teach their children their own doctrinal distinctives. They have as a common goal to educate their children from a God glorifying biblical perspective and avoiding the influence of an ungodly way of thinking.

There is much to commend the Christian school movement. First of all, the education of our children, whom God has given us and for which He holds us accountable, is of utmost importance. It matters that our children learn to think God's thoughts after Him and that every academic discipline is both taught and understood from a God-honoring perspective. Secondly, the moral framework that shapes the life of the Christian comes from the Bible. This is reinforced in the Christian school setting while in our present culture, including state run schools, would teach our children morals as determined by the values of a culture in opposition to God. The restraining of sin and the promotion of biblical morality and godly piety is an inestimable blessing for our children. Thirdly, the instructors at the Christian school are presumably adherents to the Christian faith and desirous to pass on the faith to the next generation, compared with instructors and policy makers in the secular schools who hate God and His church. Fourth, generally, that teachers are qualified (but by what standard) and gifted for communicating knowledge to our children. Good teachers often leave a lasting effect on the thinking of their students, although bad teachers also leave an effect on their students that cannot be overcome but by the grace of God. Fifth, the education of the students at a Christian school is taken much more seriously and in particular regarding its personal application to the lives of its students. I think that this is clearly demonstrated from the sacrifices and involvement of the parents and gifts and high tuitions that are paid in order for the students to receive a godly education, in general, though not necessarily in every particular case.

There are, however, some weaknesses that are attached to Christian schooling. The weak-

nesses in the Christian school system of education are of an entirely different nature than the moral failures of a secular system.

The first area of weakness that needs to be addressed is that bible teaches that the education of our own children is our own responsibility. To make it clear in other words, God calls parents to be engaged in the educating of their own children. The second person pronouns of Deuteronomy 6:5-9 make unmistakably clear that God is commanding the parents to be teaching their children and their curriculum is to be His words. "You shall teach them ('these words' of verse 6) diligently to your children, and 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." Verse 7. As

we have seen in the past, academics are subservient to training up our children in the fear of the Lord and the truths of various academic disciplines belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore an academic

education cannot be separated from training in the fear and nurture of the Lord. The verse we have quoted from Deuteronomy 6 does not merely say that it is the parents responsibility to see to it that their children are taught the fear of the Lord; rather it clearly shows that God gives to the parents the task to bring them up in the fear of the Lord. This fear of the Lord encompasses academic training. This calling and responsibility cannot be delegated to others; the Lord holds the parents accountable. But it is not wrong for parents to avail themselves of helps such as a teacher who has a gift in teaching a subject such as science or math or geography. It is still the responsibility of the parents and when they would make use of a teacher or a Christian school system that provides gifted, Christian school teachers, they are responsible to know what their children are being taught,

and that what they are being taught is shaping the thinking and behavior of the child. This last element is the heart of education and for which the parent labors and is accountable for.

A second area of weakness for the Christian school system is the inability to tailor the education of the individual child according to its own need. This problem is systemic to any form of institutional learning. The classroom of students practically necessitates the teacher instruct the students according to the average performance level of the class, and by one method of learning for the whole, regardless that the student body might be comprised of students with one of several, different learning styles. There simply is not enough resources and time for one teacher in one classroom to

deal with the individual needs of all the students. This practically underscores the wisdom and value of parents teaching their own children. Our God is an all-wise God. He uses the love and intimacy of the parent

child relationship to maximize the well-being of the child, even in the process of learning. No one will labor as the parent who is anxious to see its child realize the truths taught to it, because no one loves the child as the parent does. No one understands the thinking, the affections, the influences of the child's surroundings, its struggles and hurts and the personal sins that the child has to deal with, as do its own parents. While we hold fast to the people of God being a covenant community, we cannot take away the individuality of the person and their uniqueness in the way that God has made them. God knows how best to maintain and grow the individual to take its rightful place in the covenant community. And God has placed that responsibility on the parents.

Christian parents are required by God to bring up their child in the training and nurture of the Lord.

To be continued

-by Bill Kroesbergen

YOUTH'S CORNER

Unscramble the tiles to reveal a bible text. Six tiles are unscrambled for you.

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MISSION SPOTLIGHT SHOTGUN OR RIFLE?

THOUGHTS ON MISSIONS AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

One thing my father taught me as a young man growing up in the Midwest (USA), was when to use a shotgun and when to use a rifle. Each one had its particular use - although even a shotgun didn't help me when I first hunted doves! After shooting two boxes of ammo with no success, my father threatened me, saying that if I didn't hit something soon I would have to pack up the gun. Soon after that I downed my first dove!

Shotguns are good for birds on the wing, and small game like rabbits and squirrels. But for deer, elk or bigger, you'd better have a pretty good rifle. The bigger the game and the further away, the better the rifle you need.

In missions, churches can choose between both types of approaches - the shotgun approach or the rifle approach. For many years some Reformed churches have practiced what we might term "shotgun missions". That is, you load your church budget with many small pellets and scatter shoot them all over the world. While I fully support a broad interest in missions, and

the more mission endeavors we can support the better, there are drawbacks to this approach for smaller sized churches with limited budgets.

I would like to ask us to think about the "shotgun" approach, because many congregations continue this practice. And I would like to briefly analyze missions from both a biblical perspective, as well as from my own experience in missions. Overall, I believe this issue has to do with stewardship. Our resources are limited, and God would have us be the best stewards possible with what He has given us.

HOW DID THE PRACTICE ARISE

In the mission under which I served for 13 years, more and more money was needed for projects as overhead costs rose, and as more and more benefits were provided for the missionaries. Not all of this was bad, and I am grateful to God for the good care that our family received, and for the work accomplished. The increasing need for money, however, prompted the mission agency to solicit funds from more and varied sources, and it was common for a

missionary to have anywhere from 10 to 15 supporting churches! Local churches also contributed to the situation by asking the mission agency to recommend a missionary to support. And so missionaries got used to making the rounds, reporting to many churches. But what was the practical outcome? The local churches felt content that they supported so many mission causes, but often there was little real ownership for the projects or the missionaries. The responsibility for missions was pawned off on the "mission board".

What were the practical effects of the "shotgun approach" on the field? Speaking for Central America, I believe that they were negative for the most part. Since the local churches were not aiming at "big game", but rather content to scatter shoot, no big game was bagged. "Mission" endeavors were begun and closed, this and that was tried, missionaries came and went - and hardly anyone in the local churches back home expressed an informed concern over what was happening. In Central America, for example, there were signs of problems many years ago. And there were several causes. One of the most serious was the uncertainty as to what a "Reformed" church should look like. On several occasions there were conferences to discuss just what kind of a church we should be planting.(!) But this was not the only problem. The shotgun approach is content to start a few small groups here or there, raise up a few half-trained leaders - and call it a day. In my travels to other parts of Latin America, I marvel at the kind of work that the Presbyterians did during the last part of the 1800's and during the early part of the 1900's. In Mexico and Brazil they went in with the rifles, and they aimed at nothing less than a full fledged church. Not only were congregations planted, but seminaries were erected and staffed, Christian schools were founded, universities too, hospitals and homes for the elderly. Today these churches continue to grow on the solid base they received - Mexico with over a million members, and Brazil over 350,000. While later years have brought

internal problems - some practical and some theological - the point of this article is the way the mission effort was carried out. It was not done with a shotgun approach. There was an intentional missionary effort focused on nothing less than "big game". And the sending churches were willing to dedicate the effort, personnel and financial resources in order to obtain the prize.

In Central America there were efforts in Honduras to build a seminary - but in the other countries such efforts were weak and half hearted. Christian schools were begun, but without any support from a Christian university for the teachers. The result has been schools with the name "Christian" but little understanding of what a biblical, Christ centered education is. We must not disregard the fact that Central America has been a very difficult field - in Costa Rica the entire evangelical church has shrunk in the last 10 years, and this is probably true for the other countries. But the shotgun approach did not allow solid works to develop. (Please forgive the following personal examples, but they illustrate my point well) After I worked for 4 years in the troubled community of Los Cuadros, the work was closed (against my recommendation); the reason given was that there were only 3 baptized adults. (Today we continue to work in this community and there is now a small but solid congregation ministering to the needs of the people here). Later I continued to receive pressure to leave the church work we had in progress - Tepeyac - because there was a national pastor in place - never mind the other projects in process - a Christian school, a daughter church, other diaconal projects, etc. This lack of vision was disastrous, and the results in Central America have now been seen. After more than a decade of work in El Salvador, the work is all but extinguished. The churches in Honduras have divided and many are very deficient in an adequate understanding of Reformed doctrine and practice. The seminary building in Honduras has been lost. The work in Nicaragua

limps along with small, weak congregations for the most part. In Costa Rica many churches were closed never to be reopened. Lack of theological and ecclesiastical clarity, combined with a "shotgun strategy" has contributed basically to 30 years work with little solid fruit. It can hardly be said that there is a vital Reformed witness being carried on in Central America to any large degree.

Scripturally, we are called to "disciple" the nations. Jesus sent his disciples out with the purpose of not only converting people to Him, but to "teach" them all the things He had left them. In the light of Scripture, we understand this task to be nothing less than the establishment of covenant communities, which worship in churches that are well ordered, and which carry out all the tasks of a Christian community - deaconal, educational, evangelistic, etc. This is the fundamental task that our congregations at home should be very concerned for. And this task cannot be carried out by a "shotgun" approach. The task is difficult, and merits a good rifle. We must focus our efforts, focus our thoughts, focus our prayers - and then roll up our sleeves and get to work.

I believe that many local congregations still have a long ways to go in re-learning what missions are. Many of the churches would rather "delegate" missions to an agency, but the result is a forfeiture of personal interest and commitment in the mission effort. Consequently we lose touch with the mission field, and we lose touch with missions as a practice. There are many good signs today that local congregations wish to recover their mandate, and we praise God for this. But desiring something and obtaining it are still two different things. We have a lot to learn - and it will probably have to be the hard way. Missions at home will help us understand the complexities of church planting, and will drive us to our knees anew as we seek God's wisdom and strength. And as we think of our foreign mission work, I want to encourage churches to adopt the "rifle" approach. It is the

only one that will leave lasting fruit. Many local congregations receive request upon request for financial help. Undoubtedly there are many, many worthy kingdom causes. The question we have to answer is: What are we responsible for? One of the most basic functions of the church is to multiply itself. This is what deserves our foremost attention. It might make a congregation "feel good" to be supporting so many worthy causes, but such motivations are irrelevant when it comes to setting priorities. God has already set our priority: "Disciple the nations". As Reformed believers we understand this to mean the planting of viable, Christian communities - churches with trained pastors, elders and deacons, possibly Christian schools, and other forms of kingdom endeavors. God has put the sights on our task. When you shoot a shotgun, a lot of little pellets fly in many different directions. The most you can bring down are light game. I believe that we need to pick up our rifles, aim high - and expect nothing less than what God has promised to give to those who are faithful in the task of the Church.

An important facet of setting our priorities has to do with the stewardly use of our limited resources. It is well known - or should be - that some causes which our churches give to are already well funded. When we compare what \$500 will do for an organization that already has millions, or what \$500 will do for a daughter church in Nicaragua that has nothing, there is no comparison. We need to measure our giving and general mission support by the ruler of stewardship. It would be nice to fund every good cause there is. Unfortunately we can't. As we set about prioritizing our task, we must ask ourselves how we can be the best stewards of our resources. Let us prayerfully consider our priorities for church activities and budgets. Are we using the "shotgun" approach, or are we aiming with the precision of a rifle?

-slightly condensed from original article written by Rev. Bill Green, Missionary (Costa Rica), World Reformed Fellowship

THE LAW OF KINDNESS

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE THE FRONT COVER)

THE REASON THAT KINDLES THE HEART

Consider the final phrase of our text: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. Each of these phrases, I believe, has a different focus, but the same purpose: to encourage warmth toward the stranger. The first phrase, For ye were strangers in the land of Egypt, is designed to inspire in the hearer sympathy, and the compassions that come with such sympathy. Israel should well-know what its like to be in a far-off land, separated from that which they called home. They were well-familiar with the emotional and spiritual challenges of such a separation. Let them recall that as they look upon the stranger in need, and let them seek to bring to him the balm that they as a people received from Pharaoh, who was so fine a friend to Joseph and to all Jacob's family.

But consider also the second portion: I am the LORD your God. When things had gone bad in Egypt, and all the former friendliness was forgotten, when those who were once friends to

Pharaoh had been reduced to a nation of helpless slaves, when Moses wondered, at the burning bush, what word of comfort could be given to his distraught and discouraged people, our God spoke His Name: I AM THAT I AM. I am the God consistent in His character and promises. I am the God Who does not change, nor turn aside from, nor fail in His kindness. And for My people, My Name I AM is the hope of their salvation.

In our text the LORD speaks His Name again. His message is this: Be reminded of Who I am. Be reminded of what I have done for you. Be reminded of what you once were. Be reminded of what My grace is making you to be. And, when you see the lowly, the fearful, the lone-some in your midst, do unto them as I have done for you. When you had lost all, I reached out to you and gave you safety, and am still giving it to you. Show that you're my own by doing the same.

by Pastor Ludt

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