

Progress

The leashing of the human heart...?

Sometimes, believe it or not, I take no joy in proclaiming the Truth of Scripture. Oh yes, Most of the time, the Truths of God are glorious, and cause our hearts to soar. A perfect example of this is found in Ephesians chapter one. Here the writer says,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved”. (verses 1-6)

Isn't that glorious!? Amen! But... the rules of life dictate that just as there is no hot without cold, no light without darkness, there is in the same fashion, no good news without bad news. How would one know good from bad, were there no comparisons of the two to each other?

The thing that makes glorious the words and ideas such as those found in the first chapter of the letter to the Ephesian church, is that they stand out in comparison to other words... even other words contained in that very same letter to the Ephesian church! For example, consider this from Ephesians chapter two...

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”. (verses 1-3)

The contrast between the bad news, “... *you were dead...*” in chapter two, and the good news, “... *God ... has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...*”, is stark indeed. And so it is with many truths of God's Word.

I love to proclaim the glories. Similarly, I dislike proclaiming the contrasting bad news. But it is there. It is true. It is ours to uphold it as truth, every bit as much as it is ours to uphold the good news as truth, and therefore it is ours to proclaim. Really, you can't have one without the other. And this leads us, unfortunately, to the subject at hand.

In our post-modern¹ and post-Christian² world, we have managed to convince ourselves that we – humankind – have progressed to the point that we are beyond all that “bad news” that used to be thought of us. There was a time when our culture, while not necessarily liking the Scriptural realities of the description of humans as Creatures and therefore subject to the authority of the Creator, nonetheless realized them. We do not any longer. We are post-modern. There was a time when our culture, while not liking the Scriptural realities of the description of human nature, nonetheless realized them. We do not any longer. We are post-christian.

Just what are these “Scriptural realities” to which we refer, and which are now being denied by those whom believe that humanity has “progressed” beyond such things? Here's one that none of us will particularly like. In his book entitled “The Preacher” (Ecclesiastes), the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, said, “*What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new'? It has been already in the ages before us.*”

For those of us who like to think of ourselves as “originals”, this is very bad news. Additionally, for those who think that humans are somehow progressing and becoming a better sort of creature (or being, as those who don't recognize their “creatureliness” might say). Scripture is clear that there is no better sort of creature. Don't think so? Consider this. After God wiped out the world in Noah's flood, with what sort of human did God repopulate the world? You've guessed it! Sinners! Why? ... because there is no other kind of human. The human heart has not changed since the heart of the first human, who himself disobeyed God and was cast from paradise. The only one whom did not fit that mold was the Christ, Jesus.

But we no longer hold Scripture as the final arbiter of what is True, do we? We (as post-modern, post-christian humans) have progressed beyond that. In the spirit of our age, we consider ourselves better. We consider ourselves more civilized. We consider ourselves more capable of creating societies in which all humans can have their needs met and can therefore flourish with

- 1 **Post-modernism** refers to the “age” of mankind, describing where mankind is in terms of overall philosophy. “Pre-modern” man believed that humans were creatures, and that there was a creator or creators; whether pagan deities or the Judaeo-Christian God, humans were subject to and answerable to supernatural forces greater than and beyond themselves, and/or their control. Most religious rituals were intended to influence these “forces”. **Modern** man believed that he had “grown” beyond such quaint beliefs by discovering the secrets of our physical universe, and thereby learning how to control his existence through science, technology, philosophy, learning, etc. **Post-Modern** man has observed the apparent failure of both of these lines of thinking, and has decided that his own, personal interpretation of how reality, the universe, existence itself works, is his to determine and his alone.
- 2 **Post-Christian** describes the present condition of Western civilization. This is not to say that Western Civilization was at one point Christian, but is not now so. It is however to say that what “under-pinned” Western Civilization was for a long period of time, a *Judaeo-Christian ethic*, and now no longer is. The main cultural ethic that has replaced the Judaeo-Christian ethic is a situational one; one with relative measures and metrics rather than absolute measures and metrics. This ethic is very close to becoming one with its Post-modern cousin in becoming not merely situation and relative, but utterly personal.

neither the need nor desire for evil or abhorrent behavior. Loved ones... no we are not more civilized, and we are not more capable of creating an “evil free” society. I ask this question of our parishioners all the time, and now I ask it of you. “Which human problem has been solved?”

The prophet Jeremiah wrote,

"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." (Jer 17:9,10).

Yet somehow we have managed to convince ourselves that the Truth's of God's Word are not Truths at all. After all, don't we know better than those *ancients* who didn't understand science and technology, whether political, cultural, physical, mechanical, medical... etc? In our thinking, we, the *progressed* humans will decide what *are* truths and what *are not*, and then govern ourselves accordingly. We are post-modern. We are post-christian. We have progressed beyond those *quaint notions* of the nature of humankind. To this culture-wide, world-wide thinking I ask again, which human problem has been solved? The answer is obviously none; and why? It is because, contrary to the post-modern's thinking, human problems do not spring from human circumstances, but from the human heart. Similarly, evil is not caused by human circumstances, but springs rather, from an evil, human heart.

Here in America at present, on the heels of another heinous act of mass murder of innocents by a depraved human³, we are wrestling with how such things might be prevented from ever happening again. Some are proposing greater mental health interventions: some, more government oversight; some are proposing stricter firearm regulation. Some are proposing ____ fill in the blank!

But know this – and this is not merely the Truth of the Scriptures, but also the demonstrable truth from anyone who's paying attention to human behavior and history – while we can try and shorten the leashes on the humans and so try to control their behaviors, There. Is. No. Leash. For. The. Human. Heart. ... from which any and all human wickedness springs.

Therefore it is incumbent upon us to recognize that the world is a place in which evil exists as such. We cannot stop it, for its origins are from an unseen place. As Jeremiah recorded, only God sees the human heart. Neither can we avoid it, for as the Apostle Paul recorded, it exists in the bosom of all human flesh. What then can we do? We can cherish the absence of evil when we have respite from it, and we can defend against it when it comes to us and ours. This is the reality of life, Scripture and history itself. How is it that the (self-proclaimed) smartest people in the room, the most progressive, are allowed to convince us that reality is not?

Pastor

3 Florida, USA school shooting of 2/14/18