

Losing Sight of the 3rd commandment in reformed theology

Introduction

Wolterstorff is an influential Christian philosopher of Christian Reformed heritage. In his book, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion Alone* (1976), he parrots Kant *in contrast*. Kant wrote *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (1804). Kant is the master defender of asserted human autonomy; the title of W's book suggests that W will argue for God-centeredness over against autonomy. By an large, he does this but with a glitch: he loses sight of the 3rd commandment.

For the Christian there is an evident praxis [practical] orientation "that each of us is not to be the center of his own concerns but is rather to love and serve God with all his life, and, in similar fashion, to love his neighbor as himself" (111).

Scripture clearly teaches that we must do this as responsible stewards of the creation (111). In these things, "God is enjoining us to participate in his own cause of human fulfillment" (112).

Criticism of the Westminster Divines

There is a "reluctance - even a refusal - thus to link what God sets as human responsibility and what he sets as the goal toward which he is working in history" (112). A case in point is the catechism where it is stated that the end of man is to know and enjoy God (to glorify and enjoy him). The failure is that in this statement, "nature and neighbor have dropped from the picture" (112).

God's Goal for human existence-Shalom (GK. Eirene, cf. irenic)

The goal of human existence is that man should dwell at peace in all his relationships: with God, with himself, with his fellows, with nature, a peace which is not merely the absence of hostility, though certainly it is that, but a peace which at its highest is enjoyment. Justice can be grim. In shalom there is delight (114).

He thus emphasizes passages where justice is associated with righteousness that issues in peace (Isa. 32:16-18; with Lk. 2:14: Glory to God in heaven, on earth, *peace*). Therefore, the justification of a scholar's activities "must be found ultimately in the contribution of scholarship to the cause of justice-in-shalom" (116).

Does Wolterstorff misread the Westminster divines?

We ask this question because of his critique of the Westminster divines. Wolterstorff claims that they so emphasize knowing God as the goal of man that "nature and neighbor drop from the picture" (RB 112). Instead of this emphasis, Wolterstorff presses the claim that the goal of human existence is peace and enjoyment. Hence, his point that shalom is the goal of history (both within and at its end).

We should note some things, however, that show Wolterstorff's view to be ill-founded.

1) First, using passages that he cites to make his case, we note that peace is a fruit of righteousness (Isa. 32). 2) Second, righteousness includes bringing all thoughts captive to Christ; it includes reasoning consistently in accord with Christian presuppositions. 3) Third, righteousness itself has a chief and ultimate end, the glory of God. Thus when the Prince of righteousness is born the angels glorify God as indicated in the passage Wolterstorff quotes (Lk. 2:14). The ultimate goal is the glory of God through righteousness and the fruit of righteousness is peace.

To make the point pointedly, peace has a subordinate place as part of the fabric of spiritual fruits that have the glory of God as their ultimate end, as in Philippians 1.9-11.

Philippians 1:9-11 ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Therefore, Wolterstorff's interpretation is *reductionistic* in that he takes one of the fruits of the Spirit and reduces all else to it. Coming from a tradition of reformed theology, he loses sight of God's glory that is a focal point of the 3rd commandment.

A tendency

Perhaps it is good to note that we tend toward reductionism whenever we discover something that we think has been missing in the church or neglected. Trying to bring it back on the table and having enthusiasm in doing so, we may go from neglect to thinking that this formerly lost truth is "everything." We may see everything through the eyes of that teaching and thus tend to reduce all else to it.