

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

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ARTICLE FROM MY MANUSCRIPT ON RELIGIOUS VALUES REFLECTED IN
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS
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MACBETH

“Whoever desires to save his life will lose it” (Matthew 16:25)

Macbeth gives his first speech at the close of a foul, rainy day which has seen him victorious in battle:

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

The statement is a paradox, one which seems contradictory but is actually there. Jesus also used the device when he was himself speaking of “foul” and “fair” choices:

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 16:25 NKJV)

Everybody at some time has gone after something that he thinks is “fair,” only to find it “foul.” But the man whose exceptional abilities enable him to pursue what seem absolutely to be the most “fair” things in life—such as Solomon-level power, wealth, fame, knowledge, beautiful and exciting women—can be the one at greatest risk of encountering the “foul.” Conversely, one of ability and perception who embraces what the world considers “foul,” losing his life for Christ’s sake, can have the truly “fair.” Since you’re voluntarily reading a book which treats both the Bible and Shakespeare, the probability is that you’re concerned with what God wants, that you’re intrigued by some of the very best analyses and portrayals of human nature yet produced, and, in fact, that you’re more intellectually and philosophically inclined than those people who have only a cursory knowledge of the Bible and would rarely if ever read Shakespeare or other serious literature. In short, you may be positioned to seek more energetically and successfully the “fair.” That’s all to the good, but consider these questions: What are you using your intellectual ability and perception to pursue? Will that goal prove “fair” or “foul” in the end? Are your gifts always used for good for your life and those around you? Or do they sometimes open temptations for ambition, for greed, for seeing what self-centered goals you can accomplish or worldly positions or things you can acquire—perhaps out of avarice or power lust, or maybe even out of desire to exercise them just because you have them?

Smart, educated, talented people with loads of drive and willpower almost invariably achieve much, and the longer they live the wider the gap grows between them and their peers. Rightly focused, such a person becomes what’s truly “fair”: an Abraham, a David, a Paul for the service of God. But that’s precisely the kind of person— isn’t it?—that Satan also loves to get under his control so he can lead him “foul.” Sadly, having keen perception of what is “fair” doesn’t always prompt a man or woman to do “fair.”

Often it has a perversely opposite effect: the same keenness also whets his or her appetite all the more for “foul.” Such a man is Macbeth. He sees far, far more clearly the implications of what he’s doing than does his strong-willed but one-track queen, and he knows, deep down, how “foul” it is. But his perception isn’t supported by the character to prevent his bloody course. His ambition for the power and prestige of the crown is so great that he blinds himself into believing them “fair” regardless of how “foul” his means of achieving them.

What about you? If you also have education, or talent, or an attractive personality, or a strong will, are you using your gifts fairly for God, or foully for yourself and the Devil? To choose what’s truly “fair” can be difficult, even if (or maybe even because) you’re more intellectually able to recognize it. Intellectually and educationally, Paul was far superior to his peers (cf. Philippians 3:5-6), but he was still involved in a fierce battle to make himself do what was “fair,” even when he could distinguish the “fair” from the “foul” better than anyone else (Romans 7:13-23). Through Christ, however, he won through to the “fair”:

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So can you, if you choose the “fair” as well.

Principal Characters

Duncan, King of Scotland

Malcolm, his son

Macbeth, Thane of Glamis and general of Duncan’s army, who becomes king after murdering Duncan

Banquo, another general, also murdered by Macbeth

Fleance, son of Banquo

Macduff, nobleman whose family is murdered by Macbeth and who kills Macbeth in revenge

Lady Macbeth, who prompts her husband to commit his crime

Three witches

The Play

Macbeth is a Renaissance sequel to a genre of medieval English drama called a morality play, which featured the struggle of good and evil for the soul of a man.

The three witches arrange to meet Macbeth, Thane of Glamis, and voice the theme of his life: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." Macbeth has distinguished himself in battle against a traitor (rather ironic), and King Duncan names him Thane of Cawdor. When the witches meet him and prophesy he'll also be king, he starts: he's been thinking of this ambition already. They also promise his companion Banquo that he'll be the father of kings. (Banquo was the ancestor of James I, who ruled England when Shakespeare wrote this play.) Macbeth hopes he can somehow get the crown without having to do anything, but when Duncan announces that his son Malcolm will succeed as king, Macbeth knows he'll have to act.

Lady Macbeth knows her husband as one who wouldn't wish the murder of Duncan undone if it occurred, but won't do the deed himself without her pushing him (no problem for her). When he hesitates, she browbeats him into agreeing to go ahead, although in his soliloquies he eloquently voices his reservations of conscience, predicts the consequences, and describes the horror of what he contemplates. He kills Duncan as arranged, and immediately begins to regret: what seemed so "fair" is "foul" already.

Once he gets started, Macbeth turns serial killer. He no longer consults his wife, but hires two hit men to kill Banquo and his son to prevent a Banquo-line succession. A mysterious third murderer appears, however, and although they get Banquo, somehow Fleance escapes. That night at an uncomfortable state dinner Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth, who gets hysterical and ruins the affair: he and Lady Macbeth aren't enjoying royalty much.

Macbeth goes to consult the witches again, who give him double-entendre assurances that sound "fair" but set him up for a fall, one being that "none of woman born" will harm him. They also show him a vision of Banquo's kingly successors. He continues his murders, slaughtering MacDuff's wife and children. Meanwhile, Malcolm, who has fled to England, raises an army to march on Scotland and overthrow Macbeth.

By this time Lady Macbeth, who's capable of orchestrating the one decisive act of Duncan's murder but can't stand the long haul of the consequences, is losing her sanity, walking in her sleep while talking of the murder. As Malcolm's forces approach, she kills herself.

Macbeth, past any feelings of real sensitivity, clings stubbornly to the witches' promises of security until the reality of what's happening forces him to recognize that the fiend "lies like truth" and he determines to die fighting. He does, which is about the only satisfaction he has out his miserable choice of evil. He fights until he encounters Macduff, who as a baby was delivered by Caesarean section and therefore was not "of woman born." Macduff kills him offstage and brings in his head. Malcolm invites all to Scone for his coronation as the play ends.

"We'd jump the life to come . . ."

Macbeth's destruction comes from his rejecting the "fair" and selecting the "foul" in the most important choice man has to make: will he live for time, or for eternity? His saddest and most chilling statement, which comes at the beginning of his deliberation on whether to proceed with murdering Duncan, illustrates just how strong is the pull into evil, and what terrible decisions it forces:

If th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success, that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all—here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump [risk] the life to come.

In this frightening speech, Macbeth says that if he knew he wouldn't suffer any consequences in this life, he'd murder Duncan and risk any eternal ones. In effect, his decision here puts him with those who cut themselves off from the source of forgiveness, which Christ identifies as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-30). In a later speech following the murder, as he contemplates the threat posed by Banquo, Macbeth mentions the forfeiture of his soul again, but he lists it as only one of the "foul" consequences he's suffered, and he still seems willing to accept it, much more disturbed by the prospect that Banquo's children will succeed him in the royal line:

If't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd,
Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man
To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings!

Macbeth case illustrates, then, two truths. The first is that we all make this choice of eternal consequences, the choice that over and over again Jesus and his apostles put before each of us:

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction

. . . .

If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Do not love the world . . . the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

High and low, kings and paupers, we all make the choice: treasure on earth or treasure in heaven; wide gate or narrow gate; saved or condemned; passing away or forever.

That truth is the most profound, but still the most clear, and the one we already know.

The second truth—not so clear, and perhaps the more staggering—is that an intelligent, superior, seemingly discerning man may see these two choices clearly, and for the sake of his ambition still choose the corruptible, the destructible, and the temporary, deliberately choosing to jump the life to come and give his eternal jewel to the common enemy of man. This truth is the most the most incomprehensible, and perhaps the most frustrating to God and the angels. But there it is.

You already know the two choices. The question is whether you've really chosen the life to come; whether you're only pretending that you have; or whether, like Macbeth, you yourself might jump the life to come in favor of the immediate temptation dangled before you by the common enemy. It's not at all a given that every bright reader out there will refuse to go with Macbeth. But it is a given that God, his Son, and his Spirit have done and continue doing all that they can to lead us to heaven and away from hell, and that his people pray for our delivery (John 3:16; Matthew 11:28-30).

Why would Macbeth make such a “foul” choice? His problem is that of many talented men: he finds it most “fair” to concentrate on himself, and not on God. His letter to Lady Macbeth reflects his egotism:

Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it came missives from the King, who all-hailed me ‘Thane of Cawdor’, by which title before these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with ‘Hail, King that shalt be!’ This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee.

Ironically, Macbeth is very much aware of how unselfish King Duncan is, and how all the more blamable he'll be for killing him:

. . . this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking-off.

Macbeth isn't deceived about how “foul” his crime is. And he's not totally deceived into thinking the results will be “fair”:

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other [side].

He knows, then, that one who acts only out of selfish ambition will be like the man he describes here, who jumps so hard into the saddle from one side of the horse that he falls over the other side onto the ground. He knows this, but he's too pulled by the “fair” prospect of wearing the crown that he acts anyway, and falls into the “foul.”

Paradoxically, men who are both gifted and meek like Duncan make the best kings and leaders. Consider this one:

Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth. (Numbers 12:3 NKJV)

And, especially, this One,

Who, being in very nature God,
Did not consider equality with God something
To be grasped,
But made himself nothing,
Taking the very nature of a servant,
Being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled himself
And became obedient to death—
Even death on a cross!
(Philippians 2:6-11 NKJV)

You and I know the dangers of selfish ambition, don't we? We know what happens to the Macbeth's of the political world, or the business world, or even the church. But when that high opening comes in politics, in business, or even in the congregation, way down deep are we answering out of obedience, or out of a Macbethian desire for the glory? We know that Paul wrote,
Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. (1 Thessalonians 2:6 NKJV)

We know that Jesus said,

And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve . . . (Matthew 20:27-28 NKJV)

We know all of that, but when the call to lead comes, will we respond to serve, or to gratify vaulting ambition?

We can lead to serve! We can win this battle the same way Paul did: “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” If we see through the false “fair,” recognize the true “fair” of servanthood, and crucify our ambitious selves so that Christ the Servant lives in us (Galatians 2:20), then we can take on either the humblest or the highest role with purpose and joy.

“Hie thee hither . . .”

“Foul” ambition is one of Macbeth's problems; “foul” counselors that appear “fair” are another.

One counselor appears especially “fair.” Lady Macbeth seems gracious and charming as she welcomes Duncan:

All our service
In every point twice done, and then done double,

Were poor and single business to contend
Against those honors deep and broad wherewith
Your Majesty loads our house.

But her motives are “foul”:

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements.

A truly “fair” wife can be the best of counselors to a talented husband; a “foul” one, the worst. No one knows a man like his wife, and she can use that knowledge either to encourage and gently propel him to tremendous good, or to nag and prod him to awful evil.

Lady Macbeth knows that without her pushing him Macbeth is
. . . too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness
to take the quickest route to the throne by killing Duncan. So, she says,

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round.

What “impedes” him, of course, is the “fair” voice of conscience condemning the plot to kill a king renowned for his good rule and virtues, and now trusting himself to Macbeth’s protection. But when Macbeth hesitates, Lady Macbeth uses the three classic arguments—often “foul” ones—of manipulative wives: “you don’t love me,” “if I were a man I would do it,” and “you promised.” He folds, although adding one parting shot:

Bring forth men-children only!
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males.

Being chastised with the valor of his wife’s tongue has distressed and helped ruin many a man besides Macbeth. But, like him, such men are ruined only because they agree to be: no man or woman makes me sin.

Consider a real husband/wife murder plot: Ahab and Jezebel’s murder of Naboth, who owned land Ahab wanted. Again, the wife instigates. Just as Lady Macbeth tells her husband

Leave all the rest to me.

. . . and carefully plans Duncan’s murder, drugging the pages and laying out their daggers for Macbeth to use, so Jezebel tells Ahab to relax and leave all to her:

Then Jezebel his wife said to him, “You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise and eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.” So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles . . . (1 Kings 21:7 NKJV)

Jezebel urges the murder, plans it, and has it done, but Ahab consents, and as both king and husband he's the ultimate murderer. Adam wasn't deceived, as Eve was, and as the husband authority bore the primary responsibility for bringing sin into the world (1 Timothy 2:13-14; Romans 5:12). Still, the "fair" woman in these cases is the "foul" counselor, and like Lady Macbeth suffered their own judgments and punishments.

How different is the truly "fair" counselor:
The heart of her husband safely trusts her;
So he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life. . . .
Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land. (Proverbs 31:11, 23 NKJV)

The husband's gain and his honored position among the elders are because of his virtuous wife, a truly "fair" woman whose righteous counsel is a constant blessing.

If you're the spouse of a "fair" counselor, be thankful. If you're that counselor, be "fair," never "foul."

“. . . the fiend/That lies like truth”

Macbeth's other "foul" counselors are the witches, who in Shakespeare's day were thought to be either demons outright or else people who have given themselves over to Satan. Like fathers, like children. The witches have the same motives as Satan, the same techniques, and the same limited powers. Satan has used these from the beginning, and he and subordinates will use them with you and me as well.

When Satan met Eve, he couldn't make her eat the forbidden fruit, but he could tell her what she wanted to hear:
“You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (Genesis 3:5-6 NKJV)

So with the witches and Macbeth:
All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!
All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!
All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!

Macbeth, who is already Thane of Glamis, tries to get these "imperfect speakers" to say more, but they don't, because they have no need to. All they need do is prime Macbeth to continue down the "foul" path he's already begun. His startled look at their prophecies betrays that the witches are only addressing what he's already been thinking, and when word comes that Duncan has made him Thane of Cawdor, he leaps in his mind to the final step: king. Immediately, he writes Lady Macbeth about the experience, with broad implications as to what it imports for them. That's when she prays to the forces of darkness to "unsex" her, and becomes in effect a witch herself, continuing the seduction her fellow witches have begun.

The “foul” counselors from hell don’t have the power to make us sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 4:7), but they can make “fair” seductions to taste the things they know we crave, and entice us into believing they’re so very “fair.” Usually, they don’t even have to initiate the temptation. All they have to do, like the witches in Macbeth, is to insinuate themselves into those lusts that we’ve put into our hearts already.

What lusts are already in your heart and mine for the witches to play on? You already know the main list: power and prestige (Macbeth’s “vaulting ambition”); money and “the things in the world” it will buy (1 John 2:15); sex, either physical by fornication, or virtual by pornography or imagination; or gluttony, for food, drink, or drugs. If you’ve managed to avoid these, maybe you’re opting for one on the satellite list, like academic honor for degrees or books written; or acquiring a trophy wife or husband to show off; or maybe indolence and empty fun in a useless life following early retirement. All of these sound so “fair”!

Once he’s killed Duncan, all the witches have to do is keep Macbeth going and feeling safe. After murdering Banquo and the whole family of Macduff, he decides to consult the hags again. Hecate, the classical goddess of confusion, prompts them to give him more consoling and prophecies and visions:

And you all know, security
Is mortals’ chiefest enemy.

So they put on quite a show, including apparitions that suggest that

None of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.

And
Macbeth shall never vanquish’d be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him.

All of this sounds “fair” enough to Macbeth, but when Malcolm’s soldiers cut branches from Birnam’s trees to hold in front of them and screen their numbers, and when Macduff reveals the unusual circumstances of his birth, Macbeth loses his security:

I pull in resolution, and begin
To doubt th’ equivocation of the fiend
That lies like truth.

The “fair” promises of the witches have turned “foul.”

To what “foul,” devil-promised securities are you or I desperately clinging? Most of us are smart enough intellectually not to trust in wealth, although, as Macbeth illustrates, knowing something and believing it are different things. But there are more subtle “foul” counselors out there. With religious people, the problem may be trust in their own religious doctrines and opinions as opposed to God’s word. People and churches have been making up, changing and discarding new doctrines and church positions for centuries, and they get more fragmented and downright outrageous every year. In contrast, Paul said to the Thessalonians,

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NKJV; cf. 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:22; 1 Peter 1:22)

That Word tells us where real security lies: it comes by the sealing of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22), the intercession of Christ (Romans 8:34-39), and the power of God (Jude 24-25). Let's cling confidently to those truly "fair" promises, and avoid the secret, black, and midnight hags, "fair" or "foul," that try to seduce us from them.

It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Macbeth makes this bitter pronouncement that life is "foul" at the end of his bloody career, having destroyed his own life, his wife's, and his country's with it. Satan's piece de resistance for Macbeth—and for all of us—is that he trades his eternal soul for a temporary pleasure, and then is denied even the temporary pleasure! No sooner has he killed Duncan but he begins to experience regret. At the knocking on the gate, he exclaims:

Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

His lament to the shocked nobles that such a crime could have been committed at his castle is a pretense, but at the same time rings genuine:

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
There's nothing serious in mortality.

He and Lady Macbeth never have a moment's unsullied enjoyment from their murderous reign. She complains,

Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content.
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.

* * * * *

Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.

Macbeth feels that he has to keep on killing those around him, beginning with Banquo, to protect his security:

To be thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus.

* * * * *

O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.

Once he's started, like many tyrants past and present, he increases in atrocity, especially in killing Macduff's family:

The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line.

Here he reaches the depths of the "foul."
From the time Macbeth and his wife kill Duncan, even sleep is denied them:

Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep," the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravel'd sleeve of care.

* * * * *

"Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more."

He speaks of
 These terrible dreams
That shake us nightly.

And Lady Macbeth's last and most famous scene is her terrible mental suffering as she walks in her sleep, trying to rub blood from her hands and closing with
To bed, to bed, to bed!

Macbeth resorts to desperate séances with the witches, where they show him deceiving apparitions that bring him no comfort, and he finally immures himself in Dunsinane, gloomily aware of the vast gap between the glory he anticipated and the contemptuous hatred in which he is held now:

 Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.

And here he comes to his final pronouncements on his life and life as a whole:

I have lived long enough. My way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have.

* * * * *

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Is Macbeth's pronouncement that all of life is "foul" true? For Macbeth, yes, just as it's true for anyone who, instinctively knowing the consequences of the evil he's headed for, but pulled by ambition or greed or lust or evil counsel, plunges into it anyway, and almost instantly begins to suffer the horrendous consequences.

Is Macbeth's pronouncement true? For us, no! For the man who chooses to commit his eternal jewel to the God who made him, life is not a walking shadow, a tale told by an idiot. Life, rather, is infinitely "fair": it's a daily attempt to do His will, a security in His love, a struggle against His enemy, a continuing salvation through His Son, and a walk in His light and toward His reward.

In several ways, the story of Macbeth parallels the life of Saul. Both began "fair," as good men, celebrated by their peers. But somewhere along the way each turned "foul." On several occasions Saul is visited by "a distressing spirit from the Lord" and attempts to kill David. He has his henchmen kill innocent priests (1 Samuel 22), reminiscent of Macbeth's killing Macduff's family; and, most significant for the parallel, he visits the witch of En Dor, and asks her to bring up Samuel from the dead (1 Samuel 28), just as Macbeth visits the witches and bids them call up the apparitions. Finally, after his and his sons' deaths, Saul is beheaded (1 Samuel 31); similarly, Lady Macbeth commits suicide, and Macduff beheads Macbeth.

Whether or the story of Saul may have supplied parallel details for Shakespeare's play, both stories recount the sad but unnecessary fall of powerful men. The "fair" isn't in acquisition and retention of power and its accompanying benefits. Solomon had far more of those than reflected in these accounts. The "fair," he concluded, anticipating Jesus' teaching, is in surrender to God:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13 NKJV)

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 4.2

Imagination and literature invent places and names to which people can relate.

Such tricks hath strong imagination
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 4.2

The mind can invent vehicles for bringing feeling.

I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharg'd

And duty in his service perishing.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 5.1

We should not demand more than they can deliver of people of limited ability.

It is not enough to speak, but to speak true.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 5.1

Smile of the Month

"Mary," said her mother reprovingly, "every time you disobey, I get another grey hair."

"..., Mom," Mary answered, "so it was you who gave Grandma all her grey hair" (*Braude's Treasury of Wit and Humor*, page 147).

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

Secrets of Your Family Tree: Healing for adult children of dysfunctional families, by Dave Carder, M.A., Dr. Earl Hensun, Dr. John Townsend, Dr. Henry Cloud, Alice Brawand, M.A.

Family Rules Governing Family Secrets

Claudia Black has identified three almost universal family rules in dysfunctional families. They are:

- Don't Talk
- Don't Trust
- Don't Feel

We will examine these rules in detail below. But first let's look at how and when these rules are employed by families:

Every family uses some of these rules some of the time. This point is related to the earlier observation that all families are somewhat dysfunctional.

Some families use some of these rules all of the time. Families tend to see the rules they use as self-evident and always desirable, without question.

Some families use all of these rules some of the time. That will usually occur in families with recurring stress patterns, for example, families which have experienced frequent job-related transfers, chronic illnesses, and so on.

Some families use all of these rules all of the time. These families have in place the most lethal of family patterns. With no outlet for his feelings, a child in such a family never blossoms into full identity. He or she just strives to survive (page 71).

Galatians 6 is a good chapter to study in connection with this point. There Paul asserts that "each one shall bear his own load" (v.5). The Greek word for "load" means knapsack, or what we carry daily on our journey through life. It is the same "burden" that Jesus spoke of when He said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30, KJV). This "load" comprises that responsibility we should shoulder for ourselves.

Our individual knapsacks include such items as our thoughts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, needs, choices, feelings, values, time, possessions, money, gifts, talents, behavior, and bodies. We are to set limits around these parts of our lives and should protect and maintain them ourselves. It is our responsibility to care for them.

The converse is also true. Just as we are positively to take care of the elements of our lives that are properly within our own boundaries, so we are to refrain from taking care of the things that are inside other persons' boundaries. If we fail to observe this restraint two negative results are likely to take place:

We will sabotage the spiritual growth of another person (Eph. 4:15) and we will neglect our own God-given responsibilities and become poor stewards of ourselves (Matthew 25:14-30) (pages 170, 171).

In contrast to our knapsacks, Paul describes a different "load" in verse 2 of the same chapter. This Greek term is the word for boulders: heavy, crushing burdens that cannot be borne alone. These are the tragedies, crises, and losses that befall us and that are not our fault. As best we can, we are to help one another with these boulders. Doing so is practically the definition of brotherly love and pleases God greatly. Thus we see that God wants us to make a clear distinction: to handle boulders differently from knapsacks. Whereas we can only love, but not take responsibility for, someone whose knapsack is giving him problems, it is entirely proper for the Body of Christ to surround the stricken, crushed member with caring and support until he or she can get back on his feet (pages 171, 172).

To summarize: Paul is saying in Galatians that we are fully responsible for ourselves (bearing our knapsacks) but only partially responsible to others (helping them with their boulders when we are able). Put another way, God's plan for growing up involves taking full responsibility for our lives and helping others in crisis, but we are not responsible for the normal loads of others (i.e., their knapsacks). We will hurt ourselves and others if we shoulder the wrong load. If we try to pick up their boulders instead of our knapsacks, we will end up denying others their adulthood and prevent them from learning that their actions have consequences. We will make them dependent on us and ourselves codependent with them (page 172).

Passive-aggressive behavior is asserting one's will in an indirect way. Instead of being honest about our aggressive urges, we cloak them in actions that are superficially neutral. We are conveniently late to an appointment with a person with whom we're upset. Perhaps we resent our supervisor on the job, so we struggle with procrastination, never seeming to get to the tasks at hand. Or we might exert an overabundant amount of control in relationships.

Passive-aggressive behavior is a frequent symptom resulting from feeling one-down. The loss of power felt in the one-down position leads to covert attempts at restoration to power through resistance. We see this in the parable of the two sons whose father asked them to work in the vineyard (Matthew 21:28-31). The first son passively obeyed on the outside but resisted on the inside. In the end, he "did not go: (v. 29). He has not yet reached the place where he could openly say no to his parent. But his brother had reached such a point. His more healthy pattern of saying what he really felt resulted in his being able to change his mind and actually do the work, whereas the first son was stuck in resistance and resentment (page 213).

Barber Clippings

Last Wednesday night, a group stayed after Bible study and assembled our self-study forms. There are fifteen pages of information for each member to complete. There are questions about involvement, attitude toward the local congregation, perceived strengths and weaknesses of the local church, communication in the church, desired strong traits of the next preacher, and personal demographic information. We will be completing these on a Sunday morning.

Last night (Sunday), we had the first in a series of elder-member communication meetings. The three elder and three families are invited to our house. After refreshments served by my wife, Gail, we have an hour for discussion, talking about our concerns and dreams for this church. This is in response to the identified improvement desired by both elders and the majority of the families in the congregation.

Tomorrow night, we will be constructing a time line of the Eddyville congregation for the past forty-eight years, including graphs of attendance and contribution, elders and preachers and their length of service. As a church, we will get together and discuss this visual history a decade at a time, commenting on high points and low points in the life of this church.

I will be in a meeting at the Leanna congregation in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, October 21-24. I will be at Central in Dalton, Georgia, for a men's retreat November 9, 10. I then go to Edmonton, Kentucky, for a meeting November 11-14.

Please check out my new web site: www.barberclippings.com. It was built by SiteProPlus. They build the site. The customer pays the hosting fee. It is very easy to maintain. I usually update mine a time or two a week.

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I will continue to develop my series on major British hymns such as When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, Abide with Me, Rock of Ages, and many others. It concentrates on the great lessons they teach, their composers, and the sites where they were written, photographed by international photographer and Irish church leader Paul Seawright on our tours in Britain in 2006 and 2007. I plan to present a Power Point version beginning in December at the Granny White church. Afterwards I will be available to present it to churches interested in these treasures of faith. I will also use the series in my classes at Lipscomb University.

Jill and I will conduct a marriage seminar at the Springfield Gardens church in Queens, New York, on the weekend of November 17-18. Bill Johnson is the very effective minister there.

John H. Parker

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