

The Natural Man's Struggle with Reformed Theology: Hell vs. Corporate Responsibility

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Y'all are gluttons for punishment. Here we go again. Natural man and reformed theology. We have covered several different topics already and tonight we come to a not real happy topic but one, that in my opinion is extremely critical for us to think about, look at, and have some understanding of what's taking place in the world today.

Hell Versus Corporate Responsibility

Hell is what happens to those who don't accept Christ. Most people, of a general Christian persuasion, will say "yes, I believe there is a hell." But at the same time, our whole culture is emphasizing corporate responsibility. That influences what we look at, how we look at it, and how we behave. Now with that in mind, let's look at some of what we believe. We will have some Scripture readings here in just a minute. But we are going to start off reading this:

Of the Last Judgment

[The Westminster Confession of Faith — 1647]

God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ by whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise, all persons who have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body whether good or evil.

That's pretty heavy, isn't it? That sounds like something is going to happen!
[WCF continued..]

The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate who are wicked and disobedient, for then shall

the righteous go into everlasting life and receive the fullness of joy and refreshing, which are come from the presence of the Lord. But the wicked, who know not God and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torment and be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

Well, that's the Westminster Confession. Now here are a few words that say pretty much the same thing but just a little bit different, from the *Belgic Confession* (1561)

Concerning the Last Judgment

Finally, we believe according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord, which is unknown to all creatures is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from Heaven, corporally and visibly as He ascended, with great glory and majesty, declare Himself judge of the quick and the dead, burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it, and then all men will personally appear before this great judge, both men and women, and children that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel and by the sound of the trumpet of God. Then the books, that is to say the contents shall be opened and the dead judged according to what they have done in this world whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest and then the secrets and apocrypha of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all.

Now, do you believe that? That's reformed tradition. That's talking about hell as a real, vital place, preceded by a real individual personal judgment. Of course, we are not taking right now into statement about judgment and hell, into account Christ as the advocate of the believer, so let's not go into that right now. But there is Scripture which lays out (and we will look at in just a second), the concept that there really is an actual thing going to happen, commonly called "The Second Coming." At that second coming, there will be a thing that takes place, commonly called, "Judgment," and there will be a division (not into 14 different groups) into two: the righteous and the reprobate — the followers of Jesus Christ and the non-followers of Jesus Christ. The catechism says the same thing (I don't know that I need to read much to it), but just this one...

At the Day of Judgment

[from the *Larger Catechism*]

Q. 89 [Answer] — At the Day of Judgment, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand and upon clear evidence and full conviction of their own

consciences, shall have the fearful but just sentence of condemnation pronounced upon them, and thereupon, shall be cast out from the favorable presence of God and the glorious fellowship with Christ, His saints and all His holy angels, into hell, to be punished with unspeakable torments, both the body and soul, with the devil and his angels forever.

Well, our tradition, our theology, our belief is that that is literally true. That is the position of Reformed faith, which is no wonder why it is only 1-2% of the population over here, right? Over here, that's where we are.

Some Scripture verses — ones that I happen to know, pick out, and bring out to you:

Christ is speaking in Matthew 12:

You brood of Vipers! How can you who are evil say anything good, for out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him and the evil man brings out evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give an account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken, for by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned.

Now if you want just pure justice, to stand before God in your own right — that's what you are going to get. If you want an advocate, having someone to answer the questions for you, you have Christ. That is our belief. I like Christ using harsh words because it sort of makes the point here.

Matthew 23 — The Seven Woes to the Scribes and Pharisees — “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”

That's sort of plain pumpkin, isn't it? That's Jesus talking.

Matthew 25 — “Then he will say to those on His left, ‘depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

John 5:28 — “Do not be amazed at this for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

I could go on and on. Verse after verse, passage after passage that emphasizes the fact that there will be a judgment, there will be an accountability, it will be individual - you will answer, God is saying, for what you have done, even your idol words. That's why I want grace, for I know that I have hit my thumb many a times and said an idol word that I should not have said. And I have gotten angry at people many times when they have done things that I didn't like. I want grace

and I want an advocate. Not just for my horrendous sin, but for my idol sin as well.

Revelation 20 — Then I saw a great white throng and Him who is seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence and there is no place for them, and I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were opened and another book was open, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded to the Books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

If you want to stand on your own before God, that's what you have coming. You will be judged by what you have done, not your family, not your country, not your culture — you will be judged according to what you have done. The only alternative is to have Christ be judged for you.

It is said that in the Middle Ages, when the priests were preaching, when they saw someone drifting off to sleep while they were preaching, suddenly they would change their sermon and say, “Hellfire is coming down on you tonight! Wake up! Don't you know?! Hell is burning for you!” I have a book that has that quoted in it. I memorized it—I thought that was pretty good. It's a show stopper, isn't it? Of course, that person wouldn't get called to First Presbyterian Church of Jackson if they preached like that, I don't think; but anyway, in the Middle Ages and before, the world during the time of Christ was divided into the good and the bad — not even the ugly—just the good and the bad. So there were the forces of good and the forces of evil. Then we get into the Middle Ages and we have sort of a transition change. Suddenly we have people we have to deal with that aren't quite just that way. We will talk about that in just a minute. But the implications in what I have read to you so far is, there is a personal consequence to what human beings do. There is a judgment coming and that judgment will lead to heaven or to hell.

Now, human history — if you look around you today, you don't hear many sermons that used to be called, “Hellfire and damnation.” You don't hear many sermons like Jonathan Edwards', “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” You just don't hear that because it sort of offends the sensibility of most people. It's just really too harsh and too hard. I believe there are reasons why it is too harsh and too hard to most of the people today, but I will tell you this, that as we live longer and can fight illness better and we have more of a logical, consequential answer, as we talked about last week, to what takes place in life, we feel less of a need to have a God to give an explanation of what's happening and what's going on. We have, what I call, a dulled sense of eternity — heaven or hell. And that dull sense of eternity, heaven or hell, is what we face around us mainly in the world today.

When I was in school, we had a professor who gave us this little cliché and I think it sort of works out. He says that your view of heaven or hell is primarily determined by your daddy. He said that people who have a warm, loving father don't wonder if there is a heaven, they wonder if there is a hell. People who have a harsh, cruel father don't wonder if there is a hell, they wonder if there is a heaven. And I think that does play into what goes on with us, it sort of sets us up a little bit in some ways. Now, the more we are insulated from the harsh realities of life, the less we think of hell. I do believe that that is true. Fear versus hope. The less fear we have, the less we hope we possibly have, the more neutrality we have, the greater fear the more we want to have hope. These feelings churn inside the hearts of human beings. Now, guess what? Psychology has played a role in making all of this happen and I want to give you some illustrations of how it has.

We live in a world today where one of the chief vocational occupations of historians is to rewrite history. And as we rewrite history, sometimes we don't take into account what was taking place in the past. When settlers came to this New World over here, they had to deal with what we now call, "Native Americans." They called them the "Savages." Here were a group of people — if you got into a fight with them and they killed you (which later on would become far more prevalent), they would cut your scalp off. Why would anybody do something so barbaric as to do that? Not only that, they would do things like take out particular body parts and eat them because they thought that if they ate those body parts, they would gain whatever strength and wisdom that person had. And you wonder why American settlers treated the Native Americans as badly as they did?! They were called savages! Well, if you have got the deal with that, we can't just say that's Satan just doing all of this and it certainly isn't God doing all of this — how do we deal with the Savages? Well, we have several different ways to deal with it. One way we deal with it is to say that there is a difference in the rank order of humanity. We have these up here who are the higher level — Northern European folk who have come over the highest level and the lowest level are the Native Americans, the Barbarians. That's one way to deal with it. The other way to deal with it is through a concept developed by a guy named J.C. Pritchard in about 1825 and he wrote — he developed the concept that he called "Moral Insanity." Quote from him (now don't get lost and don't worry about it), notice the flow of what he is saying:

There is a form of mental derangement (1825 now) in which the intellectual functions appear to have sustained little or no injury while the disorder is manifest principally or alone in the state of the feelings, temper, or habits. In cases of this nature, the moral or active principles of the mind are strangely perverted or depraved. The power of self-government is lost or greatly impaired and the individual is found to be incapable, not of talking or reasoning upon any subject proposed to him, but of conducted himself with decency and propriety in the business of life.

Now that's a lot of words and I apologize, but he is making a point. His point is, there is something that happens to the moral part of the human being, to what he chose to label — now he is credited with using that label — “moral insanity.” An explanation of how and why the Native Americans can come and make peace with you, talk with you, deal with you, and then we might have done something to them (I'm not talking about good or bad here, that's not my point), but something happens and they, boom, kill you and scalp you. How could they do that? Because there is a condition of moral insanity. This is not explaining all bad, but its explaining things that human beings had a hard time reasoning through and understanding. How can someone be accountable, for instance? And those things did happen. How can someone willfully, gleefully shoot someone down? You would guess that I like to read about the pirates, right, because I like to go sailing, so I read about the Pirates in the Caribbean. If you read about some of the pirates, they would just sort of blow people away, just for the sake of blowing them away. They would be called morally insane by this definition.

Notice that there is no sin being talked about here. There is no sin. Now this sort of holds sway for a while until about 1891 until a guy named Koch comes along and he says, “well, what we really have here is not moral insanity- what we have here is psychopathic behavior.” Psyche, that is what makes us different from an animal; pathological — a pathological psyche, whatever makes us human is sick or diseased in some way and so hence, we get the term “psychopath or psychotic.” Those terms come into play. So he says this is an organic state that happens in the brain and some people it happens to and we don't know why. They always remain psychopathic in that they are caused by organic states and changes which are beyond the limits of physiological normality- they stem from a congenital or acquired inferiority of brain constitution. That is to say, “it ain't their fault!” Something is weird, something is wrong. Something happens in here that causes this kind of behavior. So moral insanity, psychopathic understanding of human beings and then it comes along in the 1900s and we get another term brought into play: sociopathy. Socio — social; pathology — a pathology of my understanding of the norms of society. Society acts upon me and I react to what society does to me by becoming numb or insensitive to what it is saying or doing.

Now, do you see where I am going with this? If you believe in a concept of hell — individual responsibility — my job as a psychologist is to explain human behavior. It is never my job as a psychologist to excuse human behavior. I don't think people should get off of crimes because of mental reasons. I think people who do it ought to be held accountable for what they do. That's just me, though. I don't hold sway in all of this.

Sociopathic behavior — I have a warped view of the norms of society, but society is what determines who and what is going on with me and what's happening. This goes on, by the way. 1925, a guy named Abraham wrote about antisocial behavior which comes after the sociopathy. And then listen to this because I think that he is describing accurately some of the things that go on.

“We often come across the result of early pampering, which intensifies the child's demands for love, to an extent which can never be adequately satisfied. You give the child too much, you breed or produce a narcissistic personality.”

Now if you remember your mythology, Narcissus (male or female) was the Greek god who sat around and look at himself or herself in the river — the water reflection — or in a brass mirror. They were consumed with themselves. Early pampering produces narcissism. This narcissism, in the absence of love — what happens if the child doesn't get enough love. You see, we are operating here on the principle that whatever is going on with me, is not my fault. It's what I got or didn't get. What I got too much of or too little of. What happens to me is that I am a consequence of something else. The opposite of a concept of individual responsibility and hell. If I get too much love, I end up narcissistic; if I don't get enough love, I become — there is a term called, “dissociative traits,” and dissociative traits in the absence of love, comparable to psychological under-nourishment which provides the precondition for the establishment of dissocial traits and excessive hatred and fury is generated which first directed against a small circle of persons is later directed against society as a whole. Now what is psychology telling us, then?

It's not your fault, folks. Your momma made you do it. It's the old Flip Wilson — if you are old enough to remember Flip — the devil made you do it. I didn't do it. Something else made me do it. You see we have this gap between my responsibility and my judgment that's going to come. Either Christ intercedes or I am judged according to what I've done and society is responsible for whatever has happened to me. This leads to what is called the antisocial personality disorder. The self-love of the individual in an antisocial personality disorder; excessive self-reference, self-centeredness, grandiosity, and the derived characteristics of exhibitionism (an attitude of superiority, recklessness, over-ambitiousness, over-dependency on admiration, emotional shallowness. Now, forgive me. I'm not trying to talk about anybody or anybody's relatives or kin-folks or anybody's grandkids. I once had a client who had 17 body piercings, all on his head. Eyebrows, ears, nose, chin — why does somebody do that? I know when we see someone walking down the street glittering in the sunshine we say, “Whoa, what did his parents do?!” Or what did they not do? The antisocial personality so often is going to this grandiosity, this self-centeredness, this “I need to be exceptional.” Have you all been watching the thing on TV with the gal who supposedly went to sleep and got all the tattoos on her face? The stars? Y'all do watch the news, don't you? I happen to have seen it one time — claims that she fell asleep; later she confessed that, “no, she did not fall asleep, she asked him to do all these stars on her face.” Why would anybody do that? Well, believe it or not, it's not their fault? They are just antisocial personalities because they didn't get enough love and attention growing up and it really isn't their fault at all. I disagree strongly with that, but that is where that line of thinking goes! We live in a generation of narcissism and at the same time, anti-social personalities,

and it is creeping into the church. It's creeping in...creeping in. Okay. Talking about this, the core beliefs of the anti-social personality — I need to look out for myself, I need to be the aggressor or I will be the victim. The antisocial personality also believes that other people are pansies or wimps — others are exploitive and therefore I am entitled to exploit them back. This person believes that he or she is entitled to break rules — rules are arbitrary and are designed to protect the haves against the have-nots. Antisocial patients automatic thoughts and reactions are frequently distorted by self-serving beliefs that emphasize immediate, personal satisfactions and minimize future consequences. Duh. What are we doing spilling trillions of dollars that we don't have, trying to take care of the immediate, not even giving consideration to the future. In addition, antisocial disorders tend to show a loss of future time perspective. Are we not living in a generation with antisocial personalities? It's all about me. It's about what I want, what I need, and furthermore, if you stand in the way, I will get you before you have a chance to get me. That's a major thing. Is that not some of what our government is doing right now?

In childhood, the antisocial personality tends to engage in lying, cheating, stealing, truancy, disobedience, fighting, and running away. When they get to adolescences, they tend to engage in destructive, sexual behavior and an illicit use of drugs and alcohol. In adulthood, these behaviors usually continue and an inability to establish a permanent marriage relationship also becomes manifest, coupled with a failure to constructively continue in a given occupation or interaction with others. You do understand that an average stay in a job or career is something like around 4-5 years in today's world? You do understand that people don't go into something—I'm one who has changed six or seven times, so I am not throwing stones at anybody. I started out as a minister, college teacher, psychologist, medical school, etc. so I flip-flopped around myself. Maybe I'm an antisocial personality.

But this reaction, this sets up something here. Christians believe in a hell. Individual accountability. The world today is heavily influenced and psychology has played a part in all of this because it gave the rational for all of this to take place. I am more the victim of what has taken place and happened — I am not the perpetrator. And I am entitled to certain things. Now you go onto a college campus and you wish to do a college ministry and you preach a God who loves you and cares for you and you are dealing with a guy over here (by the way, this is why God only does salvation, we don't — because the human ability to influence that person with those seventeen body piercings and to get him to understand judgment and accountability is close to zero. Only God can touch that kind of person). But we do this and we begin to understand how all of this entitlement — where did all of it come from? My grandparents had no sense of entitlement and yours probably didn't either, but it has come out of this feeling of victimization — the most wealthy country in the world, with the greatest standard of living, with the most opportunity, how is it that we feel that we're so pushed around that we should have an entitlement thing? By the way, there are this

corporate sense of responsibility. If you believe in individual responsibility — and forgive me, I am not trying to say something that is controversial so please take this as an illustration only — how in the world can we consider reparations for slavery if you believe in individual responsibility? If you believe in corporate responsibility, of course we need to apologize for what our great-grandparents did and we need to pay for what they did because we are corporately responsible for what they did. I'm not talking about — of course we need to help people — and reach out to people and do all we can in terms of mercy ministry, I'm all for it — that's not my point. The point is the rational for it. It's not the corporate responsibility. I believe in individual responsibility and that individual responsibility gives me all that I need to do to reach out and care for and show love to people. For when I start talking about the corporate responsibility and when I apologize for someone else's sin, by definition, I have snuck into the arena of corporate responsibility. This for your consideration.

Why does natural man reject the Reformed faith? Because hell has no meaning if all are responsible and none are responsible. If we believe in individual responsibility, I need to be concerned about hell — because I want to go to heaven. I need to confess my sins. I don't need to confess sin if it is all of our sin or its somewhere, somebody did something bad to someone — I need to confess the sin of that guy, whoever he was, who chased the truck around the interstates, you know? You probably saw that on the news too, and they finally caught him and that was not the first time he had done it — and he had done it many times before. I need to ask God to forgive me for what he did. That's what I'm talking about is unhealthy for the Christian faith. The sovereignty of God or the sovereignty of man? I believe in the sovereignty of God. Scriptures or individual rights? Scripture. Heaven or now? Heaven. Hell or group responsibility? Hell. When all are responsible, no one is responsible. Have you ever been to a church picnic where everybody was responsible for cleaning up the kitchen? Enough said. Enough said. When everybody's responsible, nobody is responsible. Father's shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers, each is to die for his own sin (Deut. 24:16). That's what we believe. We believe in a personal God, a personal Savior, we believe in a personal relationship, and we believe that we need to reach out to other people — yes — but I can't confess your sin any more than you can confess my sin. I can acknowledge sin and I do need to do that — yes, I do need to acknowledge sin, but I can't confess your sin.

Let's pray.

Father, again I pray that you will help your people to think through what's taking place around them, that you will give them the courage to look to your Word and to what our forefathers have put down on paper — our confessions, our catechisms, to try to see what these have to do with today's world. Keep us from thinking lightly of sin, keep us from thinking lightly of our responsibility, but also Lord, keep us fixed upon your Sovereignty, your Word, the concept of Heaven

and the concept of Hell. Please give us the strength to be your people. Amen.

Let's stand...Receive God's blessing and benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, rest and abide with each of you both now and forever more."

Singing of the Doxology.

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