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Why Living like Jesus is Not Enough

By Michael E. Wittmer, Ph. D

Every generation must integrate the Christian faith with its own particular moment in history. The early church did it with Plato, the medieval church used Aristotle, the Reformers relied on the Renaissance, the modern church incorporated the Enlightenment, and now the emerging church is seeking to assimilate its faith into our new postmodern culture.

Communicate without Compromise

This is a necessary, though dangerous, job. The same culture that provides avenues to communicate the Gospel may also, if we are not careful, compromise its most important parts. Consider the modern church. Surrounded by a scientific culture that valued proof and hard facts, modern conservatives packaged the Gospel into “The Four Spiritual Laws” and defended it with Evidence That Demands a Verdict, the apologetic classic by Josh McDowell. While these endeavors led many to Christ, emerging Christians wonder whether such intellectual approaches emphasize knowing the right facts rather than doing the right acts.

These emerging Christians are a trans-denominational collection of mostly Western, white 20- and 30- somethings, who like many in our postmodern culture, seek authenticity in their relationships, a sense of transcendence in their worship, and remedies for the big social and economic problems of our day, such as racism, sexism, slavery, poverty, and pollution. All of this is a large improvement over the individualized Gospel with which many modern conservative Christians grew up. We all should applaud and follow their lead.

Nevertheless, a significant segment within the emerging church goes beyond this call for authentic Christian living and permits our postmodern culture to influence its beliefs. The leaders of this group are found in Emergent Village, a loose-knit organization that arose from friendships formed during Leadership Network meetings in the late 1990s. This group is increasingly called “Emergent” in order to distinguish it from the more conservative “emerging” church. Its most influential authors include Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Spencer Burke, Peter Rollins, and John Caputo (the

latter may not call himself “Emergent,” but he is a friend and contributor to the movement). While these writers may not agree on every point, the following thread is emerging from their writings:

Everybody Wins

Conservative Christians believe that we are sinners who are saved by Christ’s death and resurrection on our behalf. Anyone who repents and believes in Jesus will live forever, while anyone who does not will go to hell. Many Emergent leaders grew up with this conservative Gospel and are now reacting against it.

Perhaps influenced in part by our culture’s value of inclusion – where every child is above average and receives a trophy just for participating – several Emergent authors say that we must not exclude others from the family of God simply because they believe differently. Rather than separate people into in- and out- groups, we should recognize that we are God’s children, accepted by Him just as we are.

Some Emergents, such as Pagitt and Burke, say outright that we are born without original sin. Since we are already good, there is no need for Jesus to bear our sins on the cross. Many Emergents endorse any and all theories of the atonement except the view that Jesus suffered on our behalf. They

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suggest that this sounds like “divine child abuse,” for if God is love, why does He need a sacrifice in order to forgive?

Because we are already accepted by God at birth, several Emergent leaders say there is nothing we must do to be saved. They suggest that salvation is an “opt-out” rather than “opt-in” plan. Everyone belongs to the family of God, though we retain the freedom to opt out if we want. However, since they can scarcely imagine anyone staring the God of grace in the face and opting for hell, these Emergents seem to favor universalism – everyone is saved in the end.

Because right beliefs have no bearing on one’s salvation, many Emergents claim that the only thing that matters is good behavior. Rather than call people to believe in Jesus, they urge others to follow or live “in the way of Jesus,” which cashes out as radically inclusive love. Those who embrace the outsider belong to God’s kingdom, regardless of what they believe.

What Do You Know?

How do Emergents square such statements with Scripture? Some get around it by asserting that Scripture is not a revelation from God. Rollins says that God’s transcendence makes revelation impossible, so that “when it comes to God, we have nothing to say to others, and we must not be ashamed of saying it.” Others, such as Caputo, argue that we only think Scripture is God’s revelation. Since other religions disagree, we should humbly concede that the Bible is only one perspective among many and that it could be wrong.

Even those Emergents who use the Bible insist that our interpretations often go astray. While this is a helpful reminder, some Emergents use the possibility that our understanding may be wrong in order to offer new and unusual interpretations of key biblical texts. Consider Jesus’ warning that most people are on the broad road that leads to destruction and only a few are on the narrow road that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). McLaren suggests that Jesus was not speaking of heaven and hell here but merely advising people that there are many ways to get in trouble with Rome and only a few ways to live at peace with it. When asked about this novel reading, McLaren conceded that he could be wrong but at least his view was possible. I suppose, but don’t we need a better reason to overturn 2,000 years of exegesis than just “anything is possible”?

This penchant for new interpretations is most noticeable in the area of homosexuality. The Church has always taught that Scripture, particularly Romans 1:26-27 and I Corinthians 6:9, opposes homosexual behavior. But many Emergents assert that homosexual activity in Paul’s day differed from ours. They say he observed adult men taking advantage of young boys, so when he denounced homosexuality he was actually opposing pedophilia. According to these Emergents, we don’t know what Paul would think of gay unions among consenting adults; besides, isn’t it more important that homosexuals are happy than that they obey some ancient rule? So Caputo, who concedes that Scripture opposes all homosexual activity, also says the Bible is wrong.

Last Thoughts

The emerging church is a big, postmodern tent that, though it includes many with nontraditional views, also makes room for conservative Christians who want to dialogue about the shape of their faith in the 21st century. A Christian may be emerging and entirely orthodox.

This is less likely with Emergent. Though some orthodox Christians may remain Emergent for relational reasons, the movement itself is trending toward a new kind of liberalism that discards many foundational beliefs of the Church: original sin, substitution, the reliability of revelation, and the need to believe anything about Christ in order to be saved. Once these dominoes fall, what is left of the Christian faith?

Emergents rightly emphasize our need to follow Christ and serve others, but they often forget that we can only live for Jesus when we are rooted in the doctrines of orthodox Christianity. Genuine Christians never stop serving because they never stop loving, and they never stop believing.

May we all live a faith that pursues biblical truth, godly love, and spiritual integrity.

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An open mind has interest in all facets of biblical truth – discipleship, witnessing, doctrine, nurture, evangelism, and prophecy. A specialist sees almost everything coming down to one facet in almost every situation. An open mind does not know it all, or have rigid presuppositions about every subject. An open mind relates new information to general facts and conclusions that were settled by serious and diligent Bible study. An open mind doesn’t “fall for” every new idea that comes along. It has a frame of reference capable of making reasonable judgments.

An open heart can show love to those who choose to differ. An open heart can refuse wrong concepts without expressing anger, contempt, or making threats. An open heart is steady without being consumed by fear, and is patient without being neutral, or just giving up in spineless surrender.

Having an open mind and an open heart are qualities suited to maximizing social skills, regardless of leadership responsibilities. Church leaders, in particular, should be aware of special interests they verbalize too frequently to be effective.

Surgeons, I am told, are specialists who do the same operation over and over. One family doctor told me being a surgeon is relatively easy, but being a family doctor is, in many ways, harder work. They must consider many possible problems and solutions. The Bottom Line is that effective servants in the church must, in many ways, be more like family doctors than surgeons.

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There Are No Single Issues

By Aaron Lapp, Jr.

Every human issue somehow connects to another one. Every circumstance somehow relates to some other happening. Every picture has a “before and after” that is part of the whole.

Politicians sometimes assert that elections turn on a single issue. Economists postulate that upturns and downturns pivot on one sector of the economy.

Church people claim one issue makes or breaks a congregation. Individuals sometimes claim that one event or condition caused them to do wrong.

Days are separated from nights, but they are connected. Absence separates friends, but they are still friends. Events may be separated by time and yet be related.

Having conceded all that, there are no single issues that by themselves adequately explain our human dilemma. The social and emotional dynamics of our lives have multiple inputs and outputs. The flow of our lives is a continuous stream of ebb and flow. No single event can be totally divorced from the ongoing progress of our lives.

To be sure, there are single issues that define a person. And there are sometimes single issues that cause people to go over the proverbial cliff. A single issue may loom so large it blots out its cause and blinds us to the consequential effect. But, in general, it is safe to assert that no issue comes of itself, nor stands or falls by itself. The Bible even says, “No man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself” (Romans 14:7).

Why is it, then, that certain people seem to get “hung up” on a single issue? The “hung up” part is more revealing than the issue itself. Sometimes when such people finally get past one issue, they get hung up on something else. It is an age-old phenomenon. Some people foist themselves into every congregational crisis. They seem drawn like a magnet to “hot button” issues. And occasionally, if there is no crisis brewing, they try to create one.

Vibrant, genuine Christians are more known by what they are for than by what they are against.

The special, single-interest groups of our day frequently relate society’s ills to single error. One group faults the environment. Another group blames the war in Iraq. Another group blames the fact that the wrong political party is in power. Another group is sure that society is disintegrating because of mediocre education. Some folks fault Social Security and the low minimum wage law. Some blame the legislators and the courts. And somewhere it comes down to indicting people who don’t vote. Each of these groups holds their cause as being of paramount importance, often to the exclusion of other ills that

beset our western society. They become self-made “specialists” in their own spheres of a narrow interest, supposing that correcting this one error would set the world straight.

In the church similar things happen but with a different list. Several are against church “hierarchy.” Others call church administration a conspiracy of control and label it Phariseism. Some are sure that the church is weak because of tolerating worldly fads and contemporary dress, while others feel the church is anemic because people aren’t interested in their favorite mission project. Some feel our powerlessness is due to material pursuits. Each sees any failure in the church as being related to the single issue of the personal focus. Thus, somehow, failure is someone else’s fault.

I repeat, there are no single issues. Spiritual lack in an individual church member (or the church, collectively) is caused by a number of related issues.

Some say that what the world needs is more forgiveness. Some say our greatest need is faith. Others say our lack really is heartfelt obedience. Still others say the world needs a godly fear. Some are sure more tolerance would fix our world’s ills. Others say the real solution to our world’s sad state of affairs is to show more love.

Which one is right? What is most important? None of the above by itself is fully adequate to make right the world’s wrongs. But all of them taken together could open the way to begin constructive change for the better.

On further thought, maybe we should first begin to implement a broader application of primary issues such as forgiveness, faith, obedience, meekness and love in the church. And that is only a short list. All of God’s truth is important. Correcting imbalances in the church must precede setting straight a narrow-minded world that seems bent on traveling on the wide road to destruction.

Church members who champion a single issue are usually eventually not taken seriously. Their credibility becomes a liability to their narrow focus. That also explains, in part, why single-issue people tend not to be chosen for leadership roles.

Any worthy leader needs a broad frame of reference. His interests and goals are shaped by an informed, broad range of subjects and issues. Being a specialist passes in the professional world for social stature and professionalism. But effective and profitable leadership in the church requires an open mind and an open heart given to broad-based application of all of God’s truth.

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Training Who?

By Ernie Longenecker

Talking about raising children is a little like grabbing a tiger by the tail...you're not sure where you will end up and in how many pieces. Dangerous though it is, it seems too many families don't understand some basic principles so it needs to be discussed.

Children need you, their parents. They need your time, effort, money, and love. They need your discipline, teaching, and your example. While they don't need perfection, they need to know you're trying.

Training children is not a lot more complicated than training myself. Sure, they need all these things, but the toughest thing to give up for them is what I, the parent, want. I want to stay in bed when baby cries, I want his tantrums to just go away rather than exert effort to curb them. I want him to be good so he doesn't embarrass or inconvenience me.

A happy well-adjusted child is not an accident. He is the result of much time, effort, discipline, and love on the part of parents.

How often have I neglected my duty as Daddy because I didn't want to leave my comfortable chair and deal with my child's misbehavior? It's so easy to overlook things we dare not overlook, and lose battles we dare not (for the sake of the child) lose, just for the sake of convenience.

Recently I witnessed a mother in church walk up the aisle and get her misbehaving son. Was that fun for her? No indeed, but it was what the boy needed. My applause goes to the parent who will make a spectacle of himself to correct his child who needs it.

Something that does almost incalculable harm to a child is to repeatedly, consistently insulate him from the results of his actions. The parents that repeatedly take the side of their child, not willing to admit that their child could be bad, are making him a terror to teachers, employers, landlords, preachers and policemen, not to mention his future spouse. Ultimately, those parents' pride may well cost their child his soul since he doesn't see his need of salvation. His attitude is, "It's someone else's fault." Proverbs 13:24 says, "He that spareth the rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Love means doing for the child what needs to be done, even if I don't want to.

Children have gone from being an asset without which the family farm couldn't function, to a liability that makes what seems inordinate demands on the two-income household. Therefore, these children are shuffled off into daycare, then to preschool, and finally (what a relief) into real school. Summer vacation is a time of considerable perplexity....what do we do with them?

Is it different in your house? Do you see your children as an asset or a liability? To what career heights could you mothers climb if you were not mothers? How many "toys" could you fathers have if you were not fathers? This is the attitude and dilemma of modern society. Is it different in your home? I sincerely hope so.

We say "that doesn't affect us" or "that's not the way it is in our circles" but is it true? The ways of general society have more influence on us than we think.

Modern psychology has made much of the problems purported to be attributable to low self-esteem. Most of us have read the books and swallowed the theory. A famous writer once said, "The things I don't know don't bother me so much as the things I know that aren't so." This is one of them.

A healthy recognition of my own short-comings is a prerequisite to improvement. If in the wisdom of pop psychology I'm told I'm very good when I'm not, I don't have much incentive to improve. So, rather than me changing my behavior, society needs to change its expectations. We don't do our children a favor when we teach this line by precept or example.

We parents need to make great effort to cherish, love, and teach our children when they're little. The influence when they're small pays enormous dividends when they're big.

May God bless our efforts to be faithful parents.

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THANK YOU!

Training Children

Things You Must *Not* Do

By William Booth

1. You must not set the things, at any time or in any fashion, that are earthly and temporal above the things that are heavenly and eternal. If you do, you cannot complain if your children grow up to prefer the world and its charms to following Christ in a life of holiness and self-denial. Do not do, or allow to be done, in your home or anywhere else things that will produce the impression on your children's minds that making money, or pleasing ungodly people, or winning the praise of men, or gratifying themselves, or anything else of the kind, is or can ever be of greater moment than pleasing God, keeping a good conscience and saving souls. I say, do not do this without, at least, expecting that the children will soon learn to act on the same principle and after the same fashion, and that, perhaps, in a fuller degree.

2. Do not act as though you believe that, if your children are left to themselves, they will naturally develop into the godly, holy, self-sacrificing characters you desire, and then be disappointed if they turn out after the fashion of little devils, or grow up to be very much like big ones, instead of becoming saints of God. That is to say, do not look for figs on thistles, do not expect a clean thing to come out of an unclean. If your children do not actually bring evil natures into the world with them, they certainly become possessed of selfish and naughty hearts very soon after their arrival there. Anyone who observes children can see that by the time they have come to know right from wrong, they are, more or less, the slaves of their appetites; and sometimes, sad to say, the slaves of their passions also; so that, unless the grace of God changes their hearts, they will certainly grow up, if not openly vicious, yet proud, worldly and selfish, like the godless crowds around them. It will be the highest wisdom in you to recognize that fact and to face it with courage and faith, not only for their sakes, but for your own. Remember the terrible condemnation which God pronounced against Eli, the high priest, in this matter – 'I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.'

3. Do not expect that children who possess any natural force of character, any backbone of resolution and energy and who, therefore, are specially worth saving, will be likely to submit their wills first to their parents and then to God, without a great deal of patient and persevering effort on your part.

4. Do not expect your children to be such simpletons as not to see beneath the cloak of a sham religion, especially if they find it in their own home. Do not delude yourself with the idea that, having discovered its unreality, they will not heartily despise it. Neither be surprised, when they see such hypocrisy, if they should make it an excuse for utterly neglecting, if not positively disbelieving in religion altogether.

5. Do not pervert the love of the beautiful, which will, doubtless, exist in the hearts of some of your children in the destructive voice of vanity. You will do this most effectively by creating within them a taste for fine clothes, fringing the hair and wearing jewelry and other adornments. Do not fill them with the childish conceit that they have prettier faces, or figures, or the like, than others about them, and then wonder that they should, in after years, be drawn into the world by the attractions of its fashions and flattery and empty show.

6. Do not fill your children's minds up with the idea of their supposed superiority, mental or otherwise, over their friends, school-fellows and others around them, and then be surprised that they should go out into life the unhappy slaves of an ambition to excel everybody else, which will alone be sufficient to destroy all their real peace of mind.

7. Do not allow your boys to entertain the notion, so far as you can prevent their doing so, that they are of more importance or of greater value in themselves than their sisters; and then be surprised that they should grow up to look down upon and domineer over women generally, and then, so far as they have the opportunity, to treat their own mother or their wives as if they belonged to an inferior race. The idea of that superiority is the seed which is firmly planted in many a boy's heart and which will, in after life, produce the spirit of real tyranny.

8. Do not coddle your children, or humor, or spoil them, making them whiny or spoony creatures, and then be surprised that unless they are everlastingly being waited upon and amused or allowed to have their own way, they should become a nuisance to themselves and a torment to everybody about them.

9. Do not foster the natural selfishness of your children. We have seen that in their infancy children are ordinarily carried away by the desire for self-gratification. Your first

business with them is to lead them in the opposite direction, to make them forget and deny themselves and delight in serving those about them.

10. Do not instill, or allow anybody else to instill, into the hearts of your girls, the idea that marriage is the chief end of life. If you do, you must not be surprised if they get engaged to the first empty-headed, useless fool they come across.

11. Parents should not argue, or discuss with each other, matters that concern the conduct or character of their children in their presence, and then be surprised if they take sides with the father or mother, as the case may be, whose notions are the most favorable to their selfishness.

12. Do not make favorites amongst your children, and then be surprised that those who are not the chosen ones should grow up with a sense of injustice rankling in their breasts,

which will be very likely to make them forget all the love you have borne them and all the sacrifices you have made on their behalf.

13. Do not, merely for the sake of peace, or any other reason whatever, let your children have their own way, or give them what they want, when doing so is opposed to your own judgment of what is best for them. For if you do, you cannot be surprised when they argue with you, contradict you to your face, and presently come to ridicule your wishes and opinions behind your back; and, at last, to your shame and their own undoing, to set you at naught altogether. Never forget that of your Saviour Himself it is written, that in His childhood He ‘was subject unto them’ – His parents.

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Satan’s Plan for the Church

By David Ravenhill

I started thinking the other day about what I would do if I were the devil. (After reading this some of you may think I am!) The only opposition the devil has to fulfilling his great commission is the Church. If the Church can be rendered powerless then Satan’s kingdom will flourish unhindered and unopposed. If I were the devil I would be carefully evaluating every possible way to accomplish this goal.

My first course of action would be to foster the belief that sin carries no consequences in the life of the believer. The devil knows that a sinning Church is a powerless Church. If he can convince Christians that they can sin with impunity, he knows their carnal desires will do the rest. And isn’t this exactly what he told Eve in the Garden? His message that fateful day, “You shall not surely die,” has remained his mantra ever since. Some denominations even go as far as having this as one of their major tenets of faith: If you have said the sinner’s prayer, it doesn’t matter how you live, you can never be ‘removed from the garden.’

One biblical picture of God’s people losing their power is what happened when the Israelites attacked the city of Ai. After destroying the impregnable fortress of Jericho, this puny city should not have been a problem. But there was something the leaders didn’t know: there was sin in the camp. Although the Lord had forbidden the Jewish people from keeping any of the spoils of the city for themselves, a man named Achan had grabbed a few items and hidden them in his tent. When the Israelites were soundly defeated at Ai, Joshua fell on his face before the Lord, pleading to know what had gone wrong. “Israel has sinned; therefore they cannot stand before their enemies,” came the Lord’s reply. It is just as true today as it was then: sin renders the

Church powerless against the kingdom of darkness.

The second false concept I would introduce to God’s people would be that you get all that God has for you at conversion. If the devil can convince Christians that there is no further work of grace, no need to press on to spiritual maturity, no need for consecration, no empowering for service, then they will forever be seeking to accomplish things in their own strength. Without the promised presence of the Holy Spirit, God’s people will achieve little – if any – measurable results. Almost without exception every man or woman who ever accomplished anything of significance for God testified to some powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Jude described teachers of these false concepts as, “... the ones who cause division, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.” (Jude 1:19) He went on to tell his readers to pray “in the Holy Spirit.” The devil will constantly do his utmost to promote false teachers who are “devoid of the Spirit” and to oppose those who understand the power of “praying in the Holy Spirit.” He is happy for there to be a great deal of religious activity – so long as none of it is done under the unction of the Holy Ghost.

Yes, if I were the devil I wouldn’t change my plans in the slightest. After all, why change what has worked so well for so long?

The antidote to Satan’s plan is obvious: we need to pursue holiness with a passion and seek daily to be filled by the Holy Spirit. The devil cannot stand against godly believers who are operating in the power of the Holy Ghost.

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Spirit-Led Exposition

By John Meador

“How can the Spirit lead me when I preach expositionally?”

That’s a question all true shepherds should want the answer to. At the heart of pastoring, there is the need to be both relevant and biblical. The need to be balanced in biblical wisdom and to-the-point application for the corporate life of the church is key.

A pastor need not feel that he must always (and only) be preaching an entire book to his congregation. We don’t have that mandate in the Scriptures, but we do have the mandate to “preach the Word,” which points to text-driven preaching, instead of merely preaching with the Word. In other words, I should focus on preaching texts, and those texts can come either consecutively in a book, or selectively as I sense God leading.

There will always be those who respond by saying that God’s Spirit already inspired the Bible books, their words, and their order, and we should stay exclusively with that approach, but few of those same people begin in Genesis with the mind to preach through to Revelation. They’d be right that God’s Spirit did give us the words and order, but they’d be wrong to insist that all biblical preaching takes that particular order each time. None of the preaching examples we have in the New Testament takes that approach to the Old Testament. There is a pattern of using God’s Word as a sword to deal with all aspects of congregational and community life.

Recently, having been led to focus on the role of God’s Holy Spirit, I began to read all the passages that deal with the Spirit of God, and found them woven throughout the Bible. What a beautiful picture of God’s tapestry of involvement in our lives, when we see Him at work and especially when we don’t! Preaching that, however, was a different matter in my expositional way of thinking. How do I approach this all-important matter in an expositional manner?

I sought the counsel of a few well-known expositors who showed me how they undertook the same task in their years of ministry. They, to a man, preached selected passages found throughout Scripture, and treated each text as an expositional message in a specific way. Instead of the

text being a part of the entire book of the Bible, the text became part of the whole of Scripture- a healthy thing, indeed. And, as those texts were expounded, we were able to see the Spirit’s ongoing involvement in our lives – beginning to end.

I’m not sure there is a more controversial issue today across the family of God than the work and role of the Holy Spirit. Those who do not emphasize the work of the Spirit in their teaching and ministry may well be yearning for the power and conviction that Jesus promised would be present with the Holy Spirit. Congregations may have many incorrect ideas about the Holy Spirit, particularly in light of so much teaching that is not biblical. Others may not realize all we have in Christ – and that God is literally with us and in us through the indwelling Spirit. We must get the truth to them!

The fact that there is no one single book that speaks primarily and comprehensively about the Holy Spirit does not mean that an expositional preacher is at a loss in dealing with this all-important subject. No, our principal task is to “preach the Word” and to let our preaching be text-centered. It is about letting the God-breathed words have a life of their own by honoring the text, the context, and the actual meanings of the words. This is the work of the Spirit – and conviction comes as we focus on Scripture.

I want to make sure that I present a well-balanced “diet” of God’s Word to the people I’ve been called to pastor. Year in and year out, for me, that means that I am preaching a book (perhaps two) of the Bible every year in the main weekend services. At the same time, that year may also be a time when God is leading me to focus on certain aspects of Scripture that could be seen primarily in a particular text – or chapter. These are all expositional – they are all text-driven – and they are all profitable to build and equip those we’ve been called to minister to. These we can do with confidence!

Let the Spirit lead you!

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Mandates for Christian Education

On a Biblical Education

By Frederic Clarke Putnam

Once, a wise king, wanting to ensure the stability of his kingdom after his death by encouraging the kind of leadership he thought a nation needs to survive, compiled “instructions” that were to be used to train young men being prepared for leadership. There was a further reason for his concern about his nation’s future: he and his people lived under and served a great and powerful God who had promised unimaginable blessing if they kept his laws, but horrific curses if they failed. And – as had been made clear in his father’s day – leaders were the “thermostat” of the nation’s fidelity – as go the leaders, so goes the nation.

This is at least part of the reason for his directions about how to behave in the king’s presence (Pr. 25:6-7). Normal people (like most of us) do not eat with rulers (23:1-3), nor do people bribe us or entice us to rebel, but Solomon’s original readers – destined to become ministers, governors, officials, tax-gatherers, overseers, and military commanders – would have had direct access to the king. So he needed to encourage good leadership. Knowing this, Solomon composed the document that we know as Proverbs 1-24, and perhaps chapters 30-31 (ch. 25-29 were added about two centuries after his death from materials he had compiled; Pro. 25:1). Thus, Proverbs 1-9 appeals to young men’s desire for wealth and power and warns them against illicit sex and dangerous companions (1:10-19). Solomon compiles his “textbook” not merely as a guide to personal morality but in order to motivate young men (the word translated “youth” refers primarily to social status) to seek and to do what was right, to become political, military, and judicial leaders whose lives and reputations would encourage those in their charge to seek what was right, and just, and good.

The ubiquitous covenantal demand for justice for every part of society – including those who could not defend themselves, such as the widow, the fatherless, and the alien – explains Solomon’s insistence on justice (“a king gives stability to his land by justice, but one who takes bribes overthrows it;” Pr. 29:4), his warnings against bribes, and even such common sense proverbs as “a faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes lies” (Pr. 14:5). Without mutual trust, a group descends into anarchy. Solomon calls dishonest business practices an “abomination to

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YHWH” (Pr. 11:1; 20:10, 23) and condemned the stupidity of adultery (Pr. 4-5, 7) and the wickedness of official corruption. All of these – and all other forms of dishonesty – undermine trust. Proverbs certainly addresses personal morality, but mainly because it affects the well-being of the nation. It implies that we do not live unto ourselves, but rather that we live in relationship to those around us. Our decisions, choices, and behavior have far-reaching consequences; therefore, we need to live in the realization that we bear some responsibility for the well-being of those with whom we live and among whom we minister.

Solomon would be pleased.

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Financial Need...

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