

273 Seeing with fresh eyes

My friend, 'Keith', who always has helpful feedback, said something that I found really challenging. Last time,^[272] I claimed that God's wrath was towards people (e.g. us) 'who turn God's love and acceptance into God's wrath and indignation against unbelievers'.

Referring to John 3:17ff, Keith said, '*Jesus talks about condemnation of unbelievers, does he not? For me, that sounds like the wrath of Romans.*' That got me worried. Pretty plain, isn't it? Jesus says there that '*whoever does not believe **stands condemned** already.*' Ouch!

Maybe I should check the meaning of the Greek word for 'condemned' – perhaps it's not quite that blunt? But then I remembered: check the context!

So who is Jesus talking to? Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Now that totally changes the perspective. The Pharisees know all about condemnation – it's a result of not obeying the rules, right?! So what does Jesus say to a condemnation-oriented person?

For God **did not** send his Son into the world to **condemn** the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him **is not condemned**... (*then to the earlier quote*)

So Jesus is saying, to a Pharisee, that condemnation is **not** about whether you come up to God's (or the Pharisees'!) standards; it's about trusting in Jesus.

'But', says Jesus, looking lovingly into Nicodemus' eyes, 'if you don't believe in me, **you stand condemned already** because I'm God's Son.' (To be fair, I think that Nicodemus did come to Jesus with an open mind.)

I'm absolutely not saying anything against Keith, but please read again what he wrote, '*Jesus talks about condemnation of unbelievers*' and '*that sounds like wrath*'. Keith is viewing that passage with eyes that have been trained (as we all have!) to *expect* to see crime, punishment, wrath, etc.

If only we could train ourselves to view every Bible passage through eyes that see God's supreme desire to love and accept us, and God's willingness to do whatever it takes to draw us back into that loving relationship. But it's so difficult to change the habit of a lifetime!

My other interaction this week was with a neighbour, 'Sally', in her mid 50s, who has been very helpful since Sue was diagnosed; Sally had looked after her mum, with Alzheimer's. She invited us for tea and cake, and we sat and chatted for over two hours, including about spiritual things. I'd describe her as spiritually aware, but she has very little knowledge of the Christian faith.

Her brother has started to go to church, and when he visited recently, he told Sally that gay sex is a sin, an idea that she just could not understand. I tried to explain why 'some Christians' believed that, but I reassured her that we both think that God is more concerned for people to live in loving relationships – which makes us happier and more rounded members of the community – rather than about how individuals expressed their love.

I'm just saying.

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