



December 9, 2020

Dear Ministry Partners,

What a year we have all been through! COVID, riots, the election, conspiracy theories on the right and left, racial animosity, defunding the police, wildfires and hurricanes—tension is high and trust is low. It all feels a bit unreal, which caused me to ponder what the Bible teaches about reality.

A LAMENTATION FOR REALITY

What is real and how can I know? Is God real, does the Bible give a true depiction of reality? These important questions can only be answered, affirmatively or negatively, by faith. If God is real and the Bible is true, then we become privy to knowledge that we could not otherwise possess. Not least among these truths is that God is a moral Spirit and the universe He created is both spiritual and moral. Further, the spiritual and moral have primacy over the merely physical and natural.

To say this differently, the spiritual and moral are in a very important sense more real than the natural world which we all experience through our reason and senses. They are more real because the natural world that we currently experience is merely temporary and will be done away with. But the spiritual and moral world, which underpins the natural world transcends time and space, being itself eternal. When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

Because this is so, the church has long understood that her first allegiance is to that spiritual and moral reality, even, and especially if, that reality came into conflict with the secular world around her. This formed the backbone of the Christian worldview for centuries. Further, in our earthly lives, we are citizens of that spiritual world and how we live our earthly lives materially impacts our standing in that future world. But the world is full of temptation.

With the sexual and feminist revolutions of the 1960-70's, the church began to embrace an increasingly secular worldview. This heterosexual revolution was soon followed by a homosexual revolution, to include gay marriage. Not long afterward, transsexual and transgender groups demanded recognition, with the result that there is now a multiplicity of "non-conforming" genders. How many there are I am

not sure, but we are compelled to learn an ever-expanding vocabulary of pronouns for each of these “new genders.”

Most Christians would see in the above paragraph a declension in morality. And most would further agree that the last step of a multiplicity of genders is not “real.” They might even quote Genesis 1:27, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” We are tempted to say that there is a movement from the “merely” immoral to the “completely” unreal. But to do so is to miss an important feature of our fallen nature.

This drift towards unreality has been with us from the very beginning and is, in truth, endemic to our kind. When our first parents disbelieved God with respect to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they immediately launched themselves and their children on the flight from reality. To disbelieve or disobey God is itself an assault against reality. But having disbelieved God, they compounded their sin by believing another lie about reality– the lie that they could hide from God and cover their sin with fig leaves. What they did literally we do figuratively. How so?

It is terrifyingly unnatural to stand “open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” But the awful reality is that at all times we all so stand before Him. To enter that spiritual reality is to see myself in stark and unflattering terms – poor, blind, naked. And who can bear His eyes?

And so I flee in search of fig leaves. I cover myself in worry, anxiety, self-pity, discouragement. I plunge myself into endless activity or the pursuit of pleasure and money. I entangle myself in the affairs of the world, obsessing over politics or the economy. I create the illusion of control by micromanaging others or by developing an eating disorder. I drown my sorrows in alcohol, illicit sex, daydreaming, fantasizing and manipulative relationships. And in doing these and many similar things, anger, hurt, fear and disappointment grow, while faith, hope and love diminish. My soul becomes hollow.

The great truth of the Bible is that this One, who sees me as I really am and whose gaze I can neither bear nor escape, is both my problem and my solution. “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

It is true that His gaze is fearsome and we need to see it as such. But His are also eyes of love and compassion. And only He can help. To stand always in His presence, to abide in the one true Vine, to live by faith in spiritual reality is the test of this life. To do otherwise is to be consumed by evil and to become as empty as the unreality

upon which it is based. But for the one who overcomes, who entrusts himself to the Lover of his soul, to the one who remains under His all-seeing and loving eyes, the fragrance and aroma of Christ begin to pervade his soul. To be sure, this process is slow and halting. But for him who does this, there will be no lamentation for reality.

Gail & I have been blessed beyond all that we could ask or think through you all. We all move ever closer to standing before the Lord Jesus, whether in the air or through death. Our prayer is that God would raise up for Himself a people worthy of His name and that we would all be among them. May we finish the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

With love,

Jerry & Gail