

141 Full circle

Sorry, but this article doesn't offer a single helpful thought about your/my/our relationship with God, but it kind of feels like the most significant article I've ever written.

I'm in the middle of a situation where I'm seeking to help someone (Clara, let's call her) with a very serious relationship crisis. In her late 70s, she's had several relationships, which have all ended badly, and she has five children she doesn't relate to well, certainly not at present.

A few years ago she finally found someone who really loved her, but Covid kept them apart from July. Two weeks ago, he died, and for various reasons she couldn't go to the funeral. His family have been seriously unhelpful, to put it very mildly. And she doesn't know that God loves her.

This past week, after yet another theological discussion with friends about penal substitution(!) I wrote [140], saying that, while I no longer think it's theologically mistaken, I do think that it can be "pastorally inappropriate, to say the least", as a theological friend put it.

On Friday I felt that God wanted me see that in three difficult situations I face, the answer is to combat **negativity** with the **positive values of God's kingdom**.

And especially for Clara.

Now the gospel (a.k.a. "good news") is exactly what Clara needs, right? But the (only?) way of presenting it starts with "You're a sinner condemned by a righteous God".

So I have to think and pray towards a **positive kingdom way** to replace this **negative** approach. But I have no answers. None!

Please will you help me? This is no theoretical, theological discussion; it's a cry from the depths of my heart of love for Clara! Please get on to your vicars, ministers, priests, theological friends, evangelists and get them to tell me how I can communicate the good news to Clara!

Deja vu time: I realised that I had already asked this exact question before. So to look it up, I searched the text of the P000 file – the text of all 140 articles. It was in article [1]! That was the **start** of this journey; it has come **full circle**, and I'm asking it again.

We're all different, all on a journey of faith, so where are you in your relationship with God? What is God saying to you at the moment? Has God said anything to you that might help me?

Finally, to encourage you that I'm not throwing the (penal substitutionary) baby out with the bathwater, in [1] I said (and I now reaffirm):

I ... hope that we can share our thoughts together, and maybe make some progress in making the gospel accessible to our friends and families.

First, what's non-negotiable for me?

- 1. The central problem is human sin – broken relationships [with God and one another].*
- 2. Our loving God has a plan to sort that problem.*

3. The solution (salvation) centres on the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

4. We need to respond in order to appropriate that salvation.

Thank you in anticipation for your input on this.

Paul Bev. 13.06.21

P.S. Why have I put this plea so strongly? Well, when Sue was quite ill, God used numbers to reassure me that it was all in his loving hands. I'd wake in the night, worrying, and I'd see the time was 1:23 or 3:33 or 4:56. And God has used those 'significant' number patterns to nudge me ever since. This morning, I opened the P000 file, glanced down and noticed the total wordcount: 143,210. Could this be God's countdown to Clara's release? I pray so.

[The following morning...] Last night I woke at 2:22 and 4:44. Thank you, Father; you're so gracious to us, giving us what we lack.

[Later still...] Thanks for your encouraging responses. Yes, indeed, Clara needs lots of listening, lots of empathy, and lots of unconditional love, but at some stage, she will also need some way of appreciating Jesus' work for her on the cross. If you have a more helpful way of describing atonement than PS, please let me know. Thank you.