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God's Glory in Our Dark World

by

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Isn't abortion just terrible? Babies are human! If you don't think they are, then you're buddying up with those Nazis who were glad to slaughter Jews, since they're Untermenschen, subhuman. Yes, it's terrible, so what can we do about it? Never vote for someone who's in favor of abortion, no matter if he's caring and wise on everything else? Is that God's way? There is something else though, and it's harder. Have you thought about giving foster care? So for those women their only choices aren't a baby with not enough money, or easier survival without that baby? Someone else's illegitimate baby in your home for years, are you up to praying about that? Or is that just ridiculous?

What does God expect from you anyway? Being decent and respectable and showing up at church? Maybe voting for a larger deacons' fund? We all know it's more than that, it's 'loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength' and 'loving your neighbor as yourself.' We see that enormous All your Heart, and we know that's God's kind calling to us. So couldn't foster care fit all that? For you too?

We have to pray about that and decide, on many other things too. We know we're justified by faith in Jesus, alone—but he himself shows us there's more to God's plan:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

That's totally clear, there's no way around it, is there? "The least of these. . .you did for me." Sheep or goat, who are you? Our love for Jesus, and our caring for those people in need—they have to fit together, tightly. We're proud people, we want brownie points for all the wonderful things we do, but we know better than that. "To God be the Glory, great things he has done" and keeps on doing, we know that.

But our history can be discouraging, we keep wrestling with this and it's still so hard. We keep on seeing it as an either/or while it should definitely be a both/and. Is our salvation really and truly 'all of the Lord, Jesus did it all, Glory to his name forever?' Is God's sovereign call to us 'to lay all on the altar, to forget about having enough for retirement since Social Security is going under, to vigorously care for needy people just as God cares for us?' Both/and, God shows us that clearly and lovingly.

There are two episodes in our history that keep reminding us how hard that is. That Reformation in England was threatening, everything was being revised upside-down, King and Parliament too. When everything comes from God, how do we find stability in society? That civil war, how can we bring it to an end and have a normal life again? With so much grace, how can we get back the tight rules we need? Let's 'lower the market,' let's discount Jesus and trim back on his grace. Let's look at 'justification by faith alone' again—doesn't it really mean that our loving and orderly God gives US extra credit for our faith, not because of what Jesus has done. Just trim 'justification by faith alone in Jesus' and take off the 'in Jesus' part and then we'll have law and order again, a peaceful and secure life. Yes, that really happened, you can read about it in C. F. Allison's *The Rise of Moralism*. In order for us to get things done, cut back on 'Jesus did it all,' that's the message.

Then was our own history of early New England. In order to have the right to vote you had to be a church member, do you remember that? Isn't that better than having to own so much land? But to be a member you had to show how you're living for Jesus and that's not easy. Then Jonathan Edwards showed us the way ahead, keep on looking to God and his love given to us in our Savior Jesus Christ, keep on 'asking him and you will receive,' don't let the struggle to make your life count get in the way of the Glory of Jesus! When people heard that they stopped all that hard work of obedience and rejoiced with all their hearts on God's love for them—call that a Gospel Awakening!

But gospel joy comes to look like emotion, and doesn't that get in the way of serious living? JE had said, look right now at Jesus, not at how hard it is to do that. Then others ran with that, doesn't that mean we can shut off all that total depravity and inability stuff, and go to work with what we are already able to do by ourselves? If we can do that with trusting Jesus, why can't we just ignore the Jesus part, except as a good example we can follow, and focus on our ability to do all those wonderful things? It took a while, but out came Unitarianism: if godly living is about our ability to do anything with what we already have, why would we need a Savior for more anyway?

Joseph Haroutunian's *Piety versus Moralism*, is the book that spells that out so sadly.

Have you noticed how that word “moralism” keeps coming up? It’s a good word, it means just be moral, who needs Jesus for that, that says it all. But what our Philadelphia Gospel Movement is trying to do, is both to bring the gospel to everyone and to make the city a better place. Doesn’t ‘better place’ need Jesus, who thinks that? But remember: Foster Care, joyfully surviving with other people’s kids? How can we possibly do hard things like that without the power of Father, Son and Spirit in our hearts? With Jesus our Mediator in everything, “tempted in every way as we are but without sin,” then we do “have all we need for life and godliness.” He’s our example, especially in dying, and we are united with him in death and resurrection! Those Unitarian types were sure they could do anything since they redefined sin so it was no big deal, but by now we know a lot better than that.

The shorter way of doing Movement is: word and deed ministry. Our last book is Tim Keller’s ***Ministries of Mercy***. There are many moving stories in there, real life stories, protecting us so well from highfaluting theory. But his heart-moving insight is this:

“Word and deed, mercy and evangelism, are inseparable, existing in a ‘symbiotic,’ interdependent relationship. . . The preaching of the Word produces faith (Rom 10:16-18) and faith always produces good works in general and deeds of mercy in particular (James 2:1-23). On the other hand, we have seen that deeds of mercy have an impact. God often uses them as a means to open hearts to the gospel (Acts 4:32-33, cf. John 13:35, I John 3:17-18).” pp. 111-113.

Now we begin to understand. Even both/and isn’t right. ***It’s much more “trust and obey” Jesus of course, our glorious Savior and Lord.***