

THE WAY OF THE CROSS LEADS HOME

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It's not easy moving through the world when you're terrified of electricity. "Donna," 45, a writer, knows that better than most. Get her in the vicinity of an appliance or a light switch or a thunderstorm, and she is overcome by a terror so blinding she can think of nothing but fleeing. That, of course, is not always possible, so over time, Donna has come up with other answers. When she opens the refrigerator door, rubber-soled shoes are a must. If a light bulb blows, she will tolerate the dark until someone else changes it for her. Clothes shopping is done only when necessary, lest static on garments send her running from the store. And swimming at night is absolutely out of the question, lest underwater lights electrocute her. When there's a possibility that lightning may strike, she simply shuts off everything in her house and sits alone in a darkened room until the danger passes. Donna is afflicted with electro-phobia.

Now if you think she's nuts and plagued with an irrational fear, then consider this. Every human being on the face of this earth is afflicted with a suppressed terror of meeting God. We are informed that at the coming of the Crucified One "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:15, 16).

Now what explains such odd human behavior when confronted with a Lamb? One day I visited a farm in which there were goats and rabbits, chickens and turkeys. The largest animals on the farm were the sheep. When the owner invited me to come into the pen with the sheep, they were the most docile and benign of all the critters on the farm.

The only explanation for our human fear of God is our repressed, intense, animosity toward God. Our first parents exhibited this fear after the Fall when God paid them a visit. They cringed in fear. Sin had so riddled them with guilt that they could not bear to be in the presence of a holy, loving God. They preferred death themselves or the elimination of God rather than coexistence with Him. They were extremely uncomfortable around God.

On a float-trip down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, our guide pointed out a secluded cabin in the remote wilderness where a recluse lived. We were warned not to approach the property because he would come out with guns ablazing. A hermit is anti-social and can't stand being around people. That's the natural born state of humans with God.

In order for humans to survive with such psychological trauma, we have adapted to our environment by suppressing the consciousness of God's existence deep down inside. We have been deeply damaged with regard to our picture of God. We see the

combination of the horrors of evil all around us as manifestations of God's handiwork. We blame Him for everything bad that happens.

Is it any wonder that just thinking about a return visit of God to this earth gives us an advent attack? We are ill prepared for the second coming of Jesus. And there are gospel preachers who unwittingly play to those human fears of His return visit.

I don't believe we can herald to the world a message of "good news" that will say, "Be ye reconciled to God!" while we represent Christ at His second coming as mowing down His helpless enemies with a heavenly machine gun. This is what the picture of Him as emitting a "lethal radiation" implies. I heard one prominent public evangelist tell his audience God will personally "devour the wicked."

As ministers, we have most certainly failed to convey to the world a true revelation of God's character. "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love." *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415. To present Christ in His second coming as having lost His mercy and His love is misrepresentation due to sad misunderstanding. The evangelist I refer to was ever so sincere. And he is no exception. If we will look at our normal, run-of-the-mill contemporary literature on the advent, this is the idea that gets across repeatedly.

I believe that what is involved is our presentation of the very gospel itself. Is it "good news"? Does it minister reconciliation? Not if it arouses fear and dread and plays upon an egocentric motivation.

Did the Lord harden Pharaoh's heart or did he harden it himself? The Bible actually says both. How you understand the problem depends entirely on the concept you have of the character of God. And this, I believe, is the key to our understanding Bible passages regarding the advent. If one has the legalistic, harsh, ungospel concept of God's character, he will quote and emphasize Scripture that seems on the surface to support an angry God view. He will believe that God personally devours the wicked, that God destroys His enemies Himself personally, even vindictively with a righteous glee. He will even quote the words of the enemies of God to support this view.

For example, he will quote "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:17 and say, "See there! Christ is mad when He comes the second time!" He won't notice that these are the words of Christ's enemies, whose basic sin has all their lives been that they have cherished this distorted view of His character. He will quote, "and He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God" Revelation 19:13, and imply that this "blood" is that of the lost, when in reality it is His own blood shed upon the cross. This is clear from the poignant disclosure of His sacrificial agony in verse 12, "His eyes were as a flame of fire" because His character is love. Love is the mightiest power in the universe: but when rejected, it brings the most fearful judgment possible. His name, which no one knows but Him comes from the experience, He went through on the cross, which no one, not even the angels in heaven, can fully appreciate. The idea is that the Lamb's eyes are

swollen with tears knowing the incomparable loss that the wicked are experiencing and He must give them up to their choice of rejecting Him their Saviour.

How will the lost feel when at last they actually see the face of Him whom they have persistently resisted and rejected? For those who have urged and supported the mark of the beast, just to look in His eyes will itself be torment “with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 14:9-11). The original language expresses the idea of their beholding in a flash the awful reality of their having rejected the One who suffered hell in order to save them. They can’t stand it. The horror of their final realization of guilt tortures every cell of their souls.

The Lord never intended that the sight of His loving face should do that to anyone. While it is true that “our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), it is only to sin that the revelation of His love is so destructive. Thus, if a human being persistently clings to any sin as a vine clings to a tree, the physical sight of Him who is love incarnate must also be instant destruction.

“No,” says the legalist, “this is the blood of His enemies—now He’s going to get even with them.” They think they find proof for this in verse 15, the “sharp sword” that “goeth out of His mouth.” But figurative language must be explained by literal: in John 12:47, 48, Jesus makes clear that the “sharp sword” “out of His mouth” is His truth which the wicked already know well enough. There is nothing figurative about John 12:47, 28—“the word that I have spoken (not will speak), the same shall judge him in the last day.” According to *Great Controversy*, when Christ comes He doesn’t have a word to say in condemnation of the wicked. He has already spoken, throughout their lives, in tones of tender entreaty, and well they know and remember this. He plainly says the “word” “shall judge him.” A single word of truth from His lips slays them—but that has nothing to do with “lethal radiation.”

This is vital. To preach the love of God truly is not namby-pamby sentimentalism. It is hard reality. And it motivates truly all who choose to “believe.” And terribly hardens all who disbelieve.

Who slams the door in the face of the wicked when probation closes? Does God do it of His own initiative? I don’t see God pushing the door shut at all; it looks to me like He has been propping it open for many decades. I see the wicked closing that door themselves. “If a man withdraws himself from light and evidence, and yields to Satan’s seducing arts, he himself draws the curtain of unbelief about him, so that light cannot be distinguished from darkness.” Here is a clear statement: “God destroys no man. Every man who is destroyed will destroy himself.” *Our High Calling*, p. 26. How desperately our youth need to get a clear picture of the character of God!

Sometimes it’s represented that the initiative in salvation or damnation as being backwards from what it is. The idea is that if you are saved, it will be due to your own initiative—you have done the right thing to make your salvation possible; and if you are lost, it will be due to God’s initiative. He pulls the rope. He is the hangman.

There is confusion—sometimes it is one way, sometimes it is another. But the basic idea that gets across to the student, that God has already done His part and is standing back with His arms folded, waiting for us to do our part. His attitude is, “Take it or leave it,” and by implication the sinner gets the idea that He could hardly care less if one does leave it. If God gets mad at the last, how does the sinner know He isn’t mad right now beneath the surface? There is no atonement, no reconciliation, in such a concept. Who would want to be in heart-union with such a God?

Could this be one big reason why we are having so little evangelistic success, especially among thinking people? The winsome truths of the New Testament gospel enunciated are nearly lost!

An example of the confusion in the minds of good Christian people regarding God’s character, is found in Romans 2:5, 8, and 4:15 and 5:9. All Paul said in each instance was “wrath,” not specifying whose. “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Evangelists must extrapolate and insert the word “God’s” wrath in each instance. This is due to a misconception of God’s character.

Paul understood the gospel. He also understood clearly the process of unconscious self-destruction that the wicked experience. He saw that their “orge” or wrath is against themselves, turned within, self-hatred. This is produced by “the law”. All such self-centered motivation produces despair and resentment by an eclipse of the sunlight of God’s true love. Rejoice, says Paul; we are delivered from this “wrath” through the gospel of Christ, “being now justified by His blood.” It is clear! Christ doesn’t have to stand between a bloodthirsty, angry God and a terrified sinner, and shield him from a divine monster!

We seek to simply free the gospel from these confusing ideas that hinder its effectiveness, so that the beautiful “message of mercy (may) be given to the world . . . a revelation of His character of love.” This will be the “last rays of merciful light.” COL 415.

I believe in the reality of the “wrath of God.” But where does it come in? As I see it in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, God is not wrathful because men have rebelled against Him nor even because they crucified His Son. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” is His attitude toward that sin of mankind. His wrath will blaze forth when at the last the wicked attempt to exterminate God’s people! This is a willful, conscious re-crucifixion of Christ. The purpose of the second coming of Christ is that of a rescue operation, not a punishment expedition. The destruction of the wicked when they see His face is incidental.

Jesus’ coming will shine brighter than the sun at noon. We are told not to look directly at the sun. It will do irreparable harm to our eyes. How is it that natural born sinners can look at Jesus’ coming and not go blind while the wicked cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them and hide them from the Lamb?

The answer can only be that the way of the cross lead home. Those who welcome Jesus' coming will have learned the principle of the cross. They are continually being crucified with Christ. Self-centeredness no longer reigns. The love of Christ and His cross dominate their lives. So there is no self left which is the source of fear. It is the 144,000 who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth that will look at His coming directly with their eyes and have no self or dross to be burned away. They will look at the Lamb's eyes through the prism of the cross.