

313 Love and wrath – Part 2

Last time, I looked at how my faith had moved from a more literal, logical, mechanical approach (LLM) to being more relationship-based; today, that idea is growing in my mind.

Would it be fair to say that life is *about* relationships? Can we say that faith in God is *about* relationships? Certainly, coming from a dysfunctional family, I have always tended to be more LLM, so let's look at a specific issue, and view it as LLM or relationally.

Peter and Julia (not their real names) were missionaries, but while they were serving aboard, things went very sour, and today they won't have anything at all to do with the church – any church! Question: are they still saved or not? Is that a valid question, even? To me that question is rather LLM, so let's see it more relationally. Does God still love them? Of course! God will never stop loving them! And that's what matters. Period.

Second issue: in the OT, we read how Israel (repeatedly) turned away from God, things went horribly wrong, the prophets spoke, the people turned back, and things improved. How do we view that in terms of their relationship with God? The OT authors speak of God punishing them for their sin, but neither Jersak nor Boyd¹ read that it in a purely literal way.

Yes, in Abraham's time, people thought of the gods as capriciously causing calamity, and so at least it's a step in the right direction to see Jahweh as bringing hardship, but only to jolt the people to their senses, so they will turn back to God's way again.

As I read through the OT, I see a changing view of God – becoming more relational and less LLM. And God wonderfully inspires the authors to write things like how the steadfast (covenant) love of the Lord never fails, His mercies never come to an end. I pointed^[312] to God 'punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation' but it is followed by God 'showing love to a **thousand** generations of those who love me'.

The underlying theme of relationship is there, albeit masked at times, as the authors' view of God changes over the centuries. Thankfully, with the cross and resurrection, our view of God has changed further, so we need to read the OT with eyes wider open to the love of God and to see things more metaphorically. I see it now more 'as if God were punishing...'

'OK,' I used to reason, 'some things in the OT *are* metaphorical – we know that God doesn't *literally* ride on the wings of the wind – but how do we know whether a given passage is metaphorical or not?'

But again, just asking that question shows my LLM attitude: I was asking for a definite decision, i.e. either something *is* metaphorical or it isn't. But relationships are not binary.

(Next time, I'll look at where Jersak and Boyd actually disagree!)

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¹ Brad Jersak *A More Christ-like God* and Greg Boyd *Cross Vision*.