



THE GOSPEL FOR THE POSTMODERN WORLD IV:

The Gift of God

FACED WITH THE VIRTUALLY UNSOLVABLE challenge of creating a relational (covenantal) universe out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), the One-and-Only God of love necessarily resorted to the introduction of —

1. Command, possession and power structures.
2. Responsive free process in nature and self-conscious free will in humanity.
3. Death and extinction.¹

However, these actions led to negative consequences that conferred unwelcome attributes upon the loving God and labeled him as having an “other side” — an alter ego (“other self”) known by such terms as Satan, *Samel*, Lucifer and the Serpent. God accepted these derisive attributes, knowing that a universe facing an eternity of infinite possibilities would greatly benefit from encountering the “negatives” first. Furthermore, he knew that overcoming these negatives early would be profoundly beneficial.

Then, as part of his “eternal purpose,” God himself became human (Ephesians 3:11; Philippians 2:5-9). In his earthly life and ministry as Jesus Christ, he accepted the consequences of creation and did everything possible to reverse their

negatives. Finally, he was crucified by those who had embraced the principles of command, possession and power. In this climactic act God inaugurally bore his “other side,” his “old self,” his “old covenant,” his “old Creation” to death and extinction: “. . . [A]s Moses lifted up the *serpent* in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up . . .” (John 3:14, emphasis supplied). This

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was the beginning of the end for the old, “vertical” (domination/subjection) relationality: “Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

On the third day the human God rose from the dead to inaugurate his “new self,” his “new covenant,” his “new Creation” — a new reality filled with self-emptying love. In his resurrection he determined to freely give himself to Creation and thus to be for, to and with all Creation forevermore. This was the beginning of the new, “horizontal,” reciprocal relationality.

For nearly 2,000 years God has been unceasingly committed to not only give himself to Creation but to also give all of his self-emptying (*kenotic*) attributes for, to and with human beings as his representative Creation/creatures. He has done this with the anticipation that human beings will reciprocate and return these gifts both to God and to all others. The divine/human attributes include life, love, hope, faith, truth, peace, rest, compassion, justice, and all the other aspects of self-emptying (*kenotic*) love. “. . . [H]ow shall he not . . . also freely give us *all things*?” (Romans 8:32, emphasis supplied).

Despite his self-giving human life, ministry, death and resurrection, God’s revelatory purpose has long been clouded by human misconception, misunderstanding, denial and rejection. Rather than adopting the self-emptying God of

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love, humanity has largely persisted in reflecting the “other side” of God, characterized by his deceased alter ego and its attributes of command, possession and power. Tragically, humanity’s desire to appropriate the gift of God to advance its own command, possession and power has conflicted with God’s ultimate, loving revelation.

After two millennia it now is essential to address the resolution of this crisis, for “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Then may we heed the words of Jesus, “. . . [F]reely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

Endnote

1. See “The Divine Predicament,” *Outlook* (January/February 2005); “The Gospel for the Postmodern World III: The ‘Other Side’ of God,” *Outlook* (January 2008).