

Are Our Congregations Ready?

Notes for Discussion at the Reformed Congregational Fellowship

Theme: *Of the Church and Communion of Saints*

April 11, 2019

Thesis: Pastors and church officers need to prepare their congregations for increased suffering because of misdirected and demonically driven dominion and the innate and world-wide growing hostility to Jesus Christ, the true gospel and faithful Christians. Such has been true in differing degrees throughout the history of our fallen race. It was consummately displayed in the malevolence poured out against the incarnate Son of God. It grew extensively after Pentecost and is intensifying today, if aided by nothing else, the shrinking world through instant communication, the overwhelming majority of which appeals to earthly-minded, idolatrous individuals and governments.

Biblical Background

We need to be reminded and hold clearly before us the origin and early fruit of the putrid soil from which all the world's present maladies have come.

In the beginning Adam and Eve were to serve - often translated "cultivate" - and guard the garden of Eden.¹ They were given dominion over the fish, birds and land animals *only*.

After their rebellion, human service and dominion became distorted from God's original mandate. This was evident immediately in word and deed: they found fault with God and one another. They tried to cover their shame by their own acts. In his infinite mercy, God made promises to them of a deliverer.

From the early pages of Scripture the righteous were persecuted and suffered at the hands of the wicked, including satanic inspired and distorted dominion. Adam and Eve's firstborn was a fratricide, simply because his brother was righteous and he was not². This was an immediate bud-to-fruit example of the ultimate physical abuse of dominion: wrongful taking of human life and a stark invasion of what is God's sole prerogative to effect or direct.

(We may observe here in passing that worse than murderers³ are those who by their false teaching are further insuring that lost souls will be condemned to the everlasting "second death".⁴)

God sent the world-wide flood because of accelerated and universal sin, especially of violence by humans against humans.⁵

After the flood there was no change in human nature⁶ and thus the distortion of dominion was certain to continue.

¹ Genesis 2:15

² 1 John 3:12

³ Matthew 10:28. *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

⁴ The Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:14

⁵ Genesis 6:11

⁶ Genesis 6:5 & 8:21

The righteous suffered at the hands of the wicked among the descendants of the patriarchs. During the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, idolatrous Egypt and the nations of Palestine were ripening for judgment.⁷ Centuries later God brought destruction in plagues upon the Egyptians and their gods (judgment) when he liberated his enslaved people at the exodus⁸ (redemption) and enabled their conquest of Canaan (rest/salvation). Earlier Esau had wanted to kill Jacob. Joseph's brothers' envy ripened into murderous hatred and kidnapping; then they sold him into slavery. Israel's 400 year servitude came from a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph nor remember his salvation of Egypt.

In the land of Canaan, Israel had a constant flow of external enemies: Amalekites, offspring of Esau, kings east of the Jordan, all the nations of Canaan, especially the Philistines. Internal enemies abounded: Saul against David, Absalom against David; divided kingdom with ceaseless wars between north and south. Then from outside came Syria, Assyria and Babylon, waging war in succession. Idolatry in varying degrees was practiced in Israel which led to complete degradation, child sacrifice and God's judgements. At last Samaria and later Jerusalem and the temple were leveled and the survivors exiled – the northern tribes, gone forever, the southern, for 70 years.

A grand if brief contrast is the post-exilic return of that precious band of Jews to rebuild Jerusalem. Though they were surrounded by opposing peoples, God revived those in Jerusalem to complete the temple by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. Reforms came by Ezra as faithful priest and later through Nehemiah as their governor. This occurred despite local hostility and in the process fulfilled God's promise to bring his Messiah to Jerusalem, the city of David.

The books of Esther and Daniel display, respectively, accommodation to pagan culture vs. faithful dissent from all idolatrous pressures and demands. The former provides the historic background for the non-canonical festival called Purim ("Dice"), while dreams and visions in the latter provided Israel with a roadmap regarding tyrannous future nations, which simply meant more distorted dominion, violence and slaughter of man against man.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a glorious man with golden head, silver chest, bronze middle and thighs, iron legs and iron mixed with clay feet and toes. After Daniel told him that he was the head of gold, Nebuchadnezzar built a statue of gold⁹ and demanded universal obeisance to it. Torture and death were promised to the non-compliant, and so Daniel's three Hebrew friends were put into the fiery furnace when they refused to bow to the pagan king's idol.

By contrast in *his* dreams Daniel saw these nations as monstrous, composite beasts with incongruent parts. Coming one after another, they devoured flesh¹⁰ until the books were opened and one like the Son of man appeared. It was he who was to receive dominion over all such beasts, i.e. earthly secular kingdoms. This man would establish an everlasting kingdom. Daniel chapter 8 gives further detail about the second and third kingdoms as they would more directly affect Israel during the 400 years of silence until John the Baptist appeared. The grotesque and violent behavior of these beasts was prophetic of the true nature of the most powerful civilizations of the ancient world.

⁷ Genesis 15:16

⁸ Exodus 12:12

⁹ Daniel 3:1

¹⁰ Chapter 7

After the exile Israel had no king, no prophet and were internally governed by quarreling priestly families with widely differing adherence to God's law. This was hardly as Malachi had directed.¹¹ The intertestamental literature was written – apocryphal and pseudepigraphal - as well as commentaries by the Jews on the law and prophets, as to how they understood the Scriptures. The grand achievement was the translation by the Jews of the Hebrew Bible into Greek.¹² Meanwhile Israel continued under the sway of one idolatrous nation or another. At times the persecutions scattered many from their homeland to other cities, like Alexandria. Others continued to live where their forebears had been taken into exile.

The Jewish leaders in Judea varied from accommodation to being the dominating culture and fighting to retain and later regain some degree of adherence to the Law of Moses. Over time five principal factions developed: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots and Herodians. And so it was in the “fullness of time”¹³ that our Lord was conceived, born, lived and died, during the dominion of the fourth beast¹⁴ and within the window of time set by Daniel.¹⁵

New Testament Period

The hostility and ill treatment of man against man culminated when Rome concurred with the Jews' condemnation of the incarnate Creator and Son of God and crucified him. This was without doubt the greatest abuse of human power and misdirected bloody dominion in the history of the world. But in the wisdom of God it was done according to biblical promise to accomplish salvation.

Our Lord described the continuance of cruelty and misapplied dominion and set the expectations of his disciples accordingly. They were to be his witnesses by word and deed. In the Old Covenant period, God had raised up individuals to represent him and to carry out his law in word and deed: priests, prophets, judges, kings and governors. As noted above, many of these suffered at the hands of their own countrymen. So likewise, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry in speaking to his disciples, he warned of persecution to come from those who would refuse to hear – whether from the house of Israel or from among the Gentiles.¹⁶

Further, our Lord pronounced a blessing on all so persecuted.¹⁷ It is ever the tendency of believers to be frail, weak in faith, man-fearing, insufficiently knowledgeable of Scripture and thus forgetful that their purpose is to live holy and priestly lives of ceaseless praise and prayer¹⁸. This lack is perhaps most pervasively evident when Christians shrink from verbal witness to Christ and the true gospel, fearing abuse. Some take refuge in mastering doctrine and straining out gnats. Others when gathered together treat the faith as a ceaseless festival. There are others who suffer persecution from fellow Christians when they do not witness in the “right way” or when an unbeliever is thought to have been wrongly offended. This despite the biblical testimony that unbelievers will always be offended when confronted with the true God, unless and until they are convicted and regenerated by

¹¹ See the whole book of Malachi but especially 4:4.

¹² Known as the Septuagint (LXX).

¹³ Galatians 4:4

¹⁴ Rome

¹⁵ 9:24-27

¹⁶ E.g. Matthew 10:16-39; 16:24-26; 24:6-14

¹⁷ E.g. Matthew 5:10-11

¹⁸ Exodus 19:6; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; Hebrews 13:15

the Holy Spirit. Thus many Christians remain silent, held by these and other fears.

The apostles had a unique place in the history of redemption, and reportedly all but John died a bloody death. One cannot read the NT and remain ignorant of the suffering of the first Jews and Gentiles who believed the gospel and spread it. For strength and consolation, they gathered together, prayed and struggled to throw off their former religious or pagan practices. All the while they were loved, exhorted, corrected and embraced as a nursing mother or loving father by the New Testament authors as evidenced by their letters.

Under persecution, people from the Judean churches were scattered, but they retained their urgency to speak the word everywhere.¹⁹ And though initially they spoke to Jews only, they at least had such a love for Christ and the gospel, such urgency about the lost condition of their kinsmen after the flesh²⁰ as to go to the Jew first and evangelize them. Paul recounts some of the negative results among the gentiles: *For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last.*²¹

Cultural Development

In the goodness and patience of God,²² the recorded history of the world includes many cultural developments, discoveries and advancements in every field of human endeavor, further illustrating the continued presence of the image of God in human beings and, arguably, a furtherance of biblical dominion. However, none of these works in themselves can please God unless sanctified by repentance and faith in Christ.

A proof of this is that despite every kind of cultural advance, the history of mankind, as noted above, has continued to be a litany of violence of man against man, of wars, slaughter, mayhem, blatant disregard for human life, careless that each person bears the image of his/her Creator.

Are Paul's words to the Thessalonian believers cited above relevant to the United States and to faithful churches? Is there not a universal and urgent need among professing Christians to revive verbal witness to unbelievers that is certain to be largely rejected as sin is confronted, unless and until we plead for and the Holy Spirit is poured out from on high in saving power?²³

Of course, the message is not to "Jews" only, that is, to those like us, family or those who are deemed attractive – in our culture or in whatever ways this affinity might be conceived. Such an impetus to testify indiscriminately will not happen without teaching from dinner table, classroom and pulpit and by inculcating urgent, ceaseless prayer for opportunities to speak. Resources are available.²⁴ But do we really agree with our Lord that the night is coming when no man can work –

¹⁹ Acts 11:19

²⁰ Cf. Rom.9:1-3

²¹ 1Thessalonians 2:14-16

²² Psalm 119:68; Romans 2:4

²³ Isaiah 32:15

²⁴ E.g. Will Metzger's *Tell the Truth; Honest Evangelism* by Rico Tice

and eternity, either by our death or at Christ's return? Are we truly people of the day and watchful?²⁵ Will we put aside childish things, distractions and frivolous pursuits that we too often defend but that waste our precious time, money and energy? Do we not have cause to greatly fear shame at Christ's coming? Will we turn and apply the resources we have more earnestly and biblically to advance Christ's kingdom?

What Is Ahead?

If so, we will need to prepare for the inevitable head-on clash with enemies in high places. Their net is wide-spread, tightening and effective, as has long been true in places where satanic strongholds have reigned. We need only mention Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Ancestor worship, Romanism, Orthodoxy, endless cults and resurgent paganism. As our Lord's Revelation to John made clear, it is no longer one nation whose monstrous appetite is devouring the whole earth. Rather it is the seemingly ubiquitous presence, power and persuasion of Satan (the dragon) who uses political, economic, medical, social, educational, military and entertainment power (the beast) and false religions, including apostate Christianity (the false prophet) to deceive millions who love not God but self and sin, and thus are the susceptible, unwitting subjects of every whim of these mighty foes.

Examples²⁶ - Creation [Footnote links are valuable resources on these themes.]

A massive impediment to biblical evangelism and arguably the dragon's greatest lie in the history of the world since the violent triumph of Islam is evolution – whether theistic or atheistic. I refer to the denial of God's creation by his word as recorded history in Genesis 1 and 2, accomplished in six consecutive days and judged by him as "very good."²⁷ What has been substituted is a plural-headed hydra based on deep time (millions of years), a cosmic explosion, biological life from chemicals²⁸ or aliens, a local and not global flood and eons of death before the entrance of true humans and their sin, to which alone Scripture attributes the origin of death. A detailed history has been written of how evolution insidiously worked its way into even the reformed camp's assumptions in the 19th century under the guise of "progress of doctrine."²⁹ Confusion and intimidation about the first two chapters of Genesis have come to neutralize if not nullify the starting point of biblical evangelism with persons ignorant of Scripture, namely God as creator and sovereign, as lawgiver and therefore as judge based upon the unchanging standard of his righteousness.³⁰ And so there is no seeming end to the extent of the evangelical compromise with and accommodation to evolution's naturalistic presuppositions.

The following quote is an example of the evolutionary thinking. It comes from a book reviewed in the December 2017 *Journal of Creation*, 31(3), 38-42. The book is entitled *Sapiens: a brief history of human kind*. Published in 2014, the author is an Israeli historian, Yuval Noah Harari. Its cover pronounces it a NY Times best seller. Harari is dedicated to evolutionary thinking and all its defenses. He writes that there is no meaning or purpose in life except what people invent for

²⁵ E.g. Matthew 25:13; 26:38, 40-41

²⁶ See the April 2019 Banner of Truth magazine for articles on these themes.

²⁷ 1:31

²⁸ Abiogenesis, as it is known.

²⁹ See Progress and Providence: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845-1929, by Bradley Gundlach, Eerdmans, 2013. See review by James Renihan: <http://www.rbap.net/review-of-process-and-providence-the-evolution-question-at-princeton-1845-1929-bradley-reviewed-by-james-m-renihan/>

³⁰ See Acts 14:15-17 and 17:23-31; Romans 1:18-23.

themselves. Not content with that, biblical definitions are what in particular come in for attack. Here is a paragraph from the review:

Christian theology is blamed by the author for getting the concepts of 'natural' and 'unnatural' wrong, as "The theological meaning of 'natural' is 'in accordance with the intentions of the God who created nature'" (p. 165). In Harari's ideology God does not exist; there is only evolution without purpose (p. 165), and so to him "from a biological perspective, nothing is unnatural. Whatever is possible is by definition also natural" (p. 164). He later states: "There is little sense, then, in arguing that the natural function of women is to give birth, or that homosexuality is unnatural. Most of the laws, norms, rights and obligations that define manhood and womanhood reflect human imagination more than biological reality" (p. 166). Earlier in the book the author calls "the biblical creation story, the Dreamtime myths of Australian Aborigines, and the nationalist myths of modern states" common myths that we weave (p. 27). In discussing myths Harari states: "There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no money, no human rights, no laws and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings" (p. 31).

The fallout - literally falling out of the church and Christian faith - is enormous from not providing children and young people in evangelical churches the means to defend themselves against such lies. There are answers in experimental science where evidence can be tested, falsified or verified. This is quite different from "historical" science where one's presuppositions determine the outcome: either the Bible is true and God created as revealed there or it was all by non-supernatural means. To accomplish the latter "scientific" miraculous interventions in some form are needed to account for the irreducible complexity evident in all living things. Great faith in non-verifiable but posited events is demanded by evolution's mythologizers.

So to the irreparable loss of a proper foundation, evangelism today largely skips creation and goes straight to Jesus - often a carefully characterized Jesus who is accommodated to perceived needs except, so often, why in fact he came, namely to achieve and then provide sinners with a God-accepted righteousness, to atone for all the sins of all his people in his suffering and death at Golgotha and then to make believers holy by the gift of God's Spirit and the other means of grace. Quaking before "god" science and the establishment that is rooted in naturalism and enlightenment assumptions, where only what is "reasonable" will be tolerated, even serious Christians avoid the one tool that God has promised to bless: his word and its - not others' - methods of evangelism and their starting point. This is a massive victory for the dragon.

As a remedy, we need and must return to a trenchant devotion to the doctrine of creation and the God who created the heavens and the earth. This has in the past, does now and ever shall be effective by the blessing of Christ's Spirit. God's word and it alone can accomplish God's purpose and not return useless to us or to him. Of course there will be objections, even and perhaps especially within compromising churches, theologies, ministers and people. But whom are we serving? To whom will we give account on the last day? It is precisely the Lord Jesus, for whom and through whom all things were created and by whom they all hold together (Col.1:16-17). Our congregations need restored confidence in *all* the word of God as plainly written and understood for centuries as the proper introduction to the living God, of whom the incipient pagan United States is increasingly ignorant.

Example – sexual sin and more

Abortion in every form needs to be opposed but also where the problem most often starts: with sexual sin. Scripture is clear that sin is present in any untoward thinking, speaking and acting toward anyone of either sex (and there are only two without change and we must insist on this). On this matter as on all others, God's righteousness is simple and straightforward; sin complicates and the longer sin persists, the more complications and entanglements it brings.

Pedophilia is perhaps the most dangerous sexual deviation today in the church. The history of what happened in the Sovereign Grace denomination³¹ and the recent court case involving a high profile Reformed Baptist pastor³² point up, among many other sinister signs, the importance of having staff who have contact with children vetted by background checks or at least with never fewer than two persons with young children at all times. Pedophilia is something that the NY Times characterizes as illness that untreated results in crimes. However, consider following:

*Federal law in France now has no legal age of consent, meaning adults who have sex with children of any age will not be prosecuted for rape if the child victim is unable to prove "violence, threat, duress, or surprise." The draft bill against sexual and gender-based violence, known as the Schiappa law, was signed into law by the French Parliament on 3 August [2018], sparking outrage in France as parents and children's rights groups accuse Emmanuel Macron's government of betraying the nation's children.*³³

As such things may come to be protected by US laws, we must be strong in opposing them at every opportunity. Doing this will mean paying a price that the unholy trio of dragon, beast and false prophet will seek to exact – against the saints in the world and, alas! all too often, in the church.

It is a highly regrettable response when national evangelical organizations and schools, rather than first exposing the wickedness of increased legislation to redefine marriage, sexuality and other biblically positioned realities, make public statements intended to protect themselves by essentially acceding to such changes under the banner of civil rights and in the case of the colleges, in order to continue to receive federal funds for their students' college tuitions.³⁴

And here we come to the nub of my theme: are we willing to suffer and perhaps seriously to maintain biblical faithfulness with integrity?

Present Persecution

We are undoubtedly aware of what the faithful house churches in China have been experiencing under now president-for-life Xi Jinping and his return to Mao Zedong's xenophobic and egoistic rule: the suppression of biblical Christianity, if not as yet manifesting the extent of Mao's cruelty. Only

³¹ <https://relevantmagazine.com/current/al-mohler-is-apologizing-for-supporting-former-sovereign-grace-leader-c-j-mahaney/>

³² See various posts on this site: <https://thouarttheman.org/>

³³ <https://thetruthrevolution.net/france-passes-pedophile-friendly-law-saying-children-can-consent-to-sex-with-adults/>

³⁴ See these articles:

https://world.wng.org/2018/12/boards_back_sogi_compromise

<http://www.uspastorcouncil.org/news-events/current-issues.html/article/2019/01/04/evangelical-groups-hop-on-lgbtq-bandwagon>

those groups/churches willing to be registered and thereby to compromise can meet openly. For example here is a March 12, 2019 posting from the Early Rain Covenant Church Facebook page:³⁵

At the National People's Congress on Monday, "Pastor" Xu Xiaohong, head of the government-sanctioned Three-Self Church (the only officially recognized church in China), expressed the Three-Self Church's commitment to the government's plan to "Sinicize" Christianity, that is to rid Christianity of all Western influences and to ensure that all aspects of Christian doctrine and worship conform to the government's socialist ideology. In his remarks, he also denounced churches like Early Rain Covenant Church who meet in "private meeting places" and "black sheep" like Pastor Wang Yi who are "subverting state security." Pastor Wang Yi and his wife are being held in [separate] secret locations on charges of "inciting to subvert state power."

Tim Mountfort is an ordained PCA pastor and head of its Mission to the World work in Chengdu, China where Pastor Wang Yi labored. Tim knows Pastor Yi well. Some months ago Tim was forced to leave China and his Chinese wife, Huilan, are back in the states. They have reported on the fruitful work of pastor Yi and his church. For specifics on what the police and military are doing, I strongly recommend visiting this page to hear Pastor Yi's sermons and the details of what is happening to the members of this faithful, reformed church. Pastor Yi was fully aware of what was coming. He is a lawyer and had been moving up the ranks of the Communist Party when he was converted. Pastor Yi directly addressed the errors of the state in trying to coerce churches, including mandated use of the NT rewritten to conform to party directives. Pastor Yi warned that faithful Christians should be ready for the inevitable persecution, not to shun it and should realize this as inevitable when the dragon and his cohorts are permitted to rage.

Perceptive writers are showing how western society is leaping back into paganism, especially via eastern religions and their overt devotion to behavior that is very present in our day: infanticide (read: abortion); pantheistic or panentheistic understanding of reality (no transcendent God) and accompanying sexual license (sexual revolution, including a redefinition of the word "gender," along with numerous other words, such as gay, diversity, etc.).

Is God above and transcendent or within? And are we all part of whatever turns out or is chosen to be the deity by any one or group of persons? When Rome began to deify its Caesars, it would no longer tolerate living at peace with those who said there was one greater than Caesar, another king, Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, reigning, coming back to judge the living and dead.³⁶

May God give us the courage to stand with our boldly contesting and confessing contemporaries around the world who are suffering confiscation of goods, separation from family, being imprisoned, tortured and put to death for their faithfulness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Are our congregations ready – are we ready, if and when the unholy trio are permitted such powers in our country?

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/prayforearlyrain/>

³⁶ See Peter Jones' article on the direction that the 1960s-spawned revolution is taking us and how we need to prepare and be prepared: <https://truthxchange.com/2019/04/the-end-of-the-family/>