

Communication, communication, communication

Staying at the house of Bryan & Mary Ashton (greetings to those of you who know them!), I woke at 5, started thinking, and couldn't get back to sleep, so here I am, yet again!

My last essay produced quite a few responses, some saying, effectively, "Yes, you were right to be concerned, because you're wrong in your interpretation of Scripture." But when they explained why I was wrong, my immediate response was, "Where did that come from? That wasn't what I was saying!"

I have chatted with a few of you face to face, and that's much safer, less likely for there to be misunderstandings. And we all know how dangerous emails and Facebook posts can be! OK that's partly because we can all too easily send emails without thinking carefully what we're saying, but even with care, written communication can be misunderstood, because we don't always know 'where the person is coming from'.

Much more importantly, how does God communicate with us about what he is like?

¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

(Wow! What an amazing few verses! I pulled them up, having had the phrase 'spoken to us by his Son' in mind and was wanting to quote it, but those verses just scintillated, as I re-read them!)

All words are pictures, metaphors; they aren't the real thing but are attempts to communicate about the real thing, and they have to be interpreted. But when we see what the Son is like, we see what the Father is really like. Thank God for providing Jesus!

So where I have come to is that if God has communicated to us in Jesus, then I have to interpret God's written communication in the light of what Jesus is like. If my interpretation of Scripture is contrary to the character of Jesus, then my interpretation is wrong.

Yesterday I met with an Iranian Christian, a refugee from a Muslim background who had come to faith in Jesus in Germany, with a view to encouraging one another week by week as we chat about the faith.

It was fascinating to look at the Christian faith from the viewpoint of someone from a totally different culture. He was impressed about what good people Christians are – which was encouraging – and also how we are allowed to question our beliefs. "We could *never* do that. The mullah wouldn't allow it." But he did also say, "Some Christians are very straight," which, after discussion, I took to mean dogmatic.

I also explained to him (briefly!) about the Catholic church and the Reformation, and then tried to explain why there are so many different churches today. Thinking about it afterwards, what an absolute scandal it is that we have wasted so much time arguing about the finer details of what we believe and how we organise our churches, each church insisting that their way is 'based on Scripture'.

So am I arguing against myself? Am I wasting my time (and wasting your time, sorry) on the finer points of what I believe. That is certainly not my intention. I'm arguing for a catholicisation of the faith (That's a small 'c'!). I'm arguing against the view that says "**The** way to understand what Jesus did on the cross is this..."

We can all, hopefully, agree with what is in the creeds, none of which actually says **how** Jesus died for our sins, but in different cultures, different of the Bible's metaphors for the efficacy of the cross will be more or less helpful or understandable.

What woke me up this morning (well, what kept me awake after my bladder had woken me) was thinking about 'the wages of sin', which is what one of you quoted to me vis a vis 'wrath'. So I checked online, and here's the first website I saw (my italic):

What's the meaning of the phrase 'The wages of sin is death'?
Sinners will be cast *[implied: by God]* into everlasting torment.

We might want to say, "No! It's not **God** that's bringing death; by that phrase, Paul meant that the natural **consequence** of sin was death", and we might want to quote the rest of the sentence about the free gift of God, but the damage has already been done: "God is someone who throws people into hell. That's what all Christians believe, right? End of story!"

No, no, no, no! Jesus' wrath was reserved for (i.e. God's wrath is reserved for) (1) those who actively reject him (2) those who prevent other people from knowing his love by presenting a distorted image of what God is like. And it was (2) that has caused me to repent these past two years.

Paul Bev. 15.12.18