

Cultural Apostasy: The Coronavirus in Context

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You may well be asking, “Where is God in the current *Coronavirus* outbreak?”

How do we understand it and respond in this moment of crisis?

First, we must establish that God is good. He is not the author of evil and tempts no one:

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

James 1:13

Second, we must understand that in his sovereignty he subjugates evil to his own purpose:

this Man [Jesus], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Acts 2:23

All of creation – including evil – serves God’s good purpose. History has been called forth from eternity to fulfil his plan. There is, therefore, *nothing* outside of his sovereign control.

Third, we must also understand that God’s dealings with man are covenantal.

Our first parents were created as covenant creatures with religious and ethical obligations. By obeying the Creator-God, Adam was to enjoy the covenant blessings and thereby fill and subdue the earth. God’s command was for the purpose of extending Eden and thus human flourishing to the whole earth. If he rebelled, asserting himself as a would-be god, he would instead experience the covenant curse of death. This he did by decreeing his own law and reality in place of God’s. And this also is *our* choice, we either worship the Creator or the creature.

By virtue of creation, therefore, all of life is religious. There is no secular/sacred divide—the earth is the Lord’s and is Sovereign over all. There is, therefore, no neutral realm in which man is independent of God. Our obedience to God and his covenant, consequently, plays out in *every* aspect of life. This means that we cannot confine “religion” to merely matters of personal piety. The crown rights of Christ the King – as the Creator-God – must be asserted over every area of life, from the personal to the cultural.

As Henry Van Til famously said, “culture is religion externalised”. The ultimate reference point of a society will determine its social morés and laws, whether it be the false gods of secular Humanism or of the true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As a culture, therefore, we face a choice between the Creator-God and his covenant-law or the gods that are no gods and their laws. This is *the* nub of the culture wars and of our cultural apostasy: man's law versus God's law.

Herein lies the answer to the human predicament.

The choice: blessing or curse

God sets before us as individuals, families and societies a choice between blessing and curse—between obeying the Lord or pursuing other gods:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.

Deuteronomy 11:26–28

Man lives in a moral universe governed by God. Regardless of his beliefs, he cannot escape the covenant consequence of his choices. His rebellion and pretended autonomy result in defeat and death.

But as God revealed to Moses the covenant sanctions are *incremental*. God does not judge his people in one fell swoop. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 set forth the covenant sanctions. Both Adam's and Israel's rebellion resulted in temporal and eternal death.

Nevertheless, Adam did not die immediately, nor did Israel go into instantaneous captivity.

After rehearsing Israel's salvation history and the blessings of obedience, the Lord declares to Israel:

But *if you will not listen to me* and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, *but break my covenant*, then I will do this to you: *I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever* that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

Leviticus 26:14–16

“Panic, disease, and fever” are the direct result of broken covenant.

However, panic and fear will only take hold of a society that has lost its fear of God. The society that fears the Lord will be secure in him and within the bounds of his moral constraints.

God's people need not fear what the nations fear:

For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, *and do not fear what they fear*, nor be in dread. *But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear*, and let him be your dread.

Isaiah 8:11–13

The West: a history of broken covenants

Not only is man in covenant with God by virtue of creation, the *Western nations*, in particular, have historically enacted *national covenants* with God. And this, in response to the Gospel of Christ, for the advance of the Kingdom of God.

For example, the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643, enacted by Parliament, covenanted England, Scotland, and Ireland to the Lord for the promotion of the Gospel. The constitutional preambles of Australia, Canada and Ireland, and numerous European and formerly colonial nations, invoke the Christian God as the basis of their legal existence.

To whom much is given, much is required.

The formerly Christian civilisation of Europe and the West is now being held to account.

With its roots in the 18th century so-called *Enlightenment*, the West has committed wholesale apostasy. And, with a severe case of “cultural amnesia”, she has rejected her heritage, and is now reaping a whirlwind.

Ushering in the 20th century this wind blew with the sinking of the “unsinkable”—the *Titanic* in 1912, the pride of Western industry and engineering.

Two years later **WW I** descended upon the world with **20 million deaths**. On the heels of this, the **Spanish flu** with another **50 million deaths**. And then, in only one more decade—**WW II** with another **50 million deaths**, not to mention the Stalinist pogroms and the genocides of Mao’s communist China and Pol Pot’s Cambodia.

We must put the *Coronavirus* into this larger context.

The answer: Christ, a curse for us

The good news is that if we return to the Lord as a culture and as nations the Lord will relent:

But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.”

Leviticus 26:40–42, 45

Indeed, the negative sanctions of the covenant will be lifted because Christ has borne the curse for us:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:13–14

While Christ has borne the curse of the law – our moral guilt and condemnation to death – this does not in any way abrogate the continuing full force of God’s law for *all* men and nations. And, therefore, the consequences *in history* for our personal *and* corporate disobedience—including ecclesial, civil, and political. There is one God, one law, and one Gospel for all

men.

Consequently, the events of history are but the record of God's covenant dealings with man, both his curses and blessings. History is, hence, the outworking of our obedience or disobedience to the Creator-God and his covenant. Nevertheless, God, in his sovereignty, works out his predestined plan even through our waywardness.

So, where are we and what does the future hold?

A phenomenon of God's activity in history is that his judgement and his mercy often travel together. As the prophet cried out, "In your wrath, remember mercy!"

Both revival and judgement are often fellow travellers.

It is crucial, therefore, that we interpret God's judgements accurately. They are designed to be restorative—to arrest our attention and drive us back to him:

For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

Isaiah 26:9

Until there is a critical-mass of those who see the larger context of our culture's apostasy there will only be a repeat of history: world wars, genocide, and global pandemics.

It behoves ministers of *church* and *state* to take bold steps toward public repentance. These two institutions have historically emerged in the West as a result of biblical Christianity—ordained by God for the welfare of society: the church as a ministry of *grace* and the state as a ministry of *justice*.

It falls to these leaders, therefore, to express, on behalf of their constituencies, their grief for the last 150 years of ecclesial and cultural apostasy from the God of our inheritance.

Let us, therefore, pray and labour toward an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a wholesale recovery of our spiritual and cultural heritage.

This will mean the church recovering her mandate to teach nations the entire law-word of God, as the comprehensive wisdom of God for every area of life: from the *personal* to the *cultural*.

The victory is the Lord's!

Photo by CDC on Unsplash. Transmission electron microscopic image of an isolate from the first U.S. case of COVID-19, formerly known as 2019-nCoV.

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