

The Other Side of the Cross

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We were still licking our wounds, having been, as an old friend would put it, crucified by Christians. So my wife and I found ourselves sitting in a pew of a beautifully ornate Lutheran church near our home. Here we were, two of the Lord's disciples; and I, especially, one who had always desired to be, and fancied myself to be, a follower of the Lord on the cutting edge of seeking His best: one of God's scouts leading the way in discovering new virgin spiritual territory, calling out to those behind me to hurry and see the wonderful land before us.

But now, we just wanted to sit in a pew, among nice people, by all means being careful to keep a low profile lest, once again, a brother might come along and decide that our heads didn't look orthodox enough, and didn't conform to the other heads, and would decide to lop them off in the Name of Christ. Pretty pathetic picture of a once beloved evangelist, prophet and pastor become a pariah on the local evangelical, charismatic scene.

I had often spoken derisively of the institutional church as a "gathering of nice people, singing nice songs, and listening to a nice man tell them how to be nicer." (Not original with me) And here I was wanting just that and not much more; just a little fellowship in the Gospel among folks who didn't take their convictions too seriously, at least who didn't take them so seriously that they might find justification in those convictions to use any means available to save me from my error and save the Christian community from any possible demonic infestation by my presence.

So we---Oh yes, I failed to mention, "we" being my wife, Jan, and I--- enjoyed the service and signed the visitors card, shook the pastor's hand on the way out and assured him that we did enjoy worshipping with them. Consistent with the friendly church that they were, the elderly, semi-retired associate pastor and his genuinely sweet wife paid us a visit within the week.

It was obvious to me that this dear elderly couple had come knocking on our door desiring to take the next step toward enfolding us in the warm embrace of this old-line, predominantly Scandinavian congregation of a mix of young, upwardly mobile families, and elderly, silver-maned couples who were the quintessence of higher middle class decency. I concluded that there must be some measure of love and Christian unity among them since they obviously thought that someone by the name, Gavazzoni, could find a place in their Scandinavian fold.

A little way into the conversation with this kindly brother-- and there was no doubt that he was a brother in Christ, I let it be known that I had a ministerial background and, picking up on the fact that he was doctrinally astute and formally trained in theology, I found myself

asking him what was the prevailing thought regarding the inspiration of the scriptures among more liberal evangelicals such as himself.

I was ready to listen to someone other than the 'fightin' fundies' who had just tarred my hide and ridden me out of institutional fellowship on a rail, apparently needing to heap humiliation upon humiliation. Having come from a background strong in the persuasion of "verbal plenary inspiration," believing that every word was God breathed, including maybe even what was written on the covers of the book itself (I'm funnin' here a little. I wasn't really that bad).

His answer was that, in his understanding, the dominant perspective regarding biblical inspiration within the broadly-defined evangelical community was that the scriptures were viewed as being normatively inspired, the benchmark by which all inspiration is measured; that it was felt not necessary to take an obstinate stand about the nature of inspiration if we could agree that in the Good Book we found a final standard for faith and practice.

With that view, it was all right to accept that there might be some human errors in the sixty six canonical books and that in spite of that possibility, God still preserved a normative standard; that whatever errors there may be, it did not effect the ability of the Bible to guide us in the important matters involved in following Christ.

I've shared all this to bring you into our life at the point where I was confronted with the word "normative" and the concept it expressed. Webster says it means "relating to or establishing norms." My experience that evening did not have to do so much with altering my view of inspiration as it did with considering the place of what is "normative" among the people of God.

Now, many years later, I find myself, having come full circle, writing for, preaching to, and generally involved once again with frontier-seeking Christians who just are not content to be "nice people, singing nice songs and listening to a nice man tell them how to be nicer." They certainly aren't sitting in well padded pews in beautiful buildings and absorbed in high liturgy.

In fact, you could say that, for the most part, they are down-home, country, plain, unvarnished folks. These have heard a trumpet sound and they are marching to a different drum beat. They are searching the scriptures with a powerful persuasion that the breath of God underneath the letter is breathing on them anew and they are convinced that they are willing to leave behind all the traditions of men in order to know the Word in freshness and vitality.

Anew, I dare to preach everything welling up from within me, at least somewhat confident that I will not be dragged "outside the camp" again, at least not any time soon. But, among these dear ones, the Lord raises the question in my intimate moments with Him, "What is the normative Word for this hour?" What is the Word which provides a fresh orientation by which we measure what is taught?

Though I think if I were quizzed regarding my understanding of biblical inerrancy I would be found holding to a high view of inspiration, still I must say, that the Word of God for

each day, as that day experiences the penetration of a fresh Word from Father's heart, a Word certainly never inconsistent with the inspired record is nevertheless a Word from God proceeding out of the Day of the Lord, moving forward, never static and always disturbing our doctrinal comfort zone and presenting another level of what is normative.

That which is normative for our day is not a Word that lies on the surface of Holy Writ. There is a new imperative thrust upon us to build upon the foundation laid by brothers Peter, Paul, John, James and the others who cheer us from within the cloud of witnesses. We must not violate what they passed on to us, but we must not be limited by it either. Theirs was a perspective that, without a quantum leap forward in hearing from God, will fail to carry us to consummation.

As St. Paul was able to unearth heretofore hidden implications in the seed of the Gospel as preached by Peter, seeing breathtaking vistas in the panorama of God's grace, so we today must hear the whisper of the Spirit as He tells us to go ahead and dare believe the fullest implications of those implications that exploded in the heart of Paul. By that I mean that Paul experienced a telescoping progression of revelation into the heart of God, yet a progression fully consistent with Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

In the best extant expositions of Paul's gospel, we still find ourselves on this side of the cross, heralding that there is the other side of the cross, the resurrection side, yet we, while affirming it, still view it from afar. We do see our Adamic selves crucified with Christ, buried with Him, risen with Him in newness of life, ascended triumphantly with Him and seated with Him in heavenly places, but somehow it's still all over there on the other side.

Standing here on the death side of the cross we look longingly across the river at the other side where resurrection rules, but we, by and large, still wait on the death side for something--- some further revelation, some greater truth, some more exquisitely refined teaching that will get us to where we say we are, but do not really believe it.

We still interpret the highest peaks of, particularly, Pauline and Johannine declarations of the good news from the vantage point of being deceived into the faith-limitations dictated by our 5-sense input, and so we bend, squeeze and pummel revelation---with clever exegesis---until we make it fit into the box of the actuality of our temporal lives, instead of realizing that the wretched actuality of our temporality has really, really been swallowed up in His eternal reality. REALLY and COMPLETELY!!!

By it's own testimony, scripture presents the truth of God incompletely, imperfectly, awaiting the coming of "*that which is perfect*" (**I Cor. 13:10**). By imperfect, I do not mean corrupt or flawed in purpose; I mean incomplete, lacking that which is ultimate and ultimately successful. We stubbornly cling to the notion that we will still find a key there that will give us full entrance into the heart of God and WE ARE WRONG IN THAT HOPE. It can go no further than declare that "...*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (**Jn. 1:14**), and that in Him we are "*the fulness of Him that filleth all in all*" (**Eph. 1:23**).

So in the light of that final Word of scripture, standing on the highest peak it offers, what do we do brethren, have another bible study? When we climb the highest peak of biblical

revelation and there find ourselves resplendent in His glory what do we do, take another course in Greek and Hebrew? When on that peak we hear the Word, "*In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily and ye are complete in Him*" (**Col. 2:9**), what shall we do?

Shall we bring to God a fresh offering of our yearning that He do a greater work in us because we are so lacking before Him? Slowly but surely, the Spirit of God has laid upon me the prohibition against my coming to him with the passion of my yearning for fulness when He has declared me full and complete in His Son. He said to me, "I don't need your passion, I have enough for both of us and I have seen the travail of my soul and I am satisfied. Away with the burnt offerings of your piety, it is as nothing when seen in the light of my burning love."

Do we seek to count all things as rubbish in order to gain Christ (**Phil. 3:8**), and then reckon our reckoning as gain, hoping with each laborious step to gain some more? We will never find in ourselves enough hunger and thirst after righteousness that will be cause for God to fill us. Paul never meant for us to stop at his testimony and insist that it is normative in a static way. It is not. It is divinely suggestive of that normalcy which refuses to add anything to what God has perfectly completed in His Son.

Without a deep digging by the Spirit into the fullest implications found in what Paul and John wrote, we are still left standing with a lack. We are still taking the finished work of Christ, which is eternal---meaning it is true now--- and projecting some of it to another day and in effect, saying it's not yet completely true. Paul DID NOT come out and say that clearly. It was left for this day. When we say, in one way or another, that it is a finished work and then say, but such and such has yet to occur, we are still, to some degree, coming from this unfinished side of the cross.

I am deeply indebted to Pastor Bill Green for his unique perspective regarding what I have shared and the powerful prophetic spirit with which he has declared that we no longer look for a day yet to come. He has renewed my determination to say it uncompromisingly. All is finished. Ah yes, the finished work of Christ; how we have taught it, preached it, prophesied it, and sung it, but much has been lip service.

I am writing to confirm the still, small quiet voice that many of you have already begun to hear telling you that He needs no contribution from you to finish a work that He has already brought to completion. I will close with that wonderful passage of **Eph. 3:10 and 11**, "*....that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose WHICH HE CARRIED OUT IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD*" (**NAS Emphasis mine**). Amen.

Stay tuned for future serious, seminal samplings.

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