

Sexagesima 2018

Suffering Fools

2 Corinthians 11: 19-31

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Postmodernity, explains J.I. Packer, is popularly equated with a denial that there is any such thing as universal public truth, the idea that there is only my truth and your truth, that which is true for me and that which is true for you, but there is no truth that is true for everybody." (The Way of Truth in the Present Age, pg. 17). Grim, but true, especially in this day and age.

The Apostle Paul seems to sum up Packer this way, "*For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing yourselves as wise.*" Human nature seems to have a tendency of wanting to be on top, to be first, to have the answers before anyone else. We strive to support our opinions based on what we learn from the varied sources of intellect that permeate our televisions, computers and newspapers. What we learn and what we accept as truth establishes our view of the world and those around us. Unfortunately it is no longer a simple matter to distinguish between fact and fiction these days.

Our country, and the world for that matter, have become so polarized to the extremes that it seems as though there are two truths that are diabolically opposed in every argument and opinion. Who do we listen to...who should we listen to? Is it possible that one side of our political debate is 100% right and the other wrong to the opposite extreme? Inevitably some will say yes. Or is it more feasible to accept that mankind, infected by sin, suffers the illnesses of arrogance and narcissism as the fight for dominance continues? We do seem to suffer fools gladly and our adherence to party lines has quite possibly buried the truth.

In the pre-king days of Israel, they were warned that following a worldly leader over God would be tragic. Samuel was getting old, his sons were ungodly judges and the people were demanding that a King be put over them. This irritated Samuel...he knew that they needed to walk with

God and not do as the other nations did. But they were persistent and said unto him, *"Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.* (Are they really concerned with righteousness? We will have to save that for another sermon). *But the thing displeased Samuel...and Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me..."* (1 Samuel 8: 5-7). Here we are reminded that we do not see things as clearly as we think. And in today's world we continue down the same path. Whom do we seek? God? Or do we suffer fools gladly? And because of our devotions do we see ourselves as wise, as we berate those on the other side who may be our Christian brothers and sisters as well? Or have we become the fools? Now listen once again to the second verse from our reading today, *"For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face."* I wonder why so many of us do not realize that many of our own sufferings are self-inflicted because of what we accept as truth and by whom we acquire that truth. For if we step away from biblical principles and morality the path before us only gets darker. If we are not careful we can be deceived into believing lies that may risk our very salvation.

Case in point: In 1989 Sergey Antolyevitch Torop, a traffic officer in Siberia Russia, came to the conclusion at age 29 that he was the Word of God and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He has two wives and a following in the range of 5,000 to 10,000 devotees (no one is really sure). His church is called the 'The Church of the Last Testament' and Sergey is in the process of writing his 12-volume follow-up to the New Testament. His church strives unto this very day influencing many that a new age has dawned. The attraction comes in the form of a peaceful utopia against the backdrop of a world spinning out of control. People are seeking, but where they go for answers will dictate the path they will choose. Some may fall into a political trap, some may try to escape to a secluded paradise, but in the end it will be God to whom we give the final answer. I suggest we do our best to avoid the guidance of fools.

Even as Paul's epistle to the Corinthians continues we can witness in our current state of affairs how little progress man has made in heeding the very words of God Himself...if we can call it progress at all. We remain

easily swayed and strongly influenced by promising words that defeat the purpose for which we are intended...to be the children of God and of God only! Not solely members of a political debate or a commune of distracted followers. Paul tells us to STAND UP for the truth; to be BOLD in the face of reproach! "Are they Hebrews...are they Israelites...are they the seed of Abraham? So am I Paul tells us! We could ask the same thing today; are they republican...are they democrat, are they American, Russian...or Israelite? Are they Orthodox, Roman or Nazarene? So are we, we could say. What Paul is telling us is that we are all equal and we are all equally subject to God Almighty. We do not need to look down darker paths seeking answers that suit us, but rest in the Word of God where the answers are right before our eyes.

No political process or self-inflated guru is worthy of the private interpretation of truth over the guiding spirit of the Holy ghost!

And so, then comes the most important question we can ask of those whom we have put in authority over us; "*Are they ministers of Christ?*" As far as I am concerned this is the most important question. If we are going to put someone in a place of authority over us, should not our priority be to ensure this person is a Godly leader? Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior have become the children of God and are the ministers of Christ; that includes you and I. Only those who profess such a faith are willing to carry out God's will even when its not popular with the masses. Some of our political leaders, on both sides, are men and women of God and they have a difficult task before them. We must be supportive no matter what side of the isle they are on, testing their words and actions and willing to suffer with them when ridicule comes our way. Paul was no stranger to pain and we should be willing to accept our lot when it comes. Paul could care less what they did to his body, for he properly understood that to be absent from this world was life in Christ and the torments he suffered would not compare to the glories he would experience after death. Some, even today, suffer the pain of death in the name of Jesus Christ, we do them no justice by failing to remind our kings and authorities that truth is found in the Almighty not agendas.

So, what must we focus on as we move along this earthly journey? Are all our answers found in the political arena or in a utopian pursuit?

These worldly ventures will have their end...and then what? What will be left? How about the truth...

Paul tells us that *"Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."* Despite worldly pulling's and our naïve leanings towards this thing or that, it is the care of God's church that remains priority over kings and kingdoms. No matter how ardently mankind has tried to rid itself of the Almighty there will be a day when all of creation will praise Him, for we will realize that in our self inflicted chaos it was He who kept us from annihilating ourselves. *"If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities."* Paul assures us that all the pain we endure to preach the Gospel of Christ will be our blessing and our strength.

We live in an uncertain world at best and the power of the Almighty is required in order to fight the good fight. Jesus did not die for you to leave you on your own come what may. His spirit resides within your very core! Come forward today and consume the body and blood of Jesus Christ who inhabits your very soul that you may have the fortitude to walk in truth being defended against all adversity and letting your lights shine in a world lost its ways.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.