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Turning Around

- by Paul L. Miller

All who find salvation in Christ, find it only after turning around. This is not a random writhing and twisting, but a repentant, decisive 180-degree turn. When we arrive in this world, it is obvious to the observant that we are all programmed to go in the wrong direction. Unless something stops our lemming-like determination to self-destruct, we will all perish.

What can we do? We must all turn away from sin and self and turn to Jesus Christ.

Some hesitate. They realize that something is wrong, but after pausing briefly, they seem always to go on again, in the same direction. Thornton observed: "True repentance consists of the heart being broken from sin. Some often 'repent,' yet never [truly] reform. They resemble a man traveling on a dangerous path who frequently stops and starts, but never turns back."

Some stop – then go on with a new resolve. They may profess faith in Jesus, and "receive Him as their Savior." But in their minds, their own insights and opinions are much better than other people's are. And so, they do not find liberating freedom from the tyranny of self. As one prison Bible teacher, whose name I don't know, said: "It is quite important that the essence of genuine repentance is addressed... because many who make a profession of faith never actually repent. They never change the motive of promoting self supremely, but rather only decide to use God as a means of promoting self supremely." That, unfortunately, happens outside prison doors too.

Think about it. Unless the new birth includes genuine sorrow for my sin, I am at best only going through some motions of being a Christian. I may copy good men. I can do some of the things they do and say some of the words they say, but if I have not experienced a deep sorrow for my pig-headed desire to have things my own way, to have the most and the best and to be highly esteemed, I am probably just going through the motions of being a Christian. In that condition, I have little "salt" or "light." Unless I bring forth fruit meet for repentance, I am walking only in the strength of my own determination.

God has something better for me. This can only be found

if I abandon the foundation of self-supremacy, genuinely resolving to proceed with life from the ultimate purpose of pleasing, serving, and honoring God supremely.

Tragically, there is a second 180-degree turn that some travelers make. Peter writes about it in 2 Peter 2:22 with two comparisons to common farm animals: those who turn again from the path of life in Christ are like a dog that eats what it just threw up – its own vomit. They are also like a pig, all washed off, that heads right back to a filthy mud hole. The second 180-degree turn completes a full 360-degree turn that gets us going again in the original direction of travel – away from God. **Beware of the second turn around!**

What are the signs, my friend? Have you really turned from you own way to His way? Or do you take comfort in the things you don't do? You don't copy the dress (and undress) of the world, you don't smoke, you don't abuse drugs, you don't drink, you don't gamble, you don't swear. That's all good, but it takes more than that.

Perhaps you find satisfaction in reciting the failures of other professing Christians. By comparison, your life looks good, at least to you. This approach also fails to meet God's requirements.

True faith is not shown in what we don't do or who we don't like. It includes a loathing for one's own filthy self-

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Pastoral Implications of Open Theism

- by Thomas K. Ascol

Part 2 of 4. Continued from the May/June 2005 issue of the FCM Informer.

Undermines Confidence in God

The Open theistic vision of God is one which robs believers of comfort and confidence. The traditional understanding of God gives full weight to those biblical declarations that describe Him as “Lord God Almighty...King of the Saints” (Rev. 15:3), Who “rules over the nations” (Ps. 22:28) and “the raging of the sea” (Ps. 89:9), and Who shall “reign forever and ever” (Exodus 15:18; cf. Psalms 93:1, 96:10, 9:1, 99:1, 146:10). Nebuchadnezzar’s inspired declaration of God’s unhindered meticulous exercise of His divine providence is no embarrassment to orthodox theism:

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, “What have you done?” (Daniel 4:35).

Open theism dismisses the view of God and providence that these verses naturally portray because it does not “fit” with the “biblical story” as they see it. Instead of recognizing God as the unrivaled Ruler of the universe, free will theists want to portray Him as the “cosmic Gambler.” This view of God is supposed to engender comfort and hope on the part of believers, but in fact it destroys the very foundation which the Bible establishes for trusting God.

Sanders is quite plain in expressing his desire to replace God as King with God as “risk taker.” God took a chance in creating the world He populated with creatures who are endowed with libertarian free wills. He did so in an effort to accomplish “the divine project,” which “involves the creation of significant others who are ontologically distinct from himself and upon whom he showers his caring love in the expectation that they will respond in love.” This risk, Sanders argues, had a “great chance of success and little possibility of failure;” in fact, “although sin was possible – given this sort of world – it simply was not plausible in view of the good environment God established and the love he bestowed.”

But any honest reading of history or Scripture demonstrates that the “divine project,” as Sanders defines

it, is a colossal failure. Jesus said that only a “few” will enter the narrow gate and walk the narrow path of loving God (Matthew 7:13-14), and missiological analyses of Christian history certainly confirm His announcement. If the sin and degradation of the world are the result of a highly implausible disruption in God’s low-risk creative venture, how can anyone be expected to trust Him for future “projects?”

Open theism reduces God to a cosmic gambler – and not a very successful one at that. He created billions of image bearers, gambling that they would choose to love and trust Him. This was to have been an “almost sure thing” because of His love and provision. But, in terms of sheer quantitative analysis, His gamble hardly paid off. From creation to the present, the Openness God has continued to take risks, only to experience repeated failure. Both the Bible and history are filled with accounts of people and “projects” that He counted on in vain.

How can such a God be trusted? If that which He has intended to do has so catastrophically and repeatedly failed to come to pass, why depend on Him to fulfill any of His promises, no matter how well-intentioned they may be? I would sooner risk my family’s finances on a lottery ticket than my soul to a gambler with such a poor track record.

Boyd does not see this problem and, in fact, argues that the Openness view of God makes Him more trustworthy than the classical view. Instead of seeing God as meticulously ruling and overruling all of the affairs of life for good and holy purposes, Boyd chooses to think of God’s exercise of providence as being like a child’s “Choose Your Own Adventure” story, in which the author creates a number of possible plots that the reader can progressively select as he or she progresses through the book. In a similar way “the God of the possible is the author of the whole story line of creation and the one who offers possible alternatives to his human and angelic creations,” thus leaving “plenty of room for individuals to exercise free will.”¹

A God who exhaustively knows the future or who ordains it is not worthy of trust, Boyd says, because that bad thing that He knows will happen to you in two days must infallibly happen, no matter what you do or do not do. He

complains,

How does believing this help you “trust God”? What are you really trusting God for? To simply know from all eternity that this terrible event is going to happen to you: What security is there in that: How does this belief help you in the least?²

Far better, Boyd contends, to have a God who knows this thing not as an inevitability but as merely one of many possibilities that might befall you in two days. In this case, God works to encourage you to create a future which avoids that bad possibility – especially if “you are a person who frequently talks and listens to God” and “have family and friends who pray for you on a consistent basis.” In such cases God “can be trusted to inspire [you] to avoid certain future possibilities he sees coming.”³

Of course, what Boyd fails to address is why anyone should be willing to trust the promptings of a God whose best intentions have been thwarted time and again throughout history. Indeed, an episode out of his own pastoral experience stands in protest against his theory. He tells the story of “Suzanne,” a young woman who was “raised in a wonderful Christian home,” and been a “passionate, godly disciple of Jesus Christ” from her youth, and had a near lifelong desire to be a missionary in Taiwan.⁴ She prayed daily for her future husband that he would share her vision for Taiwan, “remain faithful to the Lord and remain pure in heart.” She met and courted such a man for more than three years during college. After months of prayer, fasting, and consulting with their parents, pastor, and friends, everyone agreed that “this marriage was indeed God’s will.” Suzanne herself received a special confirmation of this while in prayer one day.

Shortly after her marriage, while in missionary school, Suzanne’s husband began a pattern of adultery and abuse and refused to be helped or to repent. When he filed for divorce she was left pregnant, “angry,” “emotionally destroyed and spiritually bankrupt.” In order to help her deal with the devastation of her ordeal, Boyd offered her “an alternative way of understanding the situation.” He writes, “I suggested to her that God felt as much regret over the confirmation he had given Suzanne as he did about his decision to make Saul king of Israel (I Samuel 15:11, 35; see also Genesis 6:5-6).”⁵ But why didn’t God work in Suzanne to encourage her to create a future that avoided this possibility? Surely she fits Boyd’s profile of the type of person who can trust the open God to do just that.

How can God be “trusted to inspire” His children to make certain decisions when He Himself is as fallible as we are because He does not exhaustively know the future? It is hard to see how this view does not reduce God to the level of a television meteorologist – one who because He is an expert in His field, has access to information that is not readily available to others, is in a better position than most to make educated guesses about the future. The question remains,

“Why should we trust such a God?”

It is one thing to base your picnic plans on a weatherman’s forecast. If unexpected rain ruins your day you may be disappointed and even frustrated with him and his predictions, but you recognize that he is only making an educated guess about meteorological patterns. You don’t expect him to be infallible. But we have much higher expectations of God. If He inspires us to actions that He later regrets, then He is ultimately untrustworthy.

The classical view of God will never lead to that conclusion. If, contrary to Open theism, God knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and thinks and works in ways that are much higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), then we can trust Him to work all things – including inexplicably bad things – together for our good (Romans 8:28). Remove God’s sovereign control over life and His complete knowledge of the future and the very foundation for trusting Him begins to crumble.

Undermines Faith in Christ

Open theism’s revisioning of the nature of the future and of God erodes the very heart of the Christian faith by undermining faith in Jesus Christ. No doubt this is one of the unintended implications of Openness proponents – and one that they would strongly renounce. But when God’s limited foreknowledge is applied to the incarnation and crucifixion, the credibility of Christ and the biblical witness to Christ are compromised.

In the Openness scheme Jesus did not – could not – know beforehand that He would be called to die for sinners. Sanders unashamedly reconstructs the events leading up to and surrounding Christ’s death to portray both Father and Son deciding only at the last minutes that Jesus had to die. “Although Scripture attests that the incarnation was planned from the creation of the world, this is not so with the cross. The path of the cross comes about only through God’s interaction with humans in history.” Not until the agonizing prayer in Gethsemane do “Father and Son...both come to understand that there is no other way.” Even after this new discovery comes to God, the question still hangs over Jesus, “Will this gambit work?”⁶

Jesus’ predictions of His betrayal, death, and resurrection are disregarded as general observations of future possibilities rather than, as He intended, evidencing that He is the Messiah. Boyd believes that “Scripture makes the most sense when we understand Jesus’ predictions about Judas’s betrayal” as a well-informed prediction based on good insight into Judas’s character.⁷ In Boyd’s view, God planned the basic outline of Jesus’ death. Then, when he observed Judas turning himself into a “son of perdition,” all God had to do was figure out “how he might strategically weave the wicked character” of Judas into the divine plan.⁸

But this construction is evidently still too deterministic

for Sanders. Jesus, he argues, did not really know that Judas would betray Him. Even as He told Judas, “What you do, do quickly” (John 13:27), a huge risk was involved, “since this is no guarantee which way Judas will decide.”⁹ The foretelling of Peter’s denial is treated similarly. Sanders finds it preferable to view Jesus’ prediction as an educated guess that in no way suggests He knew with certainty what would happen before it happened. None of Jesus’ prophecies concerning His death and resurrection “require exhaustive foreknowledge.” In Sanders’ mind the cross was not planned before creation, and Jesus Himself did not certainly know beforehand what events would lead up to and surround His arrest and execution.¹⁰ Things could have gone quite differently, and according to Open theism, it would not have made one bit of difference in the life and ministry of Jesus or in our own esteem of Him.

Jesus, however, viewed the matter quite differently. In the upper room discourse He specifically links His predictions to His deity and to His disciples’ belief in His deity. When washing His disciples’ feet He said, “You are not all clean” (John 13:11), in an obvious reference to Judas. He alluded to Judas again a few verses later by identifying him with an Old Testament prophecy: “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against me’” (John 13:18). Three verses later Jesus pointedly declares “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me” (v. 21). Finally He singles out Judas as the betrayer by passing a piece of bread to him (v. 26).

In the midst of these clear expressions of foreknowledge, Jesus explains to the disciples why He is telling them these things: “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am

He” (John 13:19). The “He” is supplied by translators. Literally what Jesus says is “that you may believe that I am [*ego eimi*].” He connects His foreknowledge of events, and His announcing of them, to His deity and to the disciples’ recognition of it. It obviously mattered to Jesus that He be understood as foretelling with certainty what was going to happen to Him. His foreknowledge is foundational to the disciples’ belief in His deity.

Diminish Jesus’ foreknowledge and you bring His deity into question and thereby undermine the faith of those whom He calls to trust Him. Yet, this is precisely the effect of Open theism. We are asked to keep trusting a Christ who was prone to mistakes because he could not know the future exhaustively. As John Piper has commented on this passage, Jesus’ foreknowledge “was an essential aspect of his glory as the incarnate Word, the Son of God. The denial of this foreknowledge is, I believe John would say, an assault on the deity of Christ.”¹¹

To be continued in the next issue of the FCM Informer.

Taken from Bound Only Once.

- 1 Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 43.
- 2 Ibid., 151.
- 3 Ibid., 152.
- 4 The details of this story, from which the quotes of this paragraph are taken, can be found in *ibid.*, 103-6.
- 5 Ibid., 105.
- 6 Sanders, *Risks*, 100-01.
- 7 Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 37.
- 8 Ibid., 38.
- 9 Sanders, *Risks*, 99.
- 10 Ibid., 134-36.
- 11 John Piper, “Why the Glory of God is at Stake in the ‘Foreknowledge’ Debate,” *Modern Reformation* (September/October 1999), 42.



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righteousness. Furthermore, it requires the cleansing power of Jesus’ blood applied to one’s own sins. It is sincere affection for the Savior that admits no rivals. It is a living hope of heaven through the finished work and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Unless we have truly repented, we are holding tickets that won’t take us to glory. The good news is that if someone holds an invalid ticket, he can do something about it. Even as he looks at and realizes with dismay that it isn’t made out to the destination Heaven, while there’s life, there’s still hope. He can step right up, show his counterfeit ticket and humbly ask for one written with the blood of Christ. You can too.

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We’ve made sure our children are in Sunday School, church, maybe even Christian school, hoping that these would equip them for life. But we’ve failed to model a godly life before them. We’ve demonstrated by our choices that spiritual disciplines and family togetherness take second place to material pursuits. Many have seen through our hypocrisy and want no part of our “religion.”

Fathers, we need to get on our knees and cry out to God for mercy and forgiveness. I am with you. I am far from the standard God sets up here in this portion of Scripture. But I want to press on, I want to fulfill His commands, I want His blessing on my life and on my children. Will you join me in calling upon Him?

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A Multi-Generational Faith

- by J. Mark Horst

Deuteronomy 6:1-15, presents several **STAGES** of commitment that are necessary to produce a multi-generational faith.

The first **STAGE** is **The Commitment to Personal Devotion.**

God gives the reason for the commandments, statutes, and judgments: “That you may fear the LORD.” The Hebrew word, *yawray* describes two types of fear. One, the emotion you have when you anticipate harm to yourself, and two, a very positive feeling of awe or reverence for God. Every time Biblical characters entered the presence of God, there was fear. They understood God’s holiness and their own sinfulness.

The modern church has lost the fear of God because families have lost the fear of God. Families have lost the fear of God because fathers have not modeled it. That explains the disregard we see for His commands. If we took God’s Word literally, there are certain things we’d be afraid to do, and other things we’d be afraid to leave undone.

God is jealous of our relationship and will not share any competing affection - so His command in verse five, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” Fathers, if we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and might, what is left over to love something else?

The heart is what you really are in your secret self, not what you project to others. Do you really love the Lord from the depths of your being? Next He mentions the soul; the mind, will, and emotions. Is God in your daily thoughts? Do you love the Lord with all your might? The Hebrew word means vehemently or wholly. Is it your passion to know Him intimately?

Fathers, that kind of passion for the Lord will affect our children. They’ll see our excitement for the Lord and they’ll get excited too. But, if we talk about loving the Lord yet show by our lifestyles that things are more important, our children will pick up on that. They’ll be turned off by our hypocrisy.

The second **STAGE** is **The Commitment to Paternal Instruction.**

You may wonder why I used “paternal instruction” instead of parental instruction. Biblically, the primary responsibility for instructing children lies with the father. He sets the standard. Verse 6 tells us, “these words shall be in your heart.” Verse 7 has an interesting repetition. The words “teach” and “diligently” come from the same Hebrew word,

shaw-nan. It means to sharpen, or whet. Verses 7 to 9 describe how this “sharpening” is accomplished: “you shall talk of them when you sit in your house.” God’s law is to be the topic of discussion in the home. This can happen without prior planning, but not without a commitment to center all of life around the principles of God’s Word.

“Talk of them when you walk by the way.” Discuss God’s principles in your business, in the way you relate to neighbors, in responses to other drivers on the highway. Talk of them at work, play, and worship.

“Talk about them when you lie down.” As you tuck children into bed, they often have questions. Use those questions to turn their hearts toward the Lord. “And talk about them when you rise up.” Help the family begin the new day by gathering to read the Word and pray.

“Bind them for a sign upon your hand.” It’s like tying the proverbial string around your finger. It’s a reminder to “practice the presence of God.” It can be something in their pocket or purse as a reminder like “The Cross in My Pocket.” It can be a piece of paper with a Bible verse to memorize.

Fathers, this is a full-time responsibility. This is not an option. We can’t take it or leave it. We’re accountable to God, first of all for our own personal relationship with Him, and for how we’re fulfilling His command to instruct our children in His ways.

And the Final **STAGE** is **The Commitment to Avoid Material Seduction.**

Fathers, one reason we don’t have time to spend with our children is because we’ve been seduced by the world’s value system. It’s not a new problem, because our text warns fathers of this very thing. When things go smoothly we can forget how desperately we need God. We become enamored with things. We forget the important aspects of life are relational. From there, it’s just a short step to idolatry; allowing things to become the motivation of our lives. If we accept the good gifts of God but don’t honor the One who gave them, judgment and destruction will follow.

Is the modern church successfully producing a multi-generational faith in the Lord? Generally the answer is NO. We are experiencing the judgment God promises to those who do not honor Him. Who’s to blame?- primarily the fathers. We have not taken our place of spiritual leadership in the home. We have neglected our relationship with the Lord, our spiritual disciplines, and somehow thought that we could get by.

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Not All Christian Counselors are Church Counselors

- by Lloyd Jonas

Services presenting themselves as “Christian Counseling” include a wide range of settings in which counsel is offered by Christians. Here are some common examples:

1. Institutional models: public and private school counselors, college and seminary counseling services, hospital and prison chaplains.

2. Parachurch models: public counseling offices, counselor(s) serving several churches, independent counseling centers, multi-church sponsored counseling centers.

3. Local church ministry of counseling and discipleship:

Christians may counsel in any of the above models. However, the local church, motivated by the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), will be a counseling/discipling ministry. With a good balance of both public and private ministries of God’s Word, a nouthetic pastorology under-girds its preaching and counseling. Paul commended the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:7), seeing leadership with a balanced ministry of managing church affairs and nouthetically counseling its members (1 Thessalonians 5:12). That local church was responsible for providing nouthetic counsel, encouragement, and support in shepherding the flock (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The counselor serving in any of the other categories described earlier may minister more biblically in, and under the authority of, the local church.

In a biblical sense, categories 1 and 2, above, are not church counseling. Dr. William W. Goode, writing in “Introduction to Biblical Counseling” (page 302), points out that a loving church will counsel and disciple its people consistently and faithfully:

Counseling must never be thought of as an independent ministry conducted aside from the church. Preaching, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, and counseling are all integral parts that make up effective, biblical ministry. The local church is the only organization – or better, organism – He promised to build, sustain and use.

Counseling is an essential part of the local church’s ministry as it disciples and helps believers mature in Christ’s image.

Differences appear when the counseling of Institutional and Parachurch models is contrasted with the Church Counseling Ministry. Such comparisons must be honest, recognizing that God works where He wills and as He wills. Christian men and women effectively minister God’s word in models other than God’s local church. Commenting on Mark 9:38-40, Jay E. Adams notes how Jesus rebuked John for resenting the ministry of some of God’s people who ministered in a manner different from theirs.¹ Admitting that no one Christian has a corner on the truth, Adams still cautions that tensions between Christian workers who do not always see eye-to-eye may produce additional hurtful problems in the lives of counselees seeking help. To return to comparisons, when

one studies the importance of involvement in counseling, the value of involving other members of the local body is quickly evident. Pastor Paul pleads for prayer support needed in day by day counsel of the members of his flock. As he evangelizes and disciples, his counseling is in the context of the body of local believers who add to the work force, provide money and materials, encourage him, and pray for his ministry. The local church is always incomplete without its work of “crisis discipling,” while the training of counselors constitutes an integral part of its life and ministry.

An example of total church involvement appears in the case of “Marsha.” Friends brought her to the counseling ministry of their local church during her three-hour pass from the psychiatric ward of a nearby hospital. Her concern over counseling costs were allayed by the explanation that church counselors do not charge for ministering God’s Word. Diagnosed as “bipolar” due to “chemical imbalance,” Marsha was heavily medicated. She reported years of bizarre behavior, including several nearly successful suicide attempts. Now she responded to the love of Christ, taught and exemplified by her counselors and the church members. In time she was blessed with a full rehabilitation, changing and growing in Christ by faithful obedience to Him. Marsha was dismissed by her medical professionals who gladly freed her of all medications. She functioned well in the church and in new employment for which she received training.

God has used His Word by His Spirit. His human instruments were a counseling pastor, a church deaconess, church families who drove her to and from the hospital, a church Deacons’ Fund that met some material needs, some church business people who arranged for job counseling, interviews, and eventual placement in employment, and (most importantly) a church prayer meeting and prayer chain that constantly kept Marsha’s needs before the Lord. That illustrates a nouthetic pastorology in action, a church which is a counseling ministry. The contrast with any of the other settings in which Christians may counsel is enormous! A Christian counselor in any other model simply would not have had available the majority of those Christian resources which are naturally present in church counseling.

Recognizing the place of the church in God’s plan for counseling/discipling His people, we still may ask who are the people who will carry out such a ministry. Biblically, one can quickly identify three major groups within the church’s membership who must counsel.

First, church members at large, each and all of them, are included in the teaching of Galatians 6:1-5. There we see any person who has received the Holy Spirit in salvation is instructed to counsel any sinning members with the goal of restoring them. A classic example of this is found in Paul’s commendation of the members of the local church in Rome in

which he praised them for being competent to counsel (Romans 15:14). Also important is the requirement for leaders in the church, elders and deacons, to be diligent in their counseling ministry. Scripture shows how the church members grow in their love and appreciation of their leaders because of two ways they minister: they manage the church's affairs and they nouthetically counsel the membership (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14). Most important, thirdly, is the pastor's involvement and leadership in the way his church functions as a counseling ministry. It is basic to his ministry of equipping the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12-13). None of this is attained where the Christian counselor is not a church counselor.

To see how these responsibilities are met in church counseling, consider who is doing what in a biblically balanced church. If you are the pastor, you will be devoting part of your work week to the counseling room. Your co-counselors

will be training as they minister beside you. Pastor Paul counseled his flock and, as he and Timothy established new churches, they trained other leaders to carry some of the counseling burden. As the pastor today uses various means to train his leaders, more and more of them will supplement his ministry. Lay people trained in biblical counseling can carry the bulk of the counseling work. Training church women to counsel other women is also important. In most churches today, the majority of those requesting counsel will be women. All together, they enable the local church to fulfill the Great Commission for the glory of God!

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1 Jay E. Adams. *The Christian Counselor's Commentary: The Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (Timeless Texts), p. 284.

God's Strange Work

- by Lowell Foster

While many seem oblivious to the downward course our nation continues to follow, others fear a storm of God's wrath and judgment is imminent. Some time ago I read Isaiah's warning of God's "Strange Work." As I read, I sensed an insistent urge to write. The many times I stopped and the number of copies thrown in the trash I cannot tell. But the Lord continued to "prompt" as He has done on many occasions in fifty years of preparation and preaching. Should any be awakened by this writing to pray for their family, for revival in our nation and the world, to God be all glory. (Isaiah 42:8).

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah is probably best known for his repeated encouragement that redemption is near through the advent of God's Son, born of a virgin. The word picture he draws of the might and gentleness of Christ's reign cheers the heart as one reads Isaiah chapter forty and other portions of his writings. But Isaiah also balances encouragement with warning as we see in the following verse, a verse so easily overlooked.

For the Lord shall raise up as in Mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, HIS STRANGE WORK; and bring to pass his act, HIS STRANGE ACT. (Isaiah 28:21).

The "strange work" Isaiah speaks of is God's judgment. He cites two examples. First when the Philistines try to crush David and his government in its infancy. On "Mount Perazim," David heard "a going in the mulberry trees," and he smote the Philistines from Geba to Gazer. (II Samuel 5:22-25).

The second event transpired in the "valley of Gibeon," where God cast great stones from heaven and more Amorites died from hailstones than Israel slew with the sword. "Then spake Joshua...Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon...So the sun stood still...and hasted not to go down about a whole day." (Joshua 10:6-13).

These are examples of judgment AGAINST Israel's enemies. But the "STRANGE WORK" in the text is God's

judgment rendered on Judah and its "scornful leaders" (Isaiah 28:14). Halley's Bible Handbook says "It is judgment of His own people by the sword of foreigners" (page 266). Matthew Henry agrees saying, "It is a work that He [God] is not used to."

God's STRANGE WORK is seen again in 586 B.C. when Jerusalem was burned because of its idolatry and moral rottenness. All but a remnant were carried by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylonian captivity.

Centuries pass and Jesus, doubtless weeping, cried "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets...how often would I have gathered thy children...and YE WOULD NOT! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." (Matthew 23:37-38).

In the year 70 A.D. the armies of Rome surrounded and conquered Jerusalem. Then, more STRANGE WORK. "The Jews were crucified in such numbers that the Romans wanted more room for crosses. Multitudes in the city died of famine until the valleys outside were filled with them. Titus, the Roman General, groaned and threw up his hands in horror and called God to witness that he was not responsible. Altogether, 1,100,000 Jews died." (Dake Bible, page 84, NT).

"And they, [the Jews Jesus warned], shall fall by the sword...be led away captive...and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles UNTIL the TIMES OF THE GENTILES BE FULFILLED." (Luke 21:24).

Paul asks, "Hath God cast away his people?" (In light of their UNFAITHFULNESS and PERPETUAL BACKSLIDING?) "God forbid." (Romans 11:1). The Apostle continues: "they are beloved for the Fathers' [PATRIARCHS'] sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Romans 11:28-29). Regarding verse 29, Adam Clarke writes: "The calling – the invitation with which He has favored them (Israel) He will never revoke."

Not so! insist some who teach REPLACEMENT

THEOLOGY, a premise or hypothesis that the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. Well, if the church has replaced Israel and the house of David, then who "shall look upon me [Jesus] whom they have pierced?" (Zechariah 2:10).

Paul said: "Blindness IN PART is happened to Israel UNTIL the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25).

Daniel wrote of a time when Michael "shall stand up, and there shall be a time of trouble." (Daniel 12:1). He also told, in the same chapter, of KNOWLEDGE INCREASING; of the power of the holy people being SCATTERED. And twice he speaks of "THE TIME OF THE END." Is that TIME near?

When Evangelist Vance Havner was questioned about the end of the age, he replied, "only God knows." "Scripture teaches," he added, "the age will end with APATHY in the true church, APOSTASY in the professing church, and ANARCHY in the world." Is the "beheading" of people in our day ANARCHY? Is John suggesting, in Revelation 20:4, beheading will be the anti-christ's method of execution?

Nearly twenty years ago, David Wilkerson told of being awakened with the words, "The Sodomites are in the house." "I remembered," he said, "the story of Lot and the visiting angels. How the Sodomites surrounded the house trying to get in and attack the visitors. The angels blinded them and they did not get in." (See Genesis 19:1-38). "But," Wilkerson wrote, "the Sodomites are in now, in our homes. And we are the blinded ones – blinded by television, by the media, and by the spirit of the age. Admit it or not, you and your home are under a demonic Sodomite attack." (Mideast Madness, page 30).

Do we remember that Jesus said "As it was in the days of Lot"? (Luke 17:28). Lot is often portrayed in a negative context because of his choice to move to Sodom and the awful wickedness of that Old Testament city. Peter, in the New Testament, paints Lot in a different way by portraying him in a positive light. "And God delivered JUST Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation [conduct] of the wicked: (For that RIGHTEOUS man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing vexed his RIGHTEOUS soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)." (II Peter 2:7-8).

How could Peter say this? First, because he "was moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21). Second, because God Himself called Lot a "JUST" and "RIGHTEOUS" man.

Peter then paints his best picture. In eight words he spans the distance from Sodom – to this present moment when he writes: "THE LORD KNOWETH HOW TO DELIVER THE GODLY..." (II Peter 2:9). That, my friend, is a promise as up to date as the calendar on the wall, as the ticking of the clock by your bedside. It softens the foreboding of judgment by God's STRANGE WORK which threatens us in our day!

A final question: Am I "godly"? Surrounded by cesspools of wickedness closely resembling the days of Sodom and Gomorrah; AM I A GODLY PERSON? ARE YOU?

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doeth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." (Micah 6:8).

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FCM Conference

at Calvary Chapel in Sturgis, MI
"How Big is God?"
August 12-14, 2005

Topics include:

"When Man is Big and God is Small"
Clyde Byler, Plain City, OH -
Friday, August 12 at 7:30 p.m.

"Who is In Control: God or Man?"
Paul Emerson, Harrisonburg, VA -
Saturday, August 13 at 7:30 p.m.

"Why do Good People Suffer?" Terrill
Yoder, New Paris, IN -
Sunday, August 14 at 9:30 a.m.

**"What Does God Know and When Does
He Know It?"** Todd Neuschwander,
Goshen, IN - Sunday, August 14 at
6:00 p.m.