



Spiritual Health Care--Reform or Resurrection? • Jonah 2:8

TO: NEBRASKA STATE SENATORS

FROM: REV. PERRY M. GAUTHIER

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The sweeping health care overhaul propagated by President Obama's administration has the whole nation thinking about Health Care Reform. Reflected in the headlines of our nation's newspapers this month, the hotly debated issue has furrowed many a brow in 2010. On the lighter side, the following quotations about health care from authors and humorists put a smile on my face this week.

"Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint."

--Mark Twain

"Never go to a doctor whose office plants have died."

--Erma Bombeck

"Isn't it a bit unnerving that doctors call what they do practice?"

--George Carlin

"Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, lying in hospitals dying of nothing."

--Redd Foxx

I almost feel bad laughing at these health care jokes. Hospitals are serious places and health care is a serious concern. Human life matters. Health matters. Spiritual life matters. Spiritual health matters--more. This week we continue to look at Spiritual Health Care concerns in Jonah 2. Today, we are focusing in on my favorite verse among the Jonah's 48 verses—Jonah 2:8.

Jonah 2:8 *"Those who cling to worthless idols, forfeit the grace that could be theirs (NIV)"¹*

What is the subject of this verse? Unhealthy attachments. In matters of spiritual life and spiritual health, we must always beware of unhealthy spiritual attachment. Unhealthy spiritual attachment is what the Bible calls idolatry. In the language of this week's verse, Jonah calls such attachment "clinging to vain idols."

I. SPIRITUAL HEALTH CARE—ATTACHMENTS OF DESPAIR

Last week we focused on the emptiness and vanity of idolatry. We referred to the hobbling malignant creature Gollum in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. I was reminded of the emptiness in his swollen eyes as he lusted for an idol—"the precious" ring. The English writer, poet, philologist, and

university professor, J. R. R. Tolkien, crafted *The Lord of the Rings* as an analogy to the Christian life. Throughout the book, Gollum and many other characters lusted for "the ring," illustrating the widespread nature of idolatry in all people and all of life. Clinging to idols causes a state of spiritual unhealth. Spiritually diseased from within, the degenerating Gollum displayed the danger of idolatry. Spiritual life matters. Spiritual health matters. The unhealthy attachment of idolatry weakens both.

II. SPIRITUAL HEALTH CARE—ATTACHMENTS OF DESTRUCTION

Jonah's idolatry (of racism and hyper-patriotism) left him empty. But, the prodigal prophet's insistence upon continuing to flee from the Lord was destroying his spiritual health. Every step away from the Most High God was a step lower--down into spiritual decline. Note this translation:

Jonah 2:8 *They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. KJV*

The word translated "lying" here is a very mild translation of a Hebrew word meaning *desolate* or *destroyed*. It comes from a Hebrew root word meaning *to rush over, to destroy in a tempest, to be ruined in a storm, or to be made waste by devastation*. Any reader of Jonah's original Hebrew Scriptures would have understood that Jonah was conveying the devastating effects of idolatry. Clinging to idols not only leaves one empty, it leaves one destroyed.

An office plant in a doctor's office can die in the absence of food, light and water. It can also die due to the presence of disease. So too with human life. The soul and the spirit will wither and wilt, and shrivel and shrink when spiritual rot and deadening disease sets in.

Jonah has finally learned a lesson. He is moralizing now. Jonah compressed the moral of the story (thus far) into five Hebrew words in this verse. Jonah 2:8 is a very thin slice of Scripture but it is rich in spiritual nutrients and truth. Jonah has learned his lesson (for now) about idolatry. He sings a praise song in what we call the praise psalm of Jonah Chapter 2. He moralizes from within the slimy grave of a fish's fleshy innards. The decaying stench and fishy smells were pungent and gagging reminders of the preacher's own sinful stupidity. The sea sedge roped and wrapped about his neck was also a smelly reminder of his own near death experience.

In two weeks, we will study how the great sea monster projectile vomited

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Jonah out onto a beach. If a questioning ancient reporter could have stuck a foam-covered microphone in his wet face after being hurtled to that dry shore, Jonah might have said, “*Yep, I sure learned a lesson. My own idiotic idolatry nearly destroyed my life. My insistence on sticking with bad choices was destroying my spiritual life and my spiritual health. Yep--unhealthy attachment. Clinging to my sinful stupidity almost cost me my life.*”

Jonah was not a politician, but a preacher. Some people think preachers exaggerate. You hear people talk of bug-eyed prophets foaming at the mouth and getting all bent out of shape for nothing. Is Jonah’s moral lesson really that significant? Is he making a moral mountain of a mere molehill?

Mark Twain might be right about the danger of reading health books, but the reader of the Bible need never worry about dying from a misprint. God who does not lie or exaggerate has inspired every word of Holy Scripture.

An idol is anything that we worship, obey or serve in place of God. The litmus test for idolatry is whether one’s relationship to the idol interferes with one’s relationship to God and one’s complete obedience to God.

Idols can be material. Americans often jeer at the physical idols and statues of third world countries. We do not bow down to stone images or lay burnt offerings in front of little empty-eyed statues or dance around carved images of relatives² on totem poles. American idols can be physical things like cars, boats, houses, land, food, drink, jewelry, tools, games, computers, and electronics. American idols can be physical people like children, spouses, girlfriends, movie stars, and even up and coming stars as seen on the TV show *American Idol*. Clinging too tightly to idols like these can bring destruction and decay into our spiritual lives.

However, we can also idolize ideas like fame, popularity, patriotism, liberalism, conservatism, political parties, ethnic traditions and local customs.

The Bible also has no misprints when it talks about the idols of attitude. Sinful attitudes can be clung to tightly, producing destruction and decline in one’s spiritual health.

III. SEVEN SAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL ATTACHMENTS OF DESTRUCTION

The classic “seven deadly sins” illustrate this well. Some theologians call these seven sins “deadly” because they “kill grace.” While theologians disagree, all serious Bible students concur that the seven deadly sins can wreak havoc in the spiritual life, destroying one’s spiritual health.

WHILE NOT FOUND IN A SINGLE BIBLE PASSAGE, THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS ARE GREED, LUST, ANGER, SLOTH, PRIDE, ENVY AND GLUTTONY.

After studying the seven deadly sins for seven months, I was quite surprised to discover that all seven have their roots in a God-ordained quality, pleasure, virtue or attitude. That makes sense considering what we said last week, “when a *good thing* becomes a *god thing* it becomes a *bad thing*.”

Following is a simple chart showing how I view each of the seven deadly sins (on the far left) followed by the good, God-given desire that they come from (and then in the right column), some of the destruction and devastation the “deadly sins” can produce.

Sin	Based in <i>good desire</i> for	Devastations possible
Greed	Desire for too much <i>Money</i>	Bankruptcy, divorce, credit card debt, lawsuits, prostitution.
Lust	Desire for too much <i>Sex</i>	Adulterous affairs, pornography, teen pregnancy, sex trafficking.
Anger	Desire for too much <i>Justice</i>	Hate crimes, prejudice, domestic violence, murder, rage, rape.
Sloth	Desire for too much <i>Rest</i>	Poverty, societal/economic decline, religious backsliding, poor health.
Pride	Desire for too much <i>Self</i>	Racism, political polarization, hypocrisy, bigotry, isolation.
Envy	Desire for too much <i>Blessing</i>	Theft, white-collar crime, joy over others’ pain (<i>schadenfreude</i>).
Gluttony	Desire for too much <i>Food</i>	Obesity (→Cancer, other diseases ³), sleep problems, esteem issues.

At this time, I will not take time to unpack the theological argument of how these seven sins could “kill grace.” However, clinging too tightly to any of these seven good things (*Money, Sex, Food...*) can cause a *forfeiture of grace*. The New International Version translates the loss of grace this way:

Jonah 2:8 “*Those who cling to worthless idols, forfeit the grace that could be theirs*”

Forsaking grace is deadly and devastating. That is Jonah’s exact point and his authorial intention. Feverishly clinging to idols, in hopes that they will fulfill, will leave you empty disappointed. More so, gripping *good things* so tightly that they become *god things* will produce *bad things*—even *deadly things*. Jonah’s moral is this—idolatry is an unhealthy attachment of despair; and idolatry is an unhealthy attachment of devastation.

Now, in the smelly, burbling belly of the fish, Jonah found that his idolatry has left him empty and devastated. Jonah, while still conscious, lay in dark chastisement, feeling claustrophobically imprisoned in the fish’s guts, tissues and organs. The fish’s slimy palpitating pipes would be lifelong, tactile reminders to Jonah that his idolatry caused him to forfeit God’s good grace.

**Spiritual Health Care--Reform or Resurrection? • Jonah 2:8****IV. SPIRITUAL HEALTH CARE—DETACHMENT FROM THE HEALER**

There is one final consideration in Jonah 2:8 regarding Spiritual Health Care. Idolatrous attachments will leave one empty, can leave one destroyed at some level, but also, are detachments from the Great Healer Himself.

The Bible is replete with verses, explanations and illustrations of the life-giving, health-producing nature of God. The Old Testament often refers to God as *Jehovah Rapha* (meaning *the Lord my healer*.) The Gospels teach us that, Jesus, the Great Galilean is also the Great Physician who came for the sake of those of us who “need” a physician for our souls. The New Testament reveals that the Holy Spirit’s power of healing was so strong through the Apostles that the sick were laid in the streets in hope that Peter’s mere bodily shadow might heal them. An elderly Scottish woman announced one day that she believed the Bible “*from kiver to kiver!*” From front to back, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches us that the trinitarian God is a God of health and healing.

I believe that the “grace” (or “mercy”) spoken of in our verse is not merely referring to God’s grace apart from Himself. I believe Jonah is referring to the One great giver of that grace, the One that Peter calls “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10). Jonah realizes he has lost a link to a living, loving Lord. Jonah had clung to his own idols and forsaken the God who would have given him grace to succeed in his difficult calling to preach in a hostile foreign country, which was not exactly the buckle of the Bible Belt. Jonah’s idolatry had left him unhealthy, because Jonah had run from the Healer.

Observe how English Bible⁴ translators and scholars have used capitalization to personify this grace and mercy as God Himself in their renditions:

Jonah 2:8 *“Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy.”--NKJV*

Jonah 2:8 *“Those who worship false gods have turned their backs on all the mercies waiting for them from the Lord!”--TLB*

Jonah 2:8 *“Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God’s mercies.”--NLT*

Jonah 2:8 *“Those who pay regard to false, useless, and worthless idols forsake their own [Source of] mercy and loving-kindness.”--AMP*

Jonah 2:8 *“Those who worship hollow gods, god-frauds, walk away from their only true Love.”--MSG*

As I said last week, God’s name is Grace, with a capital G. The grace of God is the grace of God! All grace is His. He is the “God of all grace.”

Two of the premiere scholars of the Old Testament are Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. I am always challenged to interact with them Biblically by consulting their massive, multi-lingual and soaringly cerebral 10-Volume *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Regarding our word “grace” in Jonah 2:8, they explain first from the Hebrew what it does NOT mean and they use Latin words to tell us. Then they lower themselves to report what it does NOT mean using English words, in contradistinction to another Hebrew scholar’s words. Finally, thankfully, refreshingly, these linguistic geniuses tell us what it DOES mean. I share their authoritative, simple comment here:

“...BUT {‘GRACE’ (THE HEBREW WORD ‘CHESED’) HERE} REFERS TO GOD HIMSELF, AS HE WHOSE GOVERNMENT IS PURE GRACE.”⁵

What has Jonah learned? What are we to learn? Simply this, that if we cling to anything in life, other than God Himself, we forsake Him as a person and all the grace that He gives in His government of grace. Grace upon grace from the God of all grace. And this grace can all be ours if we turn to Him.

Two days before Good Friday, it is fitting to close our study by turning our eyes to the Lord and focusing on the Christ or Easter morning.

V. SPIRITUAL HEALTH CARE—REFORM OR RESURRECTION?

Redd Foxx was witty when he said, “Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, lying in hospitals dying of nothing.” However, as a witness to loved ones dying in hospital beds, I know that the grim medical reality is that everyone dies of something. Medically everyone dies of something--cancer, diabetes, stroke, accidents, head trauma, heart disease, Alzheimer’s disease, respiratory disease, chronic obstructive lung disease. Something.

The Bible, without any misprints, clearly teaches the reason for all deaths is spiritual disease, contracted from exposure to sin. The spiritual disease of sin ultimately causes all death. Sin is a spiritual disease contracted in the absence of the life-giving Healer, the great Physician, *Jehovah Rapha*, even God Himself. The spiritual disease of sin has been passed down through the bloodline from our first ancestors, Adam and Eve. But all the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve *also choose* to sin. We may not cling to an apple or idolize the words of a satanically strengthened serpent, but we all sin.



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The Bible has no misprints and it is just as clear this Easter week as it was in 30 AD during the week that Christ died. The Bible clearly states:

Romans 3:23 *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*

All sin is idolatry—unhealthy attachment. All have sinned. As one Bible teacher said, “All means all, that’s all **all** means!” All means all. All includes me—I am sure of that. That also includes every human and every political leader that has ever lived. That would include king Pharaoh in Moses’ day, the king of Nineveh in Jonah’s day, Pontius Pilate in Christ’s day, and Nero (Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus) in Paul’s day. Every political leader that has ever lived has sinned and falls short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Sin is not just a disease contracted, it is also a moral work performed. All work is worthy of wages. God says that the wages of the work of sin is death. It is a wage He will always pay. The wage of death is first physical. That occurs in places like hospital beds. More accurately though, what God is speaking of in this verse is ultimate, final, spiritual death. Spiritual life matters, but eternal spiritual death is real. That is the bad news.

Nevertheless, the second half of Romans 6:23 tells us that God has good news as well. As the life-giving Healer, God is the God of all grace. He does not expect sinning humans to engage in their own spiritual health reform. Since the standard God measures by, as seen in Romans 3:23 above, is “*the glory of God*” no one could ever “reform” himself or herself to meet that perfect standard of glory. The paradise of sinlessness, lost through Adam and Eve, cannot be regained by religious efforts. The Bible is clear.

Summarizing, all have sinned, all deserve death and all will die physically and deserve to die eternally. But the God of health, forgiveness and grace offers the free gift of eternal life and salvation through His Son.

Easter is all about forgiveness. Jonah was a great Galilean prophet and a hometown hero of the boy Jesus. Their hometowns were 3 miles apart. Jesus knew Jonah was a great prophet of God. Preaching one day, Jesus compared Himself to Jonah. Prophesying about His Easter resurrection, Jesus said that the prophet Jonah was great but that he Himself was great-er.

He said “*one greater than Jonah is here*” (Matthew 12:41). Jonah is the only prophet to whom Christ compared Himself by name. What is the similarity? Did Jesus flee from God? Did Jesus refuse to preach in the face of hostile enemies? The similarity is not in these sins of Jonah, for Jesus was sinless.

The similarity is about a common death for sin and a common resurrection by God’s life-giving power. We can hear Jesus predict Easter with unflinching courage to a hostile audience of sinful people below.

MATTHEW 12:39-40—**‘BUT HE ANSWERED AND SAID TO THEM, “AN EVIL AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION CRAVES FOR A SIGN; AND YET NO SIGN WILL BE GIVEN TO IT BUT THE SIGN OF JONAH THE PROPHET; FOR JUST AS JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, SO WILL THE SON OF MAN BE THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH.”** ‘

On Good Friday, the sinless Jesus died for the sins of the world (since the penalty of sin is death.) He died for a world full of sinners like me spiritually sickened by sin, laboring in the work of sin, and destined for death.

On Easter Sunday, three days later, Jesus rose from the belly of the grave, as proof that the Father was satisfied with His sacrifice, a sacrifice for sinners. Spiritual Health Reform is not the issue in salvation. Death is the issue. Resurrection is the issue. For your eternal well-being, may I respectfully invite you to put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, raised on Easter morning? He rose because He died. He died to forgive you of your sins and restore you to life, health and wellness. He wants to give you the free gift of salvation. You need only accept His gift through faith. Paul offers this:

Romans 10:9-10 *“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”*

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

² With Apache, Arapahoe and Ojibwa Indian all in my own personal ethnic mix, I find the etymology of “totem” interesting. “Totem” is derived from the Ojibwa word *odoodem*, “his kinship group.”

³ While managing my own health, diet and fitness over the last ten years I’ve been saddened by and convinced of the direct connection between the American epidemic of obesity and three of the main causes of death in America—heart disease (1st), cancer (2nd) and type II diabetes (6th).

⁴ Note the Spanish translation and the personification with a capital “D” for the name of God. *Jonás 2:8*—“*Los que siguen a ídolos vanos, abandonan el amor de Dios.*”—NVI (*Nueva Versión Internacional*)

⁵ *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 10—Minor Prophets*, Eerdmans Publishing; Reprint © 1993, page 403.