

Blogs of Division vs. Restorative Christian Living

By Ward Fenley

Many are aware that I used to frequent the numerous forums and blogs where the truths of grace and the kingdom of God are defended and often defended well. It was usually the case, however, that I would take upon me the spirit of abrasiveness and depend upon my tone rather than simply presenting truth to communicate my own persuasion. I can also say that it was when the antagonists would attack and throw the stones of "anathema" that I usually got the most incensed, as if this were surprising. Anymore it's not surprising. But I believe when this happens, we are called to move on rather than banter and partake in stone throwing. When we partake in the stone throwing, we then show our dependency on ourselves rather than on truth. When we take it upon ourselves to twist a man's arm publicly to show our intellectual superiority, the very sovereign God and sovereign truth we proclaim is actually eclipsed. This isn't to say that blogging and disputing shouldn't happen. I believe it is an effective ministry. But when it deviates into schism, that's probably the time to quit. The accusations only hurt and bring out vengeance in the majority of us. Yes, it is true that many who attend those sites may believe the accusations after they have left, because they are gullible and do not test all things. I was recently questioned by an observer about some accusations made toward me at an "anti-preterist" site. Those accusations are:

"He teaches that Christians are in heaven now;"

"...that Christians are no longer under the moral law;"

"...and that the "creation" account in Genesis is purely allegorical, and that the term "heavens and earth" signifies the "conscience" of the individual."

I should first tell you that I rarely go to those sites anymore because doing so doesn't encourage me in my walk. They are usually filled with broad, swathing statements, and ad hominem remarks. Furthermore, they are without any due diligence to exegesis or even attempting to see the big biblical picture--namely, that the Bible is about God entering into covenant with man, man breaking that covenant, man being separated from God's presence, then God making a new and better covenant, thus restoring man back into His presence through the cross. Hence, the two books are properly named, Old and New Testaments. Granted, these are somewhat man-made titles, but even the Bible seems to make a distinction:

2 Corinthians 3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remains the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:6 Who also has made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

What about miracles today and "heaven now?"

First, the issue of miracles was also raised, which I will briefly address:

I used to be an adamant cessationist. However, I refuse to put God in a box I cannot exegetically defend. If God chooses to implement a miracle or two here or there, who am I to say He can't? Yes, First Corinthians says prophecy, tongues, and knowledge would cease or vanish away. But we still have to remember God's overruling sovereignty and providence. Are miracles still happening today? Perhaps, but certainly not the way they were in the first century. But the kingdom of God is about relationship with God, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, not about meat and drink (Rom. 14:17). Miracles (pertaining to "meat and drink," for example, the Wedding at Cana, and feeding of the 5000) were simply designed to show that the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sin: "So that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sin, arise, take up your bed and walk" (Matthew 9:6). There was a purpose in those miracles and that purpose was to affirm the power of Christ to forgive sin. Forgiveness of sin is the equivalent of heaven, for if God has forgiven *our* sin and given us *His* righteousness, then we are now the dwelling place of God:

For righteousness and truth are the foundation of His throne (Psalm 89:14).

Christians are the heavens declaring the glory of God (Psalm 19). We have become His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). He considers us holy and blameless (Colossians 1:22). He no longer regards His people as "sinners" but as "saints," or "holy ones." Do we blow it? Absolutely, which makes the heavenly places in which we dwell (which heavenly places are a clean conscience according to the two most explicit chapters in the Bible, Hebrews 9 and 10--those two chapters equate heaven with a perfected conscience) so full of grace and truth. But the religious world of self-righteousness has taught us that if I have a lustful thought or a murderous thought that my conscience is defiled. No. Quite the contrary. It shows that God's grace has subdued my iniquity and that the blood of the cross is triumphant enough that I have an advocate with the Father. I may *feel* defiled and wonder if God has left me. But truth prevails over feelings. God's promises prevail over our feelings of despair and insufficiency:

2 Corinthians 3:4,5 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: (5) Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

And I think that there is a purpose in deviant thoughts, not to pursue those thoughts but to understand that in those thoughts there is a constant working of the power of God to cause us to know that the power of eternal life and forgiveness is of God and not of us. For what is our nature? To trust in our obedience rather than the power of God. Our God loves us so much that He will not allow us to be lifted up with pride to settle back into self-righteousness. I have written an [article](#) which focuses on the purpose of "night" and wayward thoughts:

What about the moral law?

The accusation that I don't believe we are under a moral law is false. I just don't define "moral" as the 613 commandments written and engraved on stone. I define the moral law as the Royal Law of Christ. It is moral in that it dictates forgiveness toward others. That is, Paul and Christ knew God's people would fall and knew they

would need comfort when they did. Indeed, we all fall daily, and when a Christian comes to us simply trying to abide by James, "Confess your faults one to another" (James 5:16, and we respond with gossip and harsh, damning, and accusatory words, we have violated the law of Christ. But when we abide by the command, "Comfort My people...cry to her that her warfare is accomplished and that her iniquity is pardoned" (Isaiah 40:1,2), we are bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ:

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest you also be tempted. (2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 5:14 For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The New Testament is about restoration. Charismatics think of spirituality in these terms: Speaking in tongues, not being sick, the second blessing, being able to pray healing upon someone. Moralists think of spirituality in these terms: go to church, don't commit adultery, don't covet, and don't steal. Paul says, "You which are spiritual restore the one who is overtaken in a fault" (Galatians 6:1). He doesn't tell us how severe or how minor the fault is. He simply says that when we restore someone when they have fallen, we fulfill the law of Christ. I am more concerned about Paul's view of spirituality than the Charismatic's or Moralists' (whether Arminian, Calvinist, Catholic, or Orthodox) view of spirituality. We are called to restore our brothers and sisters who have fallen, and if not, then we have no right to think of ourselves as spiritual. "You which are spiritual restore." "'Comfort My people,' says your God. 'Cry to her that her warfare is accomplished and that her iniquity is pardoned.'" This is the "moral" task of the Christian seated in heaven. Why? Because it is the true demonstration of love which Christ said would prove we are His disciples: "They will know you are My disciples by your love" (John 13:35). That is how we shine light. The practice of love by restoration and comforting God's people (that is, reminding them of their holy standing because of the cross, is the meaning of "shining light;" it is the meaning of "good deeds.":

Matthew 5:13-16 You are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. (14) You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. (15) Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light to all that are in the house. (16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Preterists and other Christians always wonder: what is our greatest calling? They turn everything into a legalistic system of *nomianism* based upon and Old Covenant moral code, which is disjointed, broken apart, divisive, and abominable. But when we understand what Christ means by "works" and see those works as the restoring and comforting of God's people, then we have grasped our role as Christians, which is to love God with all our hearts (which is simply thanking Him for His cross and love) and to love others as ourselves (we are willing to say we are totally forgiven and remind ourselves of this, therefore we are to be willing to say that any of God's people who have fallen are also forgiven and we are to remind them of the cross as

well). That is true comfort, for "I determine to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

What about Genesis "creation?"

Finally, the accusation that I believe the Genesis account is purely allegorical is also false. Paul said that Sarah and Hagar were allegories. But he didn't say they weren't real people as well. That is how I view physical characters in the Genesis account: They were real people but the story of the circumstances surrounding them is telling us about something far greater than mere physical nakedness or physical fig leaves. Their nakedness represented their guilty conscience and their fig leaves represented their attempt to cover up their nakedness by self-righteousness ("tilling the ground") instead of by blood (death of a sacrifice). Hence, Cain's offering was works based, for he had to till the ground to get it, but Abel's was grace-based. He knew there had to be shedding of blood. And just as Cain persecuted Abel, Esau persecuted Jacob, Ishmael persecuted Isaac, and the Pharisees persecuted Paul, so also the moralists persecute us because our sufficiency is of God and not of ourselves. So naturally they, like the Pharisees in Paul's day, accuse us:

Romans 3:7-9 For if the truth of God has more abounded through my lie to his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? (8) And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. (9) What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

It has been slanderously reported that I have said Christians may do evil that good may come. Those who accuse me of such, well, whatever damnation is, their damnation is just. True "love covers a multitude of sins." Sure, I struggle with every vile passion of every man and woman, just as Paul and Elijah did:

Acts 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach to you that you should turn from these vanities to the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

James 5:17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

Do I encourage people in those passions? No. Yet it is not because I think that abstinence from those passions proves their salvation or keeps their salvation. Rather, those passions can affect our experience of God's presence. They don't remove God's presence. Nothing can snatch us out of His hand. Yet, it makes me *feel* un-forgiven. And this is not God's best. God's best for us is to always remember the cross. When we awake in the night, knowing we have struggled in our thoughts or outwardly (but it was the *thoughts* that brought Jesus to the cross; outward actions simply yield earthly consequences), God wants us to remember Him:

Psalm 63:5-11 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips: (6) When I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the night watches. (7) Because you hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. (8) My soul follows hard after thee: thy right hand upholds me. (9) But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. (10) They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes. (11) But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that swears by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

I hope that you assimilate the above passage. It is a beautiful display of our experience today as we wage warfare not with carnal weapons and fighting and dissenting, but rather with simply presenting the truth of the cross of Christ, which brings rest, joy, and glory. We aren't wrestling with weird red demons and a leader with a pitchfork. We wrestle against the "snakes" of self-righteousness who try to steal our joy by imposing burdens grievous to be carried:

Acts 15:10-11 Now therefore why tempt you God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (11) But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

God's people are saved by grace, walk by grace, think by grace, reason by grace, love by grace, and restore by grace.

Finally, my encouragement to you:

My encouragement to you is to stay away from blogs that bring schism, division, and strife:

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Study the Scriptures:

2 Timothy 3:15-17 And that from a child you hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (16) All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works.

Those good works are love and mercy, and in them is the victory of the cross established:

Isaiah 16:5 And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness.

Zechariah 7:9 Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

James 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that has showed no mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgment.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 Now thanks be to God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and makes manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. (15) For we are to God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: (16) To the one we are the savor of death to death; and to the other the savor of life to life. And who is sufficient for these things? (17) For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

There is no profit in vain-jangling with the self-righteous. They dote about the law:

1 Timothy 6:3-6 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; (4) He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, (5) Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw yourself. (6) But godliness with contentment is great gain.

1 Timothy 1:4-10 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. (5) Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: (6) From which some having swerved have turned aside to vain jangling; (7) Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. (8) But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; (9) Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, (10) For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

The above is for the self-righteous. They are viewed as such in spite of what they seem to practice. For that is how God views them. They would say contrary of course:

Isaiah 65:2-5 I have spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, which walks in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; (3) A people that provokes me to anger continually to my face; that sacrifices in gardens, and burns incense upon altars of brick; (4) Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; (5) Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burns all the day.

They view their deeds as their righteousness. But God views it differently:

Isaiah 66:2-4 For all those things has mine hand made, and all those things have been, says the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word. (3) He that kills an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrifices a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offers an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burns incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations. (4) I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spoke, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.

Notice that they "chose that in which I delighted not." In what does God delight?:

Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like to thee, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retains not his anger for ever, because he delights in mercy. (19) He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and you wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

The self-righteous delighted in (or desired) sacrifice and not mercy. But what does Christ say?:

Matthew 9:12-13 But when Jesus heard that, he said to them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. (13) But go you and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Matthew 12:7 But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.

The New Testament way of life is clear from both the Old and New Testaments:

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what the LORD requires of you: to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?

Matthew 22:36-40 Master, which is the great commandment in the Law? (37) Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. (38) This is the first and great commandment. (39) And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (40) On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.