

The Problem of Rationalism

by Denis Lyle

Denis Lyle addresses the dangers of rationalism through the biblical story of Elisha and the poisoned pottage, emphasizing the need for divine revelation in modern Christianity.

Scripture: Psalm 11:3, Matthew 6:33, Colossians 2:3, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Peter 2:7

Topics: "Rationalism", "Spiritual Deception"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches about the problem of rationalism, emphasizing the dangers of relying solely on human reason to solve all problems without divine revelation. He highlights how this poisonous viewpoint has infiltrated various aspects of modern life, including science, philosophy, ethics, education, and even religion, leading to a spiritual dearth and confusion. Lyle draws parallels between the famine in Gilgal and the spiritual drought caused by disobedience in the church today, stressing the importance of returning to God's Word and seeking Christ as the antidote to the poison of rationalism and modernism.

Transcript

2 Kings 4:38-41 THE PROBLEM OF RATIONALISM Long ago, one of England's greatest preachers, Joseph Parker, preached a mighty sermon on the stupidity of the specialists. His text was from (1 Pet 2) concerning the stone which the builders rejected... the builders of all people, mind you,... the experts, the specialists. This is the age of the expert. Our civilisation is crumbling because the experts have rejected the only foundation that will endure. And "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do" (Ps 11:3) As we near the end of this twentieth century we are being exposed to the influence and impact of rationalism that particular view which holds that man's reason is entirely sufficient in itself to solve all of man's problems apart from divine revelation.

My... This poisonous viewpoint has permeated every department of modern life... Science, philosophy, ethics, education and even religion. And it's this perilous pottage which is being constantly fed to our young people from the classroom, rostrum, theatre and pulpit. Sad to say, in many so called Bible Colleges, "schools of the prophets", and even in some churches, there is "death in the pot". Are you not tired of the new brand of Christianity that pagans don't feel embarrassed to join Are you not tired of the new freedom that throws the Ten Commandments out of the window and doesn't know the difference between love and lust Are you not tired of hearing sin called sickness and alcoholism a disease Are you not tired of the professors who brainwash young students into disbelieving the Word of God Are you not tired of experts who know all the answers when they don't even know what the question is The Problem of

Rationalism!

And I believe that this problem is highlighted in this strange story of the poisoned pottage. People in Scotland would be able to sympathise with these lads in Gilgal, for they have too have come through a time of food poisoning! Of course, difficult circumstances were nothing new to Elisha. We have already seen him dealing with a polluted water supply at Jericho, the crippling poverty of a widow in the same region, and the terrible smell of death itself at a home in Shunem.

It's almost as the Lord said, "Very good, he's doing so well. Now what shall we expose to him next I know! Famine". And so, returning home to Gilgal for what he may have thought would be a well-earned break with the lads from the Bible College, Elisha walked into a real mess. Notice: (1) THE CONDITION THAT ELISHA FOUND " There was a dearth in the land". (4:38) The Hebrew word for "dearth", (raab) signifies a famine and is so rendered in (1 Kings 18:2) The land was in the grip of famine.

This was the Condition that Elisha found! Note: (a) THE REALITY OF THIS CONDITION: Can you imagine the transformation that had taken place Do you recall that it was from "Gilgal", that Elisha had started out with Elijah on their final journey together (2:1) Gilgal was to the east of Jericho, close to the Jordan, where there would be more moisture and vegetation than further inland. But what a change had taken place! The earth no longer yielded her fruit: the fig tree ceased to blossom: there was no fruit in the vine.

It was a time of general suffering and gloom! This was probably the great famine which is mentioned in (ch 8) and lasted seven years! But think of this, famine in Gilgal! My, 600 years before, Gilgal witnessed a mighty miracle. The Children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land. They stood on the banks of the Jordan. There were no bridges. The people waited to hear instructions from God. When they obeyed the instructions the river divided miraculously. Take another look at Gilgal.

It was the Place of Renewal: for there the men were circumcised: it was the Place of Restoration for there the Passover was kept: it was the Place of Replenishment for there "they ate of the produce of the land". But now there was dearth in Gilgal! My, we can Learn From the Past, but we cannot Live in the Past! So many churches are living on an illustrious past! What Christ said to the church at Sardis He says to them, "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead". (Rev 3:1) What about you personally Do you remember how it was with you spiritually The fresh awareness of His presence: the ever present joy: the love that seemed to flow from you: the irresistible desire to talk about the Lord!

My, is it still that way Is it much more so Or is it less (a) (b) THE REASON FOR THIS CONDITION: You see in Eastern countries a DEARTH is generally due to a DROUGHT. We can therefore assume that the cause of this dearth was a devastating drought in the area. The rain of heaven had been withheld. Now according to the OT its clear that a time of drought in Israel was in turn due to the disobedience of God's people and God's displeasure with them. Do you recall those solemn words in (Deut 28:23-24) "Thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.

The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust". Disobedience on the part of God's people led to drought, and the drought in turn led to a dearth and this was the inexorable law in OT times. (2 Chron 6:26-27) My, is there not a real analogy between OT times and NT times When the church today is disobedient to God there comes a time of spiritual drought, which in turn is followed by a time of dearth! Here is the explanation of the shut: sealed: and silent heaven! Here is the reason for the barrenness in our land and in our lives!

SIN! Sin in the lives of God's people! Do you recognise that Perhaps you're trying to shift the blame and say its present day conditions: its the hardness of mens hearts: its the sign of the times: its the moral chaos: its materialism! No doubt all these have played their part, but lets be honest, the reason for the shut heaven is your sin and mine! What is: (c) OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN THIS CONDITION: Well, in any climate of economic deprivation and shortages, the natural reaction is predictable... it is selfishness and covetousness.

Ills: Francis Schaeffer expressed it like this, "the priorities of a materialistic culture are personal peace and affluence, that is, get all you can, can all you get and to pot with the rest". Its fascinating to see the care of Elisha in this time of dearth. My, he didn't remain at Shunem were his wealthy friends would have gladly entertained him! His post was at Gilgal and how lovely it is to see instructing " and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him." (4:38) Do you see what he's doing He's preaching the Word in season and out of season! (2 Tim 4:2) When trouble came he did not desert the flock!

Ills: I recall a time of spiritual dearth coming to one particular church at which I was preaching. After the service I asked one of the elders why he was not leading the service, "Why", he said, "because of the present crisis as elders we have stepped down at this time". I replied, "My, when trouble comes elders and pastors don't step down they step up a gear, and carry on". Is that what you're doing as an elder In this time of spiritual dearth in our land are you instructing: encouraging the people of God Are you doing in all your power to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die" (Rev 3:2) (1) (2) THE CRISIS THAT ELISHA FACED The pottage which was simply a thick broth, a stew, (made by boiling vegetables) was poisoned.

This was the crisis that suddenly faced Elisha and the student body at the school of the prophets. (1 Sam 19:2 1 Kings 20:35) Now what constituted this crisis Well, notice there was: (a) INSTRUCTION: Look at (4:38) Do you know that preachers and Bible College students usually have good appetites Ills: I'm sure you heard about the lady who was talking to her next door neighbour one Monday morning and she said to her, "I had the locust preacher yesterday for dinner". Her neighbour said, "You mean the local preacher do you not" "No, the locust preacher."

" Why", said her neighbour, "sure a locust is a small black thing that eats everything before it". She replied, " That was him". My, do you see how balanced Elisha was He was not only taking care of their Spiritual needs, he was taking care of their Temporal needs! Incidentally, which are you going to put first in this New Year The Spiritual or the Temporal Elisha took care of the Spiritual before he attended to the Temporal. The Lord Jesus said, "Seek ye first..." (Matt 6:33) There was (a) INSTRUCTION.

But note: (b) INDEPENDENCE: Look at (4:39) Did he feel that the stew being prepared by Gehazi was not adequate to meet the needs of the students Did he act independently because he was dissatisfied with what was being offered to the student body Did he forget that the prophet of abundant life was present and that he was well able to care for the needs of the young men No doubt all this was carried out with good intentions, but good intentions can be very dangerous if we have no word from God to authorise what we do!

So there was (a) (b) (c) IGNORANCE: For (4:39) says, "they knew them not". None knew what these wild gourds were! The word for "wild", means uncultivated. Commentators suggest that these wild gourds were probably a type of cucumber (a colloquint) which looks harmless enough but has a bitter noxious taste indicating that it is poisonous! Now these cute little cucumbers must have been very like the real ones

otherwise he who gathered them would not have been deceived! But not only was he fooled, so was everyone else as these poisonous cucumbers were shred into the pot without a voice being raised in protest.

My, we need only read Church History to discover that error and heretical doctrine have been introduced into the diet of God's people with little or no protest! In fact... and right here is the crux of the problem... often that which ultimately poisons the food of believers outwardly resembles that which is true and good and wholesome! Ills: M.Luther said: "Satan is a great ape". Does he not transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14) Does his deceitful workers not transform themselves into apostles of Christ (2 Cor 11:13-14) They come preaching the gospel but as the Word of God warns us, its another Jesus and another gospel. (2 Cor 11:4) My, do we not need to be vigilant Do we not need to heed the exhortation, " Prove all things...

"(1 Thes 5:21) "Try the spirits whether they are of God". (1 Jn 4:1) (a) (b) (c) (d) IMPURITY: Look at (4:40) These young men recognised that the food was impure and dangerous! Do you know something The power of Bible Colleges today depends on the kind of food the teachers give them I tell you if they teach anything that takes away from the inspiration and infallibility of the Word of God or from any of its great doctrines then "there is death in the pot", and that will be a sick college!

My, in so many areas today we have to say, "there is death in the pot." There is death in the pot of Modern Education: Secular educationists proceed on the basis that man's reason apart from Divine Revelation is sufficient in itself to answer all the questions that face man! There is death in the pot of Modern Ethics: Our young people are told to be natural and they are dubbed as prudes if they live according to Biblical standards of purity. There is death in the pot of Modern Broadcasting: As TV videos: cinema all combine and seek to undermine the teachings of the Word of God.

There is death in the pot of Modern Religion: as denomination after denomination has imported the poison of modernism and liberalism and ecumenism into the food of God's people! My, are you able to discern between what is helpful and harmful to the soul Are you able to detect error from truth Do you know when there is " death in the pot" (1) (2) (3) THE CURE THAT ELISHA FURNISHED You see in their plight the students appealed to the man of God, who ordered meal to be brought and cast into the stew.

As this was done, we read "there was no harm in the pot". (4:41) Do you see: (a) THE MEANS THE PROPHET USED: Meal! My, the meal acted as an antidote, and the influence of the poison was counteracted and canceled. What does the meal represent to us today Christ, the Living Word as He is presented to us in the Written Word! Do you recall that one of the great types of Christ is seen in the meat (meal) offering (Lev 2:1) My, Christ is the only answer to our present need and the only antidote to the poison of rationalism and modernism!

Thus, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness". (2 Tim 3:16) And My, the Scriptures bear witness of Christ. (Jn 5:39) Do you recall that when dealing with the poison of rationalism in the Colossian church, Paul had but one answer and antidote, CHRIST... "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge", and in whom "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 2:3,9) Would we seek to confront the poison of rationalism and modernism and any other ism Then we need to present Christ in all His Fulness (a) (b) THE MEAL THAT THE PEOPLE HAD: " And he said, pour out for the people that they may eat". (4:41) And the stew, now cured of the deadly addition, became nourishing food for the people!

My, there is no study... be it science, education, ethic's etc.: that cannot prove helpful provided it is Bible based and Christ - centred! There must be a generous addition of the meal of God's Word... Christ as He set forth in the Scriptures as our Saviour, our Sovereign, and our Sufficiency! My, add the Living Word as presented in the Written Word, and there will be "no harm in the pot,"... no matter what the study will be! My, Christ is the antidote for the Poison of Error. Christ is the answer for the Problems of Life. Will you afresh, "Turn your eyes on Jesus... His glory and grace"

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