



Thinking in New Ways

How Do You Think You Can Upgrade Your Life?

If I were to ask you to tell me about the history of the world, where would you start? What would you describe? Would you speak on the major inventions that have changed the way people do things or of important wars, the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms? Are you interested in cultural changes over time or fluctuating values, morals, or religious practices? Perhaps it is certain people of the past that interest you: authors, artists, philosophers, or heroes. The Bible provides us with a sociological account of early history, using biographical information to explain how it went. After Adam and Eve sinned and brought evil and death into the world, it was not long before the one sin led to others. Their son Cain killed their other son Abel in a fit of rage and jealousy. A few generations later, one of Cain's descendants bragged about his murder of a young man. **I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.**" (Genesis 4:23-24 NIV) It went downhill from there. In Genesis 6 is given the following report of how bad it had gotten. **The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.** (Genesis 6:5 NIV) Of course we know that a hundred years later the LORD destroyed the people of the earth with a great flood, only preserving the family of Noah and his daughters-in-law.

Society did not improve after that though. Most of the world turned away from God and corruption filled the earth. Murder, rape, and theft broke apart the social order God designed and the farther away people turned from God, the worse it became. The Apostle Paul described the situation and the root issue. **So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.** (Ephesians 4:17-19 NIV) This is an astounding declaration. There is much to unwrap here and then we will consider our next steps with what we know!

Paul reminds us of what the condition is of those without a life transformed by Christ. He says they are "darkened in their understanding". The way they see things is shrouded in an inability to figure out what is there. That is their constant state. What may seem so obvious to a Christian walking with God is a complete mystery to those who aren't. Logic and forceful arguments get nowhere. It is like hiking into a cave devoid of all light and someone trying to get you to notice how beautiful the stalactites are. Anything in the Bible or in connection to God that is more than what we all know from common experience is lost to the mind of the one without Christ. It is so frustrating to try to get someone without Christ to grasp the life of salvation. Paul saw this too. He insisted that those not born-again are alienated from the life of God. They are thoroughly disconnected and have no idea what they are missing.

A classic illustration of what we are describing is found in John the Apostle's Gospel in the ninth chapter. A man who was born blind was outside and noticed by the disciples. They asked Jesus if it was his sin that caused his blindness or the sin of his parents. They were completely in the dark on this and assumed like many that if something bad happened it was someone's fault. Jesus waved off the question and told them

the man's blindness was an opportunity for God to reveal Himself through the man. Nothing more than that. Jesus then spit on the dirt, made mud out of the saliva, and rubbed it on the blind man's eyes. He told him to go down to the Pool of Siloam and wash the mud off his eyes and after he did so, the man could see. Now here is where the account gets fascinating. Jesus healed the blind man on the Sabbath. The Jewish authorities were angry that by making mud, Jesus worked on the Sabbath which according to them was against the Law. Of course, Christian or non-Christian alike would recognize how ludicrous this was, the Jewish teachers condemning Christ for making mud on the Sabbath rather than rejoicing in the great miracle of the blind man's sight. Yet, all of us have our own pet values and unique blind spots when it comes to right and wrong. The Romans explained away the murder of Christians. The Vikings had no problem with pillaging and raping. Child sacrifice, slavery and wife burning have all been accepted in many parts of the world for thousands of years. Our generation justifies abortion, the poisoning of drinking water, medical testing of young children, sexual immorality, greed, sex trafficking and drunkenness.

The ability to think like God and see right and wrong correctly is lost on those who have never been born again. It isn't that they won't, they can't. Sin makes us all blind to how life actually is. The Apostle Paul in our passage said that the problem is insensitivity. How the expression is translated is "hardening" of the heart. The word rendered hardening is more literally "insensibility". It is the inability to recognize and understand the things of God and right and wrong. The Greeks had a word that describes this phenomenon. They called those not Greek barbarous or barbarian because their words sounded like "bar,bar bar", just gibberish. God is not just ignored and His ways rejected. He is unknown and what He says sounds like nonsense to the mind without Christ. The need for God is not just spiritual, it is psychological and emotional also. If that need is not met, a forgery developed by Satan will be tried. Lust rather than love, greed rather than contentment, drugs, fighting and anger rather than peace.

The need for God and all He brings is universal. If He is not discovered and embraced, a form of sin will be a replacement emotionally and psychologically, something that keeps us from God, an idol. Our idols are more subtle and sophisticated perhaps than they were in ancient times but they are still God substitutes. Everything from a new smartphone to binging on Netflix can be attempts at finding an alternative to Christ and the work of salvation. When Samson, who was chosen by God to rescue Israel from Philistine oppression stopped connecting with God, he turned to prostitutes to fill that need only the Lord can safely and perfectly provide. When David turned away from God, his eyes found the married Bathsheba. For Judas it was thirty pieces of silver. Jesus' mother Mary found her sons and daughters when her faith in Christ waned.

I recently saw where a famous singer/actress shared her devastating account of having been raped by another Disney actor when she was fifteen and then sexually assaulted by her drug dealer when she was eighteen. The singer had made a pledge when she was fifteen to remain sexually pure until marriage because of her commitment to Christ and now her personal life is in shambles as she approaches thirty. The traumatic effect of the sins of others and yes her own sins also still cripple her. Wealthy and popular, she is broken, confused, and hurting. Do I know what she needs? She needs the salvation of Christ reworking her life. She has embraced substitutes for God that haven't brought fulfillment. I can't help though thinking that a return to the Jesus she once loved could bring her into a supernatural peace and joy she needs beyond all else.

You can't think as you should unless you see things as Jesus does. I laugh sometimes at how God so magnificently outplayed Satan at the Cross. The enemy thought the Cross was his way of getting rid of Jesus. God saw it as the means of rescuing His people from Sin and making Jesus the Savior of the world. This week when you come up against it and you feel defeated, offer a simple prayer of faith. Say to Christ, "Show me Lord how this is a victory for me and what I should do next." Raise your hand in triumph, smile, and keep your eyes open for Jesus to point the way for you. Like it was for Moses, your Red Sea, your great hardship, is just a new opportunity for Christ to advance your cause and increase your faith!