

Curate's Rant — Protecting God

A while ago Latimer's Curate took up golf on his days off. The funny thing about golf (apart from it ruining a good walk) is that little adjustments have large repercussions. The smallest change in a swing will cause a big effect in where the ball ends up.

The curate has a natural disposition towards sending the ball off to the right (technically this is called a slice, although it's often called other things) and so has to compensate to correct this. The problem is that this slice is such a fearful beast that the curate has overcompensated. And everything else in his game has got ugly. To the point he's thinking that bowls might be a better option for day off relaxation.

This overcompensation is not restricted to golf. The fear of something can often drive us too far in the other direction and it happens in our talk about God. Over the past few months New Zealand has seen earthquakes and floods and mining disasters. And as these things have struck, Christians have done the right and proper thing, sitting with those affected, caring for them, praying with them, offering them the hope of a God who loves and comforts his people. And as the questions 'why me, why this, why now' have been asked, most Christians have rightly offered the biblical answer—we don't know why you, why this, why now. The problem the curate has noticed is that afterwards, often in trying to make a more public statement from a Christian point of view, words have been said which seem to have overcompensated.

Here's the danger people seem to want to avoid: we don't want to say 'God made the earthquake'. Or 'God killed the miners'. We don't want to say it because we don't want to attribute such tragedies to God. We don't want to be understood as saying that God looked down from heaven and ruthlessly or maliciously caused a mine to explode. Or that he punished Christchurch for some particular sin. And that's right—we don't want to be heard to say those things. We don't want our loving Lord, whom we want our friends and whanau to come to know, to be thought of as being nasty and mean and vengeful.

But here's the overcompensation. We say instead that God wasn't involved. The curate has heard 1 Kings 19 applied—'God wasn't in the earthquake'. He has read that the '... deaths were tragically the result of an accident, a terrible

devastating accident' but still only an accident. There was no divine fate at work to snatch their lives away.'

But that isn't right. Do we really want to say that God wasn't involved, that he wasn't in control? If he wasn't in control, then who was? Fate? Mother earth? Karma? Of course God was involved. He must be. He is the Lord who forms light and creates darkness, who brings prosperity and creates disaster (Isa 45:7), who does what he pleases (Dan 4:35). Of course it is right that God's power and sovereignty are spoken about properly, but we should do that, not try and absolve God of any involvement at all.

Because if he wasn't in control and wasn't involved then not only is the door left open for someone or something else to be calling the shots in this universe, it also means that this 'god' can be of little hope or help. The best he can do is sit with us as we try and endure whatever it is that we're going through. He becomes as much a victim as we might be. You see we haven't protected God by denying his involvement or sovereignty in an event—all we've done is rendered him impotent.

We don't need to protect God, we need to graciously and carefully speak of his sovereign hand in all things, even in tragedies. And we need to speak of his sovereignty in the greatest thing of all. When an innocent man was executed for wrongs he never did—when the creator was killed by his creation. Not so that he might become a victim with them, but that he might become a substitute for them. So that he might be raised to life triumphant over death, sovereignly ruling over sin and death and the devil, and that he might now powerfully work in all things for the good of those who love him.

Latimer's Curate

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