

Disingenuousness and the Problem of the Obvious

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1. One of the things I tell my students at Veritas School of Theology is that “God means what He says, and so should we!” I mean that we should never give in to the temptation to paper over problems in our theology, still less to pretend certain “problem texts” aren’t there and then talk as if they weren’t there! We must go to work on the texts, not shut them out by spinning theological yarns. We don’t want to be disingenuous with the Bible or parts of the Bible.

All the Bible is equally the Word of God. No passage or Book or Testament has automatic veto over another. Scripture is not an obfuscation but a revelation. It is not written in an esoteric code that only the privileged few can decipher. It possesses the quality of clarity, even when sometimes a lot more than a cursory reading is needed to procure the message.

2. It is an odd phenomenon that in our world someone can claim all sorts of things which sound quite plausible, but which, as a matter of fact, only preserve their appearance of plausibility by passing over very blunt facts which would soon have them plugging the leeks in their outlook, were it not for the fact that they can imagine these rude truths away.

Thus, a person who says there is no such thing as truth ignores the plain “truth” that they have just contradicted their own truth claim. In similar fashion, a person who rejects the correspondence view of truth for the coherence theory conveniently ignores the fact that the correspondence view can be held very coherently – and so should be accepted as the grounds for any coherence theory. This curious circumstance can be caught in the phrase, “If I don’t like it, it isn’t true!” The imagination then is soon in full swing to provide the preferred interpretation of the world.

Like I say, we encounter this attitude everywhere. An evolutionist says that life has meaning without God, even though it’s all a huge cosmic accident; a devotee of Krishna begs for money from others he claims aren’t really “there”; the philosophy student looks with disdain upon those peons who believe in moral absolutes, and then protests against the evils of female exploitation; the Muslim who asserts against all the evidence that the Jews and Christians changed the Bible; the liberal spokesman who claims Islam is a religion of peace; the neo-Gnostic who tries vainly to date the Gospel of Thomas to the mid First Century.

The one prerequisite? One must first have a dislike for the “Obvious.” This animus can then be set to work to re-paint the landscape in more acceptable colors with more palatable features.

It is quite fascinating, the human capacity for ignoring the obvious. It is the old “elephant in the room” syndrome. And the smarter you are the more easy it is to ignore what you wish wasn’t there.

3. Unsurprisingly, this same phenomenon is conspicuous in the realm of Christian theology. The Bible teaches that the Church is the Body of Christ and consists of those “in Christ” (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; cf. Rom. 5:12f.), yet there are Christians who say that the unregenerate can also be in the Body of Christ, the Church. Or, some believe the days of Genesis 1 are millions of years long even though a normal reading of the text, plus Exod. 20:11, plus a look at the standard Hebrew lexicon (Koehler-Baumgartner); plus the fact that this old-earth view still doesn’t match the claims of secular scientists, all militate against it.

One of the clearest examples of this phenomenon of overlooking the obvious is the way

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supercessionists (those who hold that in some real sense the Church inherits Israel's promises) fail to tackle those OT texts which stand like so many enormous sauropods threatening to flatten every furnishing in their interpretative house.

How often does one hear it nowadays: "the promises of God to Israel in the OT have not been done away with, rather they have been expanded into something far better." When, therefore, they are presented with one of these promises – say Jeremiah 33:14ff. – and asked to re-interpret what God is *really* saying, the resultant explanation too often is a retreat into imagination. "Imagine such and such..." we are told. "Yes, but what about what the actual passage SAYS," we protest. But try as we might, we can never get them to expound these OT passages. Why not you ask? Because these passages have been conveniently allowed to slip into the hermeneutical netherworld, where they can be dictated to and never permitted to speak on their own account, for fear they will stampele someone's cherished beliefs.

4. But let's have a real-time sampling of the kind of "interpretation through imagination." This is from an article called "Not Replacement...Expansion," by a Reformed writer called Fred Klett:

Did God fail to deliver what He promised to the Jewish people? Consider this example: What if you expected me to give you a hamburger and then I gave you filet mignon? What if you were told you would inherit an apple tree, but instead you inherited a whole glorious orchard? What if you thought I promised you \$10, but then I delivered a million? What if I promised a child a typewriter when he turned 18 and when the time came I gave him the latest computer. Would I be a liar? No! When someone gives IMMEASURABLY MORE than that expected, the gift giver is no liar. God has given an even greater gift through Jesus, superior to what many think was promised!

Sadly, even many believers today do not fully understand how much greater the New Covenant redemption is that Jesus brought to Israel and the world. Why dine on hamburger when you can have filet mignon? Why settle for a single tree, when you can have the whole orchard? Why stress the \$10 when there is \$1,000,000 available? Why use an old Underwood manual typewriter when you can have the latest personal computer and laser printer? The Messiah and His Eternal Kingdom are the great blessings promised to Israel.

I see. And the covenanted oaths to the ethnic nation of Israel in Jeremiah 33? The great prophecy of Zechariah 12-14? Ezekiel's vision in Ezek. 36-37 and 40-

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48? Malachi's prediction in Mal. 3:1-6? Not to mention Isaiah and the other prophecies. "Well, just imagine..." Tell you what, let's leave the imagination out of it for a while. Let's read these texts and expound them! Let's allow them to speak as the Word of God!

More to come....