

'Living faithfully in our culture'

1. Faithful in our Reverence



*But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." **But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.** Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,...* (1 Peter 3:14-15a)

Bob Dylan was right about human beings: 'you're gonna have to serve somebody'. How does being faithful to the Lordship of Jesus Christ frame our lives, our loves and our longings?

Introduction

A. The all-encompassing nature of Christ's Lordship for the Christian

i) Yahweh's 'transcendent uniqueness'

Q: Do other gods exist?

The need to affirm both the incomparability (none *like* him) and transcendent uniqueness (no *other* God) of YHWH and of Jesus Christ who is God incarnate and Lord:

The essential element... is not the denial of the existence of other 'gods,' but an understanding of the uniqueness of YHWH that puts him in a class of his own, a wholly different class from any other heavenly or supernatural beings, even if these are called 'gods'. I call this YHWH's transcendent uniqueness (Mere 'uniqueness' can be what distinguishes one member of a class from other members of it. By 'transcendent uniqueness.' I mean a form of uniqueness that puts YHWH in a class of his own). Especially important for identifying this transcendent uniqueness are statements that distinguish YHWH by means of a unique relationship to the whole of reality: YHWH alone is Creator of all things, whereas all other things are created by him; and YHWH alone is the sovereign Lord of all things, whereas all other things serve or are subject to his universal lordship. (Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*)

- 'there is none like you, and there is no god besides you (2 Sam. 7:22)
- 'I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me (Is. 46:9)

ii) Jesus is Yahweh.

YHWH stood *sui generis*, entirely in a class of his own as *the* God, the sole Creator of the universe, and Ruler, Judge and Saviour of the nations. And the New Testament repeatedly makes the same affirmation about Jesus of Nazareth, putting him in the same exclusively singular, transcendent framework and frequently quoting the same texts to do so. (Chris Wright, *The Mission of God*)

Q: Who is Jesus?

- The one to whom all authority has been given by the Father (Psalm 2, Mt 28:18ff, John 13:3, 17:2)

- > Christ has the **right** to be lord of all
- > Christians have a **duty** to challenge areas where this rule is not respected
- > accounts of anything in creation that do not relate that something to Christ are **necessarily incomplete**, and to that extent misleading

----- > a key area is that of our thoughts and ideologies – we must take every thought captive for Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)

iii) The Shape of sola Scriptura

- *Scripture is both final and flawless providing light and sight*

Scripture is *norma normans* (“the rule that rules”), while the Pope and Councils are *norma normata* (“a rule that is ruled”)

the authority of Scripture is shorthand for ‘the authority of God as he is speaks through Scripture,’ so the Bible is the Christian’s ultimate authority and is totally trustworthy and consistent because it has been inspired (or better ‘breathed out’) by a totally trustworthy and consistent God.

- *interpreting the world through the Word*

When we distil such repeated patterns from the Bible we are seeking to pay attention not only to what the Bible says in this passage or that, but how it presents every passage from Genesis to Revelation. Put another way, we read the Bible not only as a set of ideas and stories to think about, but a set of patterns and dispositions through which we can think about everything and through which we live the whole of life. To think about the Bible is to take the its unfolding events as an object of our contemplation; to think through the Bible is to take up the patterns and moves of that story and use them as an interpretative grid for all of our understanding and living, finding in these patterns tools for shaping debates and solving problems far beyond their immediate concerns. It is when we start thinking and acting through the Bible in this way that we can provide genuinely fresh, distinctive and constructive contributions to intellectual debate and social change. (Chris Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation*).

B. The all-encompassing nature of other ‘Lordships’ for those not Christians

The biblical picture of humans post-Fall is not:

‘Religious’ < -----as opposed to ----- > ‘Non-religious’

but rather:

true faith < ----- as opposed to ----- > false faith

‘False faith’ is F. Turretin’s brilliant phrase describing what happens to us in Genesis 3 (archetypal sin)

- Genesis 1 & 2 establish God is:-
 - a God who blesses (benevolent and good)
 - a God who is truthful and effective (He speaks and it is so)
- We disbelieve the truth about God, accepting He is:
 - not good (actuated by envy)
 - not truthful (we will not die)
- and believe lies about Him – but these lies about Him are ‘leaps of faith’

The public square is a battleground of the gods and ‘people will always fight for their idols and gods, their objects of worship’ (Jonathan Leeman)

Idols are to be found at the level of 'ultimates': *Ultimate explanations; Ultimate authorities; Ultimate commitments; Ultimate loves seen in the lives we live, the homes we make for ourselves, our hopes, fears, and desires, the scripts we follow, the everyday liturgies and rituals than (de-) form us*

If Christians do not articulate how the Bible explains all other stories in terms of its own story and how it provides a positive vision for society, then other stories will step in to explain the Bible in their own terms and provide that vision in its place. (Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation*)

Putting the above 2 points together:

Worldview is an affair of the human heart.

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Pr. 4:23)

"As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart" (Pr. 27:19)

- The 'heart' (*leb, kardia*) is the central defining element of the human person - Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 267-273. *855 times in OT, 150 in NT*
- Jesus and the language of heart, trees and treasure (Matt. 6:19-21; Lk. 12:33-34; Lk. 6:43-45; Matt. 7:17-20)
- Naugle: "the heart of the matter of worldview is that worldview is a matter of the heart"

The Bible only talks about two worldviews:

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." (Col. 2:6-10)

C. Two 'less than faithful' version of Lordship.

i) A Diluted Jesus

a) Features:

b) Dangers:

i) The human problem

ii) The cultural problem

– 'culture is religion externalized' (H. Van Til)

A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of This Country Contrasted With Real Christianity (1797):

"The Fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines insensibly gained strength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Christianity went more and more out of sight and as might naturally have been expected, the moral system also began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment." (Wilberforce)

iii) The 'Jesus' problem

This was the main issue between Rome and the Christians: Who is Lord? Francis Schaeffer pointed out: "Let us not forget why the Christians were killed. They were not killed because they worshiped Jesus...nobody cared who worshiped whom so long as the worshiper did not disrupt the unity of the state, centred in the formal worship of Caesar. The reason the Christians were killed was because they were rebels...they worshiped Jesus as God and they worshiped the infinite-personal God only. The Caesars would not tolerate this worshipping of the one God only. It was counted as treason" (Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live?*)

ii) A *Delimited Jesus*

a) Features:

b) Dangers:

i) The human problem

ii) The cultural problem naivety – no cultural vacuum – we bemoan our situation but we have evacuated the area.

A plausibility structure is a web of beliefs that are so embedded in the hearts and minds of the bulk of a society that people hold them either unconsciously or so firmly that they never think to ask if they are true. In short, a plausibility structure is a worldview of a society, the heart of a community...One of the main functions of a plausibility structure is to provide the background of beliefs that makes arguments easy or hard to accept. (Sire, Naming the Elephant)

iii) The 'Jesus' problem

Concluding applications:

- cosmic *not* compartment
- flow-chart *not* pie-chart
- Praise *and* Polemic (Psalm 92:8)

But you, LORD, are forever exalted = But you, LORD [alone, and not x], are forever exalted.

Significantly, the context of the prophetic critique of idolatry helps us sense what to emphasize as we hear them—and as we sing them ourselves. Often we naturally approach a song of praise with a kind of blank-slate reading. We express our praise songs as 'Sing to the LORD a new song' (as opposed to simply speaking our praise) or 'Sing to the LORD a new song' (as opposed to singing some old songs). However appropriate those interpretations might be in other contexts, here the force of context conveys, rather, 'Sing to the LORD a new song' (as opposed to singing to idols or false gods). These are hymns offered as polemic statements; they are offered against the gods even as they are sung to YHWH. When we sing 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow,' we are also saying 'Down with the gods from whom no blessings flow.' The polemic function of praise has been memorably described by Walter Brueggemann: 'The affirmation of Yahweh always contains a polemic against someone else.... It may be that the [exiles] will sing such innocuous-sounding phrases as "Glory to God in the highest," or "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Even those familiar phrases are polemical, however, and stake out new territory for the God now about to be aroused to new caring.' When we sing our pretty songs of praise, it is as if we are singing 'take that you false gods (!).' (John Witvliet)

- absolute gratitude *and* focused ingratitude