



But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. – Matthew 15:9

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I confess, I'm a newsaholic. I listen to a business news program on AM radio early in the morning on my way to work, and when that is over I tune to public radio for Morning Edition. I usually sleep through a lot of that waiting for time to go to work.

It's a problem because the news often upsets me. It riles me up to hear people claiming their sins are actually virtue and everyone should be like them. I hear people make arguments that to me are colossally stupid. I should feel sorry for them, but usually my blood pressure rises instead.

Which brings up the issue of "civility." Observers bemoan the loss of civility in public discourse, particularly political discourse. It's easier to denigrate your opponent and call out the failings of his/her proposals than it is to demonstrate the effectiveness of your own ideas. So there's a lot of denigrating to be heard. Just today a co-worker used the terms "stupid" and "gun-grabber" to refer to a politician he didn't like.

I think there's a reason for the loss of "civility." I think it's a sign that God is about to move in human affairs as has been the promise for thousands of years. You see, I think God is letting go of humanity. When you study it, you'll find that God's wrath is him letting go. In Romans 1 Paul discusses God's wrath and says that he "gave them over" to what they wanted to do.

Revelation tells of seven bowls of God's wrath. Some people take these things literally and speak of seven last plagues in which an angry God punishes the world for slighting him for so long. But the imagery may merely suggest how bad things will get when God lets humanity do what it has always wanted to do.

Humans have a very strong need to feel that they're right and good. So often

thieves and hitmen have twisted logic to make the things they do honorable in their own eyes. The last half of the book of Judges is a strange section detailing a lot of terrible things that happened in Israel. The section begins and ends with the notation that, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." (Judges 21:25)

It should be obvious that we owe this portion of the book of Judges to a campaign to get a king in Israel, a campaign that did not please God. It's included because the history in it is accurate, not because the motive for writing it was pure.

My point is, however, that when everyone does what is right in his own eyes, terrible things happen. No, this isn't a call for stricter law enforcement. It's merely an observation about the human condition. We are internally wired to justify what we do, and often religion gets called into service to provide this justification.

Jeremiah provides a contrast between evildoers and those who trust in the Lord. This is found in chapter 17. It includes a passage very similar to Psalm 1. And when that part concludes he notes:

The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it? (Verse 9)

This reference to deceit tells us about human nature. Our own hearts (characters) do their best to appear honorable and righteous. So we aren't very good judges of our own condition, because one aspect of that condition is self-deception. Fortunately Jeremiah doesn't leave us in the dire condition he describes.

"I the LORD search the heart
and examine the mind,
to reward a man according to his conduct,
according to what his deeds deserve." (Verse 10)

In other words, if we trust ourselves or other humans to deal with our fatal condition, we are bound to fail at finding a solution. But if we come to God, if we learn to trust him, he can remedy our condition so that when the time comes for him to display his wrath (to let go) we will receive what the fruits of our healed characters earn for us, and it will be very good.

Believe the truth that God loves you. Believe the truth that you cannot get rid of sin by human means. Trust God and let him take over. I'm confident he will do a good work in you and that he will finish what he starts.

Sincerely,

Elkanah

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