

RELATIONAL REFLECTION ON “GOD’S INITIATIVE, MAN’S NEED”

-- PART 2 of 2--

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(Editor’s note: this is the second of a 2-part series)

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“Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and the Lord listened and heard it and a book of remembrance was written before him for those who feared the Lord and who thought on his name....And He will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers lest I come and smite the land with a curse.” (Malachi 3:16 & 4:6)

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8)

“...relation presupposes both distance (distinctness) and presentness.” (Reuel Howe)

When we read Malachi the main theme is God’s Unchanging Love (Malachi 1:2; 3:6). We also read of two groups of religious people. One group is the arrogant complainers (Mal 3:13-15) and the other the remnant (Mal 3:16-18). Two characteristics of the remnant are: **they feared the Lord and they thought on his name**. The expression “thought on his name” (hos bi s mo) means “to meditate”, “regard” or “to focus one’s mind”. This is the same expression, which the Greek translations of the Old Testament uses for the Apostle Paul’s expression in Philippians “think on these things” (Phil 4:8) i.e. “take inventory on these things.”

There are four relational reflections on “the remnant” in terms of “God’s initiative, man’s need”.

First, the clergy and laity are in partnership. The Bible only recognizes two offices in this regard – elders and deacons, see 1 Tim.3. There is a plurality of leaders emerging – they spoke to one another. This means that leaders never graduate from their need of conversation. They joined the circle of conversation by adding conversation to their preaching and teaching – a dialogical approach. For incarnational relationships to develop the goal to die to self is to help others. Servanthood and humility are crucial if we are to avoid rampant insecurity in family relationships and society.

Second, words take on a different meaning in dialogue from monologue because people come from different contexts. Here we read the Lord listened and heard. Like-mindedness in Christ rather than monologue in isolation emerged. Godly communication is not to give **our answers** to people or to secure consensus from **our point of view**. Rather, when useful information is supplied, a conviction borne out of dialogue helps people make responsible decisions.

“If Christians would be like Christ, they must expect to become dialogical persons to and through whom he may speak. The incarnation in us of the spirit of dialogue would cleanse the church of the sickness of clericalism and parochialism, and prepare the church in its dispersed life for participation in God’s saving work in the world.” (Reuel Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue*, p.102 Seabury Press, 1963)

People are important to God and His agenda – a book (scroll) of remembrance was written before Him. (Cf. Esther 6:1; Psalm 56:8 and Daniel 7:10). Furthermore the remnant experienced happiness beyond their prayers. The Lord made two promises. The Lord says, “They will be mine” **and** are “my treasured possession.” (Malachi 3:17). Dialogue breaks down barriers between God and between man and man and man. When we wrongly separate God and man’s kingdom, we divide into right and wrong and get it wrong. Don’t we need to separate vertical relationships from horizontal in order to understand both?. Note Joab’s comment to David “*You have put all your servants to shame today by loving those you hate and hating those who love you.*” (2 Samuel 19:6-7). Don’t mistake your friends **for** your enemies and your friends **as** your enemies. The question is not whether I am standing on God’s side, but whether God is standing on our side. You are still indulging in truisms that negate the impact of your thought process and create impatience in the reader.

Third, **intimacy between God and those who feared the Lord emerged**. For this to happen mutual responsibility and accountability is required. Both spiritual maturity and continuity is measured by our conversation with

one another. God's first action with Creation was to speak "And God said...and there was... (Genesis 1:3). In Malachi those who feared the Lord not only spoke to one another but also thought on his name. Mutuality opened two-way communication – each freeing the other to speak **with** rather than **about** each other – an authentic presence both of Christ and affirmation of the persons present.

Husband and wife need to talk together in a way that children overhear it and are encouraged to join in the circle of conversation. The husbands of such families become the Elders of the churches and they see that each member joins the circle of conversation and love. In the creation story Eve is instructed to help Adam hear and understand what God has been saying to them in conversation so that together they can obey God with understanding his will and purposes.(Dr Ralph W. Christensen)

Fourth, the remnant **labored for a faithful community – a restored kingdom people**. He will turn hearts of the fathers to the children and hearts of the children to the fathers where inter and intra generational communication can take place – the miracle of dialogue. Lay people need to know the World and Life View of the Gospel and how to talk about the Principles involved, that will never allow Relevant Cultural Applications to become part of the Gospel given. (Dr Ralph W. Christensen)

A good New Testament example of someone who applied these principles is Phillip, the evangelist, who was a bridge builder between clergy laity distinctions and spoke to both groups without extinguishing either. He is found prophesying with his four daughters; hosting the Apostle Paul and his companions. Phillip rose above common problems of threatened clergy, or sheep wanting instant rather than durable responsibilities or modernity problems – relationships built on volunteerism rather than or without dependable common values. Need to clarify, perhaps expand a little here (See Acts 6:1-7; 8:1ff & Acts 21:1-9).

In many so-called contemporary worship services, worship is reduced to 45 minutes of boisterous singing and another 45 minutes of motivational talk. (Dr. Simon Chan. Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Theological College, Singapore. Quote from "Talk on Worship and Pastoral Care" – Hong Kong, January 2002)

As we have taken stock of our own lives, learn from our Chinese Christian brothers and sisters, identify in their struggles we have, in a very low key but patient way, sought to apply these principles in our own lives. By God's grace and for His glory we share some comments. (We have used the original print fonts. We have changed the font size for space.

Dear brother Rod:

Thanks for such a wonderful sharing! It's inspiring and encouraging! I've known of a number of people that are facing almost the same situation as Brother Brian has these days due to the economic environment in Hong Kong. Life has not been easy for them and they need strong support both from the Lord and their fellow brothers and sisters.

Thanks for releasing such a positive inspiration to revive the spiritual climate that is surrounding those who are still going through hard times!!!

Lilian (Marketplace transformation group)

Dear Rod

Thanks a lot for your sharing. I was very impressed by your openness. I asked bread but you provided me not only physical bread but also spiritual needs.

What a nice friend you are!

Thanks for your continuing prayer and love in Him.

With love

Margaret (colleague)

Rod, I see you are trying to bring a pastoral touch to your accounting job. Several colleagues I spoke to in China appreciate your help and personal interest in them. Thanks. (Expressed verbally to Rod)

Matthew (colleague)

Dear Rod (and Judy),

Thank you for your writing and reminder. I am so glad to have you and Judy here to be "my missionary mentors". Yes I will even say that the most important spiritual fruits are meekness and humility, if there is any.

These days I often experienced "touches" from the Spirit. Once when I was working on a sermon and once when I was writing a book report, and both were happened in the library as I was surrounded by shelves of books (oh i love shelves of books so much). Each time my tears start to roll as I experienced His grace, His love and His forgiveness towards me. I feel so blessed and calm though.

We now have a male minister serving in Lokwah. Finally, God has answered our prayer, even more than what we have asked for. His name is BIG JOHN, who is around 31 having a young wife and a cute little girl. Yesterday both of us had started to share, to plan and to pray together. I feel so amazed to find out that we two had a close vision in ministry. I feel that it's time that God starts to build Lokwah into a stronger church.

Anyway, please remember all of us here. And pray that our new team or combination will glorify Him.

Regards,

Wilson (with Karen) [friends from Lok Wah Church – Wilson currently studying at Seminary]

December 5, 2004