

Forcing Change



Who Do You Trust?

As I contemplated the change-over from 2014 to the new year, a personal question arose as I considered the last twelve months and the uncertainty of what's to come. It was a simple question but with profound implications; Who do I trust? In ponding this I realized that the idea of *service* correlated. Ultimately, those who I trust are those who I will seek to serve.

It was a self-imposed question that reminded me of an incident many years ago.

Back in the 1980's I attended a Mennonite-founded Bible college. It was a good experience, and I encountered people truly passionate about pacifism and Anabaptist history. The irony was that I grew up in an independent Mennonite church that did not claim adherence to pacifistic ideals, nor did I hold to the pacifism expressed in our classes. Other differences in culture and attitude were evident. Thus I found myself an enigma to some professors, for my thought process didn't always fit the orthodoxy of the classroom.



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Carl Teichrib, Editor

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Occasionally this difference resulted in a meaningful exchange, but for the most part it produced awkwardness. My foot-in-mouth comments would be returned with a side-ways glance from the professor. A few times, however, things got interesting.

For example, in our Corinthians class the professor led an exercise based on 1 Corinthians 1:12, the passage where the Apostle Paul confronts Corinthian believers about divisions in their midst. In the verse some claimed to be followers of Paul, others of his contemporaries, Apollos and Cephas (Peter), and some professed to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Understanding that Christ was the focal point of Paul's letter, our professor nevertheless wanted us to wrestle through the passage by asking which of the three we would follow and why, thereby placing ourselves in the shoes of the Corinthians. In this we were told to purposely exclude the obvious answer, Jesus Christ. On the chalkboard he wrote, "Paul" – "Apollos" – "Cephas," then randomly picked students to verbally respond. Classmates answered with intriguing reasons, highlighting the teachings and characteristics of the three men. It fueled a fascinating debate.

"Carl, who would you follow and why?"

I didn't know. I had been aimlessly doodling on my binder while listening to the others. At no time had I believed the prof would call on me. "Carl, your thoughts please."

My mind went blank. Stalling for time, I started thinking out loud and blundered through a list of reasons why I *wouldn't* choose Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas. The answer came when I was at the end of my rope. "I'm going to follow myself!"

The class went silent. Slowly the professor walked to his chair, pulled it around his desk to the front of class, straddled it, and stared at us for an uncomfortable minute. Finally he broke the quiet; "Now we have something to talk about."

City of Man

The idea of following myself - a statement of trusting and serving the creation rather than the Creator - has long been the story of humanity. One example is the first city in the Bible. No, it's not Babel with its infamous tower. It's the city of Enoch.

In Genesis 4 we read the account of two brothers, Cain and Abel, and the murder of one by the other. God confronts Cain for his crime and pronounces a sentence, a curse

that included the inability to grow crops and to wander. Methodist minister Les Woodson, in his study on Genesis, explains the act of roaming; “The curse was not to a nomadic life but to one of constant running without the benefit of a stabilizing culture.”¹

Hearing this sentence Cain cries out, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!”

Three things cause him angst as noted in Genesis 4:14. First, he will no longer live in the security of the place he knows - he is driven from his land. Second, he realizes his relationship with God will be cut off. Third, he understands that as a wanderer he will be prone to attack - a possible reference to the fear of vengeance over the murder of Abel. This is too much for Cain, and God responds to his cry by promising protection while Cain lives out his sentence. Here was a “second chance” of sorts; Cain could choose to place himself in God’s trust as he roamed in consequence to his crime.

Cain does wander for a time, set adrift from the stability and safety of others. We find he travels to the land of Nod, a name that in the Hebrew means “wandering.” But here things change; Cain starts to build “a city” - a permanent settlement - and his wife gives birth to a son whom they name Enoch. Cain extends this name onto his construction.

Jacques Ellul, a French social philosopher and theologian who held some unorthodox beliefs [a complex view of universal salvation], communicated the importance of Cain’s actions. I believe his assessment of Cain’s work has merit.

“...he [Cain] will satisfy his desire for security by creating a place belonging to him, a city... The city for Cain is first of all the place where he can be himself - his homeland, the one settled spot in his wanderings. Second, it is a material sign of his security. He is responsible for himself and for his life. He is far from the Lord’s face, and so he will shift for himself...”

Cain has built a city. For God’s Eden he substitutes his own, for the goal given to his life by God, he substitutes a goal chosen by himself - just as he substituted his own security for God’s. Such is the act by which Cain takes his destiny on his own shoulders, refusing the hand of God in his life.”²

Ellul reminds his readers that the city name itself has a meaning correlating with the above assessment, that is, to dedicate or inaugurate. In other words, to start again or to make a beginning.

“Now a start is made, and it is no longer God beginning, but man. And thus Cain, with everything he does, digs a little deeper the abyss between himself and God. There was a solution for his situation, but the solution was in God’s

hands, and that is what he could absolutely not tolerate. He wants to find alone the remedy for a situation he created, but which he cannot himself repair because it is a situation dependent on God's grace."³

Cain's Enoch is the first known city, the exemplification of civilizing for the sake of security under Man's own power. Trust is placed in self, service is given to self.

It reminds me of what Frank Sinatra famously said in his song, *My Way*. Note the reference given to those who kneel in prayer; the person who trusts God.

For what is a man, what has he got
If not himself, then he has naught
To say the things he truly feels
And not the words of one who kneels
The record shows I took the blows
And did it my way
Yes, it was my way



The actions of Cain, my own off-the-cuff remark of "following myself," and the message of Sinatra's popular song are indicative of humanity's fallen nature. Genesis 3 records our fall as intentionally choosing an alternative direction rather than staying in God's prescribed order. We made a new start with the aim of our own aggrandizement, and thus turned our back on the God who made us. Since then, humanity continues to choose to serve the creation - ourselves - and not Jesus Christ the Creator.

We trust and follow humanity.

The Big Question

As we consider in "whom we trust," now and into the remainder of 2015, a reminder of the importance of this question can be learned from the ancient Hebrews.

In the last two chapters of the Book of Joshua, Israel's leader is advanced in years and Joshua knows his death is near. Calling together all of the Hebrew officials, elders and judges, a powerful message was then transmitted to the Israelites. It had a two-fold approach; a reminder and a decision.

The reminder was an historical overview of what God had done to set apart Israel, to keep Israel, and to direct the Hebrew people. A short but effective survey was given, reinforcing what God did through Abraham to Moses and their experience with the Egyptians, to what He had done for them in securing the land they were now standing

on. "I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant" (Joshua 24:13).

With this history in mind, they found themselves facing a serious choice. *Who will you serve?* Will it be the God who created and protected you? Or will you place your trust elsewhere?

"Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The people responded; "We also will serve the Lord." But Joshua knew this wasn't sufficient. It was one thing to make a declaration in the emotion of the moment, after all, their leader was dying. Rather, the seriousness of the decision had to be established.

"But Joshua said to the people, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good'."

With the gravity before them, the people made their choice; To trust and serve God. And this brings me full circle to the beginning of this article.

Knowing what God has done for us in the past - His act of love and redemption (John 3:16) - yet understanding that 2015 brings uncertainties in world affairs, and personal trials and troubles, in whom will you place your trust? Will it be the God who is exalted above heaven and earth? Or an alternative?

Who will you serve? **FC**

Endnotes:

¹ Les Woodson, *The Beginning: A Study of Genesis* (Victor Books, 1974), p.39.

² Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Wipf and Stock, 1970/2003), p.5.

³ Ibid, p.6.

When Issues Ignite Ire

By Debra Rae, author of *ABCs of Globalism*.

Note: This article, penned by my friend, Debra Rae, was written a few years ago. However, it is a good reminder of how we are to conduct ourselves - as Christians - in light of the challenges faced by a changing society, politically and otherwise. Some important food-for-thought.



Be Angry, but Sin Not

Whether self-described as “right” or “left,” “faith-based” or “secular,” “conservative,” “liberal” or “moderate,” those engaged in the political process poise themselves for battle. Unfortunately, the voice of reason is too often sidestepped. As agenda-driven politicians lick their chops in anticipation of a pending presidential election, scathing rhetoric escalates all the more.

With this in view, I’m reminded that Jesus was no stranger to “telling it like it is.” However, in characterizing Pharisees as “white-washed tombs” and “a brood of vipers,”¹ He never succumbed to conspiratorial plotting, pride, hatred, or lies.² Only fools engage in slander, and Jesus was no fool! (Proverbs 10:18)

Following His example, Bible honoring Christians must speak out boldly without fear of ridicule or, in extreme cases, persecution. But, frankly, as a Christian, I’m sometimes at a loss. Wisdom dictates that a “soft answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1), but I’m often befuddled as to how best to broach flammable issues that, by their very nature, ignite ire.

Navigating Strategically Set Land Mines

True, our adversaries draw from an arsenal of dubious political tactics; but tit-for-tat hardly becomes a Christian. Before jumping into the fray, we best examine our own motives and the accuracy of our information. Both should remain above reproach.

Given the postmodern mindset, ceding to “common ground” – i.e., the lowest common denominator – is deemed necessary. Not so for Christians. Simply by choosing the narrow way less commonly traveled, and by acknowledging moral absolutes, fundamentalists bear the unfair label of being somehow divisive.

In navigating strategically set land mines, Christians must remain ever mindful that postmodern ground rules forbid “adversarial processes” – e.g., proclaiming Bible truth. Given the dialectic process, ends always justify means. Accordingly, in his book, *Getting to the Source: Read-*

ings in *Sustainable Values*, Ross McCluney calls for a new, more liberal core set of “universal” values distinguished by imagination, ambiguity, and “evolving truth.”

To uphold Bible truth, Christians must challenge what’s wrong, not go along with it. Otherwise, rugged individualism will take its final bow to consensus, and “gray” thinking will trump absolutes. Hence, for Bible honoring Christians, the art of “collaboration” goes beyond difficult, it can be downright impossible.

The Civility Card Tactic

George Orwell explained: “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

Even when its presentation is diplomatic, this revolutionary act is tagged “uncivil.” Count on it. Playing the civility card is intended to silence one’s opponent, and it does a great job of it. Once accused of incivility, the faint hearted wilt and fade so as not to appear bullish. In response, opponents skillfully steer the sheepish into conceding core convictions about traditional family, national patriotism, religious dogma, and the like.

Opportunistic Outrage

Shifting accountability from self to others, many tacticians feign “outrage” over the moral failings of their adversaries. As Christians, we’re to “judge nothing before the time until the Lord come” (1 Corinthians 4:5). That is to say, while Christians rightly exercise and act upon spiritual discernment, they mustn’t usurp God’s position as Supreme Judge (1 Corinthians 2:15). Furthermore, before attempting to remove a speck from another’s eye, they first must remove the log from theirs (Matthew 7:3-5). [Editor’s Note: For an in-depth discourse on judging, see *Forcing Change*, Volume 8, Issue 9]

When it comes to politics, however, Christian activists sometimes fall prey to bouts of opportunistic outrage when, instead, they should strive more diligently to be irreproachable workmen who honor the Bible, (2 Timothy 2:15) “all men,” (1 Peter 2:17) and dignitaries (Jude 8) for whom they are commanded to pray (1 Timothy 2:2).

Our purpose, as Christians, isn’t to prove others wrong. Rather, we’re to seek truth (Acts 17:11) and, with meekness and due reverence, give account for our findings (1 Peter 3:15).

[Editor’s Note: meekness is often mistakenly considered as “weakness” or passive mildness, the New Testament word, however, is *praótēs*, which refers to “strength in gentleness” or “power controlled.” The use of the word in this context is telling, emphasizing “self control.”)

In so doing, we remain fully aware of our personal limitations (2 Timothy 2:24) and strive to avoid nonproductive wrangling over dogma intended to advance some church-philosophical-political agenda (2 Timothy 2:24; 1 Timothy 6:20). Apart from God’s calling, we mustn’t presume to teach others lest, by our own errors and shortcomings, we lead them astray (James 3:1).

“Iron sharpens iron,” and that’s a good thing (Proverbs 27:17). However, in wielding the sword of truth, believers mustn’t go so far as to disembowel their fellows! Divide and conquer is the Devil’s work. He’s the consummate accuser (Revelation 12:10). Christians aren’t.

Hot Button Christianity

Because their respective worldviews are altogether incompatible, Christians simply won't see eye-to-eye with secularists. In the Book of Amos, we learn that two cannot walk together except they're agreed; nonetheless, the basis of fellowship with other believers is not so much agreement when it comes to highly disputed or complicated theology. Rather, it's founded on shared, saving knowledge of Jesus Christ – distinguished by sound biblical belief and shameless confession of one's faith (Romans 10:9; 2 Timothy 6:20).

Curious, isn't it, that in the Gospels Jesus posed over 300 questions and, when asked some 183 questions, He answered only three of them.³ Jesus wasn't uninformed or confused. Rather, we glean from this observation that Christianity is not entirely a "tucked-in-tight religion."

Nonetheless, unity is achievable (Ephesians 4:13) if, when hot button issues arise, zealots avoid becoming unduly blinded by their own biases. It's true, there are "deal breakers" rendering compromise impossible; but we're likely to catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. By following Christ's example of asking probing questions to expose folly, we're more likely to accomplish this without capitulating our values and standards.

The Ploy of Stereotyping with Impunity

By taking moral stands, supporters of life (over abortion) and traditional marriage (over gay relationships) are not necessarily hateful. But to special interest groups focused on targeted political agendas, you'd never know it! Such groups accuse principled religionists of phantom phobias and, then, fashion negative stereotypes to belie believers' rich heritage of abolishing the slave trade, defending human rights, practicing charity, and founding hospitals and schools.

By stereotyping with impunity, opponents undermine traditional values and break ground for a myriad of special interest causes. So powerful are special interest groups that theirs have become, in effect, a fourth branch of government characterized by unchecked power funded through earmarks.

While biblical perspective for holding government in check includes God's transcendent law, sphere sovereignty⁴ and balance of power, too many have come to believe that emissaries of an all powerful Nanny State must act for the common good by curbing religious zeal and silencing moral absolutism.



My Point?

A secularist who believes that “ends justify means” is expected to play the civility card, feign outrage at moral failings of others, and fashion fallacious stereotypes that discredit opponents. But Christians are held to a much higher standard. In no way are faith-driven citizen activists “just another special interest group” pleading for some self-serving agenda. When issues ignite ire, Christians rightly manifest indignation at what’s wrong, yet their charge is to “sin not” (Ephesians 4:26). Believers are commanded to love their enemies and pray for those who abuse or falsely accuse them (Matthew 5:44).

In fighting “the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12), believers mustn’t faint. Nor must they engage adversaries with arrogance, hostility, or deceptive practices. Theirs is a spiritual fight in which principled moral positions evade partisanship. Uniquely, their war targets forces of darkness (Ephesians 6:12), not the people deceived by them.

There exists a natural order that government “under God” is compelled to respect and uphold. For Christians, “politics is the high calling of ensuring that government protects the pre-political institutions and preserves the moral order.”⁵

Standing for truth demands nothing less than absolute integrity. *FC*

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Endnotes:

¹ Prominent and Influential, Pharisees were a closely organized separatist group at the time of Christ.

² See Psalm 31:13; 101:5; Proverbs 11:9; Jeremiah 9:4.

³ Marvin Olasky, “Complicated Truth,” *World Magazine*, April 23, 2011, p.84.

⁴ Dutch statesman Abraham Kuyper coined the term “sphere sovereignty” to assert that individuals, families, churches, schools, and businesses owe their origin, not to government, but rather to God, before whose face they live. Accordingly, their rightful structures and functions come from Him.

⁵ Charles Colson, “The Value of Virtuous Government,” *The Sky is Not Falling: Living Fearlessly in These Turbulent Times*, 2011, p.140.

Inspirational Quotes

1. **Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.**
– Proverbs 3:25-26.
2. **Rouse yourself up and look to God. Build your hope on Him. No matter if there are a hundred and one things that press, resolutely exclude them all and look to Him.**
– Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Barbour and Company, 1963), p.22.
3. **The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.**
– Nahum 1:7.
4. **Simply trusting ev'ry day, trusting through a stormy way; Even when my faith is small, trusting Jesus that is all.**
– Edgar Page Stites (1836-1921), "Trusting Jesus," *Hymns of Glorious Praise* (Gospel Publishing House, 1969), p.392.
5. **In the spiritual-political battle for the soul of man and society, the commonwealth of God will outshine any attempt at man-centered commonwealths, whether regional or global. Whence comes this certainty in the midst of uncertainty and humanists' fear of the future? It comes from the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace in the world. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Light.**
– Philip C. Bom, *The Coming Century of Commonism* (Policy Books, 1992), p.364.
6. **God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling.**
– Psalm 46:1-3.