

From Canada

SCRIPTURAL BASES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

THE PROMISE OF A NEW COVENANT

by Revd. Rod Carter

“These days are surely coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt - a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,” says the Lord. “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
(Jeremiah 31: 31-34)

COMMENTARY

The old covenant has been abolished by Israel’s disobedience, for a covenant is a mutual agreement between two parties which remains in force only so long as both parties abide by the terms of the agreement. Israel had been unfaithful. The external law written in a book or on tablets of stones will now become dictates of the inward moral sense informed by true knowledge of God in the Old Testament is equivalent to faith in the New Testament. The result of such faith or knowledge of God is sound morality.

REFLECTION

Changing our outward appearance or demeanour is hardly effective in our spiritual life when inward regeneration is needed. Some writers would later refer to this as being born again or becoming a new creation. Our spirituality must be internalized which activates us to respond externally by reaching out to those in need.

THE OLD LAW AND THE NEW

“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first to be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”
(Matthew 5:23, 24)

COMMENTARY

Jesus is emphasizing an urgency for reconciliation. The Mishnah says that the Day of Atonement does not atone for offences against one's neighbour, unless one reconciles with him or her. A sacrifice offered by an individual was of no value if he or she had not put right an offence committed.

REFLECTION

Jesus uses this example to show how the principles expressed in the law involve at the personal level. Sin begins in the mind and will. The earlier the intervention, the better. The standards of the Kingdom of God are way above the standards of the law courts. This is Jesus' restoration of the law.

RIGHT WITH GOD

"For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (*Romans 5: 10,11*)

COMMENTARY

Through Christ's sacrificial death God has changed us from enemies to friends. As Paul sees it, it is always God who reconciles and people who are reconciled to God. These reconciled ones share the life of Christ. To share this divine life if to be saved. Christians owe it all to God's reconciling work in Christ.

REFLECTION

However we adhere to and understand the doctrine of the atonement, God's love for each one of us goes unquestioned. Generally the atonement is understood as the restoration of humankind to a right relationship with God through the obedience and death of Jesus Christ (not to overlook his life) Further, this restoration expands to oneself and others.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation. (*2 Corinthians 5: 18,19*)

COMMENTARY

God was in Christ reconciling the world to God, God taking the initiative toward humankind and Christ never doing God's work more fully than he did on the Cross, The message of the reconciling work of God through Christ was entrusted to Paul and the Church.

REFLECTION

The message of reconciliation has been entrusted to us. In whatever ways our work and ministry allows us to assist in conflicted situations and parties in dispute, God is with us. The empowered message must begin with ourselves, having experienced our own reconciliation we can lend help. We cannot give away what we don't have.

THE HOMECOMING

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided the property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe - the best one - and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called on one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might

celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours comes back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you kill the fatted calf for him!’ The father said to him, ‘Son you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’ (Luke 15: 11-32)

COMMENTARY

The father’s welcome precedes the son’s confession and begins while the son is still far off. The elder son by calling his brother ‘this son of yours’ fails to recognize his fraternity with outcast sinners. The father saying ‘Your brother’ corrects the unbrotherly attitude.

God cares for those who have done wrong in life. God is always ready to forgive any who turn to God. The elder son in the story, shows neither love nor pity for those who fail to meet their standards. But God rejoices at their rescue.

REFLECTION

The following letter was written by my parents to the National Parole Board.

National Parole Board of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Sirs,

We respectfully request the release of our son Rodney Steven Carter on parole as of Dec 1968, at which time we are given to understand he could be released if parole is granted.

Our son is being held at Collins Bay Penitentiary since his sentence last Oct 2, 1967.

Since being in prison Rodney has been taking a course in motor mechanics which he will have completed by parole date, and also has been taking a correspondence course which will give him grade ten academic standing by that time.

We would like Rodney to be released so that he can continue his education. It is his desire and ours that he continue to school under Program Five and obtain his grades eleven and twelve. Rodney will be residing at home with us while attending school. When he has completed grade twelve he will do one of two things;

obtain employment or enrol in another school of higher learning. The second alternative will depend on financial circumstances at the time which I think we will be able to provide if Rodney decides to go on to higher learning.

Rodney was never in any serious trouble before being sentenced on the charge for which he is now being held. He left high school at age 16 after completing grade nine and a year in grade ten which he was not successful in passing. Rodney joined the Canadian Army where he served two and a half years in the Tank Corps. He was home on leave from Camp Gagetown, New Brunswick when he became involved in the circumstances which led to his being sent to Collins Bay. He was released on bail and was on duty at Trenton Air Station at the time he was sentenced to three and a half years.

Rodney had signed on in the Army for three years and it was his intention to return to school after his three year term was up which would have been in Feb. 1968. He still wishes to return to school to complete his formal education, for which he has the ability as I am sure the authorities in charge at Collins Bay will attest.

It is our intention to stand behind Rodney and help in any way we can so that he can complete his high school and return to a useful place in the community.

Rodney's arrest and following sentence came as a terrible shock and he has cause untold anguish among relatives and those who know him well. My wife has had to be under our doctor's care ever since and myself to a lesser degree. With God's help we have carried on and have tried to see things in the right perspective.

Rodney is deeply concerned over the anguish he has caused by becoming involved in this terrible affair, he wants to make amends at the earliest possible date. We see no useful purpose being served in Rodney being confined to the end of his sentence, to ponder over the trouble he has caused for himself as well as many others. However a useful purpose can be achieved by an early start at rehabilitation by Rodney to make amends and pick up the pieces to start anew. We are confident Rodney can do this. Rodney is

prepared to do his utmost. We ask you show mercy and by so doing open the way to an early start at rehabilitation and a return to a normal way of life for Rodney and all others concerned.

In closing we again respectfully submit our request for Rodney to be released on parole so that he can start anew, obtain his education and become a useful citizen in this society.

Respectfully yours,

Mr. E. R. Carter (Father)

Mrs. F.M. Carter (Mother)

My Parents wrote this letter on my behalf to the National Parole Board. They had previously gone to a friend to borrow the necessary finances to release me on bail. My mother and father visited me. My mother and father visited me the allowable time of two one-hour visits per month while I was incarcerated. My sister came also but couldn't leave the car when she saw the foreboding appearance of Kingston Penitentiary; she stayed in the car and cried. My mother was a 'pray-er,' and her faith evidence was that prayer from the heart would be answered. She also wrote a letter to the relatives virtually challenging any one of them to act in 'elder brother' fashion. They were all supportive of me and my plight. That I wanted out of prison was clear. My parents and others who loved me were preparing a place for me - a place of full reunion and restoration.

THE STONE THE BUILDERS REJECTED

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

(Psalm: 118: 22)

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'" (Matthew 21: 42)

But he looked at them and said, "What then does this text mean: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" (Luke 20: 17)

This Jesus is, 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone'.

(Acts 4: 11)

Build upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

(Ephesians 2: 20)

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner."

(1 Peter 2: 7)

COMMENTARY

Commentators tell us that this was probably sung by congregation or choir (as it is a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving) The experience of deliverance is the subject of the thanksgiving. It is described as a metaphor from building. It is the chief cornerstone, being the bond stone, which links two walls at right angles. In the New Testament it is given Christological interpretations.

REFLECTION

The Psalm 118: 22 is one of, if not the, most often quoted Old Testament verses in the New Testament. To me it represents the courage to rise above adversity, to seek restoration and one's rightful place of equality in the human family. There will always be those who want prisoners to receive no mercy, who will blame or revictimize victims and will scare our communities by exaggerating crime rates. Yet it is through the engagement that prisoners, victims and communities are prepared to enter into that these 'power-brokers' and bullies will be contained and exposed as the 'heavy hands' they are.

Kahlil Gibran paraphrased this Psalm, "The most solid stone in the structure is the lowest one in the foundation." We are enacting this Psalm when as prisoners or victims or as members who care about their community, we refuse to accept rejection or abandonment. It's when we stand up and are counted. It's when we dare to reach to become the people God intends us to be.

In our present criminal justice system victims, offenders and community members can feel alienated and disallowed from meaningful engagement in the legal process. Restorative Justice resolutions allow involvement and lead to more satisfying outcomes. People feel heard and accepted and can begin their personal journeys toward healing and restoration.

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An ex-offender, he received a Pardon in 1977. He is ordained with the United Church of Canada

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