

Response
by
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Al Truesdale has brought to the table an issue that must be developed. Until now we have felt comfortable holding to neutral ground on issues that were not in the limelight of our distinguishing doctrine of salvation (entire sanctification). But the postmodern world requires us to recognize the urgency of further development.

Are we ready to develop our ecclesiology and eschatology? Indeed, we must if the work of the Church is to be built on a solid foundation. In our passion to serve, we are susceptible to other doctrinal persuasions being offered, and the needs of our world demand that we take a stand. Without a strong theological framework, we will either evade the complex issues of the postmodern world, or we may lose momentum in the face of persecution. We **MUST** define our vision of hope.

Will the range of our hope see the world as we know it *restored* when it is liberated from its bondage to decay (the *maximalist* vision), OR, do we envision the destruction of this present world and the *creation* of a new place where we will live (the *minimalist* vision)?

What should our criteria be for developing our theology? Truesdale points out that you can find scriptures on either side of the argument. This flexibility meets the needs of believers to sustain hope, regardless of their culture or worldview. But if we appeal to our vision of God and the world, what issues do we consider critical? Our theology must be consistent with our theology of God and his creation; and it must also be in harmony with God's ultimate purpose to have a personal relationship with humans.

How do the alternatives affect our doctrine of God? Does the minimalist view suggest God's failure in his human experiment? Would starting over affirm that humans indeed were **NOT** able to subdue the earth and maintain a loving relationship with their Creator? Moses pled with God not to destroy the Hebrews after they made the golden calf, arguing that the Egyptians would question God's motives. Could the argument against destruction also be applied to God's methods? Would the destruction of the Kingdoms of this world suggest that either God did *not* create all things good, or that his confidence in humanity was unfounded? Perhaps the maximalist view provides the substance needed to prove that humankind will indeed fulfill their God-given potential.

What about our radical optimism in God's grace for his creation? The maximalist view of the restoration of the kingdoms of this world (in the absence of sin) is more consistent with our belief that the image of God can be restored in this life. Wesley Tracy, in his "Introduction" to *What is a Nazarene?*, says "Few others believe, as we do, that there is almost no limit to the good things that can happen in and through you because of the atoning grace of Jesus Christ." If we take our concept of God's grace to its logical conclusion, we must also be confident that God's grace is sufficient to restore **ALL** of creation.

Our range of hope must be consistent with the divine self-revelation of Jesus Christ. To behold Jesus is to behold the One who sent him. Jesus **IS** who he appeared to be. He respected human participation and never hinted that he considered revoking our responsibility to subdue the earth. On the contrary, he came to offer us the power needed to fulfill our task. The minimalist view suggests that peace on earth is essentially impossible. Furthermore, it seems to lead to the notion of predestination. The maximalist view of hope provides a better foundation for our faith that the kingdoms of this world will one day be able to love and serve one another freely.

Which of the two perspectives of hope is more consistent with our concept of sin and the flesh? The root of our problem is sin, not flesh or the material world. Sin is the intruder that interferes with God's plan for

humanity. Thus, is it not the intruder that interferes with the rest of God's creation? Creation is the context of finite beings, but since all that God created was "good," we cannot say that He had a less than perfect design that must necessarily be replaced.

God's desire is to have a relationship with his human creatures. That relationship is hindered solely by the presence of sin. Wouldn't the removal of sin make the relationship possible, regardless of the conditions or location? Adam was expelled from the garden to keep him from eating from the "tree of life," a dangerous combination with sin in his heart. Without sin, would not eternal life be permitted? By natural extension, what is possible for humans is certainly possible for the kingdoms of this world.

We believe that in the consummated Kingdom there will be an unwavering devotion and personal relationship to the King. The enemy will return all the stolen riches of the Kingdom to its true Creator and Sustainer. ALL that God created will be restored to his original design and purpose and true LOVE will reign. Although we typically associate these realities with a new heaven and a new earth, there is nothing in essential conflict with the maximalist view of hope.

In spite of escalating knowledge and technology, the world has been unable to save itself. Postmodern society has adopted a pessimistic view of the world's potential to be restored. We must not allow ourselves to be pushed into accepting a theology of God with a negative view of humanity. After all, theology is first of all a study of God. Perhaps this is fertile ground for us to proclaim that God's intentions for his created order are going to see what God has prepared, which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the human heart. If we sustain our radical optimism, we may have reason to say that what God spoke into existence was indeed very good.

The maximalist view of hope may not dominate the contemporary theological scene, but we must proclaim God's grace regardless of what is popular. There are more consistencies between the maximalist view and our Wesleyan theology. We WILL see the healing of the nations; how and when remains unknown. This is our HOPE.