

170 Your image of God creates you

In an on-line meditation, “A toxic view of God,” Richard Rohr starts, “Your image of God creates you. This is why it is so important that we see God as loving and benevolent and why **good theology is still important.**” (my bold)

Rohr explains that a view of God as a cruel tyrant creates fear, and fear is a great way to control people – which might explain some of the horrendous things I alluded to last time^[169] – Christian wars and atrocities.

But actually, I think the problem we face is **more serious** than that – yes, *more* serious! The real problem is you and me. ‘They’ did some terrible things, and yes, when I want to tell people about Jesus, I have to first apologise for ‘them’, but what have *I* done?

No, I don’t mean I have to confess that I used to nick things from shops when I was a kid. But how has my wrong image of God ruined my effectiveness as a Christian? And how could healing my view of God transform my effectiveness? How can **good theology** enable me to radiate the love of God? *That’s what I long for with all my heart!*

Believe me, I know, it’s very, very hard to shake off the theology we’ve been fed. This is what I’ve been working on these past four years – this is what God has been working on, in me.

Sure, we don’t think of God as a cruel tyrant, and yes, we do try to emphasise having a loving relationship with God through Jesus, but our **theology** is unarguably centered on punishment.

The gospel = We deserve punishment, **but** Jesus died for us.

Tell me I’m wrong! Tell me that this is **not** the basic message we’ve been fed all our Christian lives. And if so, please show me where, in the teaching of Jesus, you see a punishment theology.

And if it’s not in the teaching of Jesus, how dare we read back our own ideas of God into the Scriptures?! One of the most commonly used ‘evangelistic’ Bible verses is “the wages of sin is death,” which we read as saying, “We deserve punishment **but...**” Wrong, wrong, wrong! Bad exegesis, bad theology! That was **not** what Paul was saying. He was talking to fellow Christians:

We are loved and accepted by God, **therefore** don’t sin – it’s a deadly disease!

And actually that, in my view, is one way to sum up Jesus’ teaching – that’s the good news of the kingdom of God:

We’re accepted, we’re forgiven, **therefore** avoid sin like the plague.

Don’t worry, I still believe that the cross-and-resurrection is at the heart of that forgiveness, but forgiveness is a mystery, a beautiful diamond that can be gazed on from different directions.

As Rohr says, our theology forms who we are, which then forms our witness to the people around us, but we have to check our theology against the **person** of Jesus.