

Bewildered?

I hear so many believers expressing perplexity and frustration with what they see happening around them. We live in a time of accelerating change, change that is moving our culture away from the predominately Christian worldview upon which American culture developed. For many this is perplexing, bewildering, “Why?”

For some it is simple; it is just more evidence that we are living in the “last times,” where things must grow “worse and worse” before Jesus’ return. Such a view of things is neither satisfying nor helpful; nor is it my view an accurate picture of what we are experiencing.¹

Judges and Ruth fit into a time in Israel’s history where God’s people had lost their way. Judges is the Biblical case study revealing what happens when a people abandon God. Consequences necessarily follow from what we supremely love. In Judges God’s people fell in love with the gods of the peoples around about and adopted their distinct and twisted ways. (Judges 2:11-15) They rejected God’s love and purpose and found themselves adrift; having pushed God out of their hearts, they found themselves living practically as God’s enemies. Their idolatry created calamity and yet they seem bewildered by it all; they ask, “*Why* is this happening to us?” (Judges 21:3)

Judges concludes with the disturbing story of the man and his concubine (Judges 19). The story shows how near the culture lives to anarchy and dissolution. The narrator tells us why this situation has developed: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25)

While the narrator is preparing us for the emergence of the Israelite monarchy (an actual earthly king), we should not miss the point – God’s people had rejected *God* as their King. When there is no transcendent authority, no source of truth outside of ourselves, then everyone really *does do* what *they* think is right. Tragically, left to ourselves, the rejection of God and His truth leads to an inevitable consequence – the disintegration of the culture.²

What about us as God’s people – how are we to see things, to respond? It is no accident that Judges and Ruth are together in the OT. In fact, the mess of Judges is the setting for the book of Ruth. Read it again with this background in mind. The characters of Ruth are refreshing, light in the middle of increasing darkness. In Ruth, we find people who still love God and live in covenantal loyalty; they obey His law and order their lives according to His word even while the world around them slips increasingly into chaos.

The problem with idolatry is that it can be subtle. At the heart, of course, it is about the heart; about a loss of passion and perspective. When our hearts are attracted to the things that the world around us finds so delightful; we might not really notice that our passion for Him burns less intensely. Oh, of course, we *still* love Him, but so many other things crowd Him out and our hearts grow cold and hard.

How can we know? Ask and answer some simple questions. “Do you delight in Him today more than any other day in your life?” “Would you quickly let go of any pleasure, any recreation, anything, if only you could draw closer to Him, sense His presence and His love?”³ Unless we live fervently in the moment, passionate in pursuit of Him, we *will* imbibe the values and ways around us – America is the evidence that so many believers have. Can we say without equivocation that we have *not* adopted the value system and perspective of our culture? Ask that question the next time you look through the postings on Facebook.

Many expressed anger and shock at what was exposed in the recent trial of abortionist Gosnell. Why are Christians so in the dark about this issue? Abortion is THE single greatest indictment that American Christians are asleep and have bought in to the prevailing culture – we do not share God’s heart and grief on even this most basic of issues.⁴

I don’t intend to be harsh; but I do intend to insure that we are not *bewildered* about what is happening around us. What we see happening is because *we* have failed in our fidelity to Him who gave His life for us and this broken world that He loves. We have failed to be God’s people, with God’s power and God’s truth, bearing witness without compromise, to the culture around us. Why should we be surprised at what is happening around us?

We must change. More than anything else we need an **awakening** – where we see things from His perspective and begin to live accordingly – will you ask for that?

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¹ There are several problems with this view, not the least of which is the lack of Biblical and theological support for this particular eschatology. Beyond that, how can anyone say with any certainty that *everything* is getting “worse and worse?” Upon what basis is such a thing to be determined? Is it not more than a bit arrogant to think that we have such a broad view of history, God’s purposes and the present moment to think that we can discern that things are really getting worse and worse? In 1900 there were a handful of Christians in Korea – today the nation is more than 50% Christian and has the world’s largest churches – are things getting worse there? Really? And if God evaluates things based upon hearts (1 Sam. 16:7), then which of us can look into the hearts of people and see what God sees? No, we would be better served to focus on the Lord, do our best to understand His Biblical/historical purposes and be totally, radically faithful to Him in the moment. Let me add this. Do we really think that all the end-times mania is really a satisfying excuse, to God and even our own conscience, for our passivity and lack of fervency for Jesus?

² The Christian can present a case for why this is so and why no other worldview can bring freedom and liberty to all of life. Central is the idea that the Bible reveals the true story, the metanarrative, of reality. Created in God’s image, we were made to live in relationship with Him, applying truth to all of life. No other system or philosophy will do.

³ Rev. 2:1-5.

⁴ Who has time? We are all so busy with our sports, recreation, hobbies and pleasure that we cannot find time to express God’ heart and outrage even if He wanted us to (who else will if we do not?).