

146 Changing our minds (Part I)

As I said last time,^[145] 4000 years ago, God had a massive job on his hands. At the time, everyone thought that the gods (they thought there were lots of them) were angry and needed to be propitiated – thankfully, God knew otherwise. He spotted Abraham and realised he was a one-off.

Abraham was a man of faith; he realised that when God said something, it was a really good idea to trust him, believe in him and follow his leading. And God told Abraham that through him he wanted to bless all the peoples of the earth. So against all the received wisdom of his day, Abraham actually believed that God was a blessing, not a smiter.¹

Then, for 2000 years, God tried to get this message across: he wanted to bring blessing to people, and to get people to be a blessing to one another – especially to “the stranger and the alien in your midst”. But we wouldn’t listen, and instead we thought that God wanted us to smite our enemies.

In Jesus’ day, it was all about smiting: the Pharisees taught people that God would smite them if they didn’t do what *they* said was right, and the people wanted God to smite the Romans.

Thankfully, the penny dropped: Jesus made it clear by word and action that God actually wants us to love and to care for and to bless one another. Jesus showed that love can defeat evil by *non*-violence, and that’s how Jesus defeated Satan! And this Good News spread like wildfire.

(And I’m *not* reducing the Gospel to “Love is all you need” – far from it: Greg Boyd’s *Cross vision* has *hugely* enhanced my view of the radical meaning and significance of the cross.^[124–129])

So, as I suggested last time: “They all lived happily ever after.” Except we didn’t, of course.

Did you see the pattern in my 500-word history of the world?^[145] Did you see how the smiting-God kept reappearing in our thinking, which kept leading us to using religious domination? Doh!

Tragically that allowed the forces of evil to work through “the church” to bring such terrible suffering, such murder and mayhem, all supposedly in the name of Jesus of Nazareth! (Think Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, Catholic/Protestant, etc.)

But we’re much more civilised now, right? We wouldn’t do that sort of thing! Really? Are you sure? What about Christian support for Apartheid or racial segregation or anti-gay feelings? No, our image of a smiting-God is only just under the surface.

And we can smite in non-physical ways too, don’t forget, by applying emotional and societal pressure. We make true statements like, “God loves the person but hates the sin,” but that can be a thin veil. How welcome, I wonder, do gay people feel in my church?!

So what *actually* is our view of God?^[145] We just don’t seem able to shake off the idea of God as angry and needing to be propitiated. Please don’t fall for that lie! See God as Jesus portrayed him: a prodigal God running down the road to greet us!

Paul Bev. 11.07.21

¹ Yesterday, when I was preparing this article, I looking up a word on the OED website, and I was amazed and amused to see that their ‘Word of the Day’ was ‘smite’!