

124 What is God NOT like? Part 2

Four months ago, when I wrote “119 What is God NOT like?”, I was grappling yet again with the very difficult issue of the disparity between the wonderful picture of the loving, self-sacrificing, enemy-embracing God who is seen in Jesus, with the frankly ugly God I see portrayed in the Old Testament. (If you’ve read the OT more widely recently, I’m sure you’ll agree that it’s not a pretty sight – God apparently commanding genocide, human mutilation, animal sacrifice, etc.)

If we want to believe in Jesus, we have to accept, I think, that Jesus thought the Old Testament (i.e. his Bible) was divinely inspired: “he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24). And Paul agrees: “All Scripture is God-breathed...” (2 Tim 3).

In that earlier article, I tried to say that we have to understand what is written in the OT in terms of the beliefs and practices of the ancient near east, to read it in its historical context. But frankly, I was struggling. The nasty stuff about God in the OT simply won’t go away; it doesn’t make sense; it doesn’t fit with the loving Jesus; yet Jesus didn’t reject the OT. Help!

Then, through my contacts within the editing community, I ‘met’ a lady in Vancouver. We got talking more widely, and she said she was a Christian who, like me, had been wrestling with her faith. “What authors have you been reading?” I asked, and she introduced me to Greg Boyd, a theologian who has written several books.

I looked on YouTube and found a dialogue between Greg Boyd and Bruxy Cavey (he of the “Gospel in chairs” video). It was incredibly intense and difficult to follow, as the two powerful intellects tackled some very pertinent theological issues for the church in the 21st century, but I understood enough to realise that this was someone I needed to read.

I bought “Cross Vision: How the crucifixion of Jesus makes sense of Old Testament violence”, and I read the spoiler at the beginning – fascinating! (It’s the bit that you can read on Amazon.) But then I didn’t read it, I think because I was in the spiritual doldrums – I had lost focus.

Eventually, I started reading it. Amazing! Here at last was what I had been looking for. No, not “answers”, but at least a genuine, honest grappling with the issues that I’ve referred to above.

I guess I’ve been feeling right through all of this that the church has got it all terribly wrong – we’ve become very un-Jesus-like – and I’ve been wondering where, when and how did it go wrong? The feeling I’ve had was that it was as long ago as the early centuries of the church’s life; Greg Boyd seems to agree, and is proposing what I would almost call a New Reformation.

I’ve read less than half of the book, but the “Yes, yes!” count is as high as it was three years ago (and 120,000+ written words ago), when I read “The Divine Dance”. I don’t think you’ve heard the last from me about Greg Boyd!

Thank you, Lord, for the gracious way you deal with us, leading us a step at a time. I pray that we may have courage to walk with you, whatever the cost – to walk where Jesus walked, and see things as Jesus saw them. Amen!

Paul Bev. 10.7.20