

A Time To Weep

A Prophetic Call to God's Priesthood Company

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"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" ---Jeremiah 8:20

Picture the scene with us. It's the end of the agricultural year, the time of the celebration of the Feast of Ingathering, whenever the final crops should be harvested, and brought into the garner for storage. The streets should be crowded with joyous, happy people, who are dancing, singing and praising God for His abundant provisions throughout the course of the year. Instead, there is weeping, and a pitiful wail of despair heard throughout the land. Joy is withered from the sons of men.

Why is this? Because the harvest of the field is perished. The wheat, barley, and corn crops are completely wiped out. The oil and the wine is languished. The vine is laid waste, and the fig trees are made bare. In fact, *all* the trees of the field are withered. They have all been stripped bare, barked white, ravaged by *something* that took no thought or consideration of the condition in which it left things.

What could possibly have produced such devastation? The answer is a simple one. A mighty swarm of locusts has invaded the land, strong and without number. They have come, and brought with them heartache, misery, and woe. They have ravaged the land, insomuch that, behind them, the earth looks as if it has literally been scorched by fire. Not only have they made spoil of the fruit, but they have left the groves and vineyards in such a state that, without a miracle from God, they will never produce again. The future looks bleak indeed!

Unless you have witnessed such a thing with your own eyes, it's hard to even imagine how something as small as a locust could produce such widespread destruction. But it must be remembered that their strength is in their numbers! The sight of millions upon millions of ravenous locusts would be an overwhelming one indeed...and the progression of such a vociferous army would be practically unstoppable! A description given in Adam Clarke's commentary drives the point home even further.

Should our eyes be opened in the Spirit, I firmly believe that this is the vision we would see. It is the same as that described in the Book of Joel, which is given in typical prophetic symbolism. "Ah," but some will say, "that's such a negative message. Shouldn't you be preaching a positive, uplifting word to God's people?" Sure... if we

were at liberty to pick and choose our messages. But we cannot help but speak what we have seen and heard!

Beloved brethren, we may as well be honest with ourselves. If what we are seeing today is what we have been expecting for so long, then, let me be the first to confess that my expectations have exceeded reality. By this time, I had hoped to see the fullness of the Spirit manifested in the lives of God's people (mine included), ultimately leading to the ingathering of a worldwide harvest of souls. I had hoped to see a full deliverance from the bondage of corruption, beginning first of all, with a firstfruits company, and afterward, to the rest of the groaning creation. I had hoped that we might see this, not just by faith, but in actual fact. But I am forced to conclude that we are *not* collectively experiencing the fruitfulness of Tabernacles, and we are *not* corporately partaking of the abundance of harvest blessings, *for a definite reason known by God*. Without a doubt, HE HAS THE ANSWER. And He is interested in a people who will look to Him, in order that He might reveal that answer. Once it has been revealed, He is waiting for that people to assess the situation, acknowledge their condition before Him, and be willing to do whatever it is He tells them to do, in order to see the change come that is necessary. This, we believe, is what God's people need to hear more than anything else; and this is what He has dealt with our hearts to share. WE CAN have the experience typified by the Feast of Tabernacles; and we don't have to pretend that we've already possessed it. But we MUST follow His instructions precisely as He reveals them!

JOEL'S VISION

Regarding the book of Joel, there is much we do not know for certain. There are, however, a few things which we can put together, which will help us understand the circumstances surrounding it. We do know that Joel was a prophet to Judah; and, his prophecy is believed by many to have been contemporary with that of Amos (who, as you recall, was a prophet to the house of Israel). According to Amos 7:10, we know that Amos' prophecy was given during the reign of Jeroboam; so that gives us a general idea of the time frame.

Regardless of when it was issued, our main concern in this message is how it applies to us. Traditionally speaking, the first two-thirds of Joel's prophecy has been relegated to the past. Because of Peter's remarks on the Day of Pentecost, most folks immediately place it (with the exception of chapter 3) in the category of church history, as something that has already been fulfilled, and no longer relevant. But we have found it to be of greater relevance now than at any time prior to this!

There are a number of reasons why we believe this, but two of the primary ones are worthy of note. First, as we have already alluded to in our opening lines, the harvest described in the Book of Joel is not that which was gathered during the Feast of Pentecost, but, rather, that which was to be brought in at the end of the agricultural year, namely, during the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. The fact that we have only now arrived at the time of this symbolic Feast should indicate that Joel's message remains pertinent in our times. Our second reason will be brought out a little later in the message.

"THE TOLERANCE BUG"

It should go without saying that the cankerworm, the caterpillar, the palmerworm, and the locust of Joel, chapter one, should presently be considered for their symbolic significance, rather than for some natural form of fulfillment. Furthermore, they should not be viewed as differing creatures with similar destructive capacity. Rather, they should more accurately be seen as varying stages of the same beast. This becomes apparent from an examination of the original language.

We are not saying that this is its only application, but, as we see it, this plague of locusts carries a contemporary theme. It represents a philosophy, an attitude and a mindset which is prevalent in the world today. Each of its stages can be chronologically tracked down through history, and right up to the present Postmodern existential day in which we live. Furthermore, as each stage has had its development in the world, we can also see its devastating effects in God's "vineyard", as well. This is the area of greatest concern with us.

What, you may ask, is this ideological "insect" that possesses such enormous influence? And what is this attitude that has gained such broad, universal ground around the world? Our answer may surprise you. It has to do with a newly evolved idea of tolerance. It has come to bear tremendous weight on society, and has undeniably altered the face of the spiritual and cultural landscape both in and among us.

"But," someone will surely say, "what's wrong with tolerance? Isn't it a 'Christian' virtue?" To that, we would answer: it depends on what you mean by the word tolerant. You see, whenever that word was used in conversation in the not-so-distant past, it generally held the same meaning for everyone living within the framework of a Judeo-Christian society (that is, a society built upon the principles found in the Old and New Testaments), regardless of age, race, or gender. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that everyone who heard it attempted to *practice* it, as it was interpreted; but at least, there was a minimal amount of confusion regarding the word itself. People, upon hearing it, immediately understood its implications, and could therefore respond to its meaning with confidence that they were correctly comprehending its connotations. Not any more. It's as if we are reading from two radically different dictionaries in use today...the "Old World Dictionary", as it were, and the "New". And, believe you me, it makes a tremendous difference which one you use!

Traditionally speaking, the word tolerance was understood to mean a respect for the rights of others to hold views, beliefs, and / or practices which differ from our own. It described the ability to understand others, how they think and feel, in order that we might respond to them in a loving and considerate manner. And it called for the exercise of patience with them, even though we didn't necessarily agree with their conduct or point of view. The *new* definition of tolerance, however, includes more than just a simple respect for those who hold differences. It insists upon, and *demand*s acceptance of the beliefs and practices, themselves, treating them as being equally true as our own. Can you see the difference? A failure *to accept and to praise* the truth claims and values of others,

no matter what they may be, invokes charges of bigotry, hypocrisy, prejudice and intolerance. It becomes an invitation for attack, and an opportunity for ridicule.

Let me ask this question. What has been one of the primary obstacles facing the proper interpretation of Scripture? Would it not be the failure on the part of translators to recognize certain changes which have occurred in the meaning of words? Over the course of history, certain words have taken on drastic changes from their original meaning. Most of these have been gradual, making small, almost non-discernable changes over a period of several generations, until they arrived at their present definition. But what we have witnessed is a radical redefining of the idea of "tolerance", *over just the past few years...* and this has happened, for the most part, without the majority of folks ever even recognizing it!

Think about it! It used to be a complement to refer to someone as being "discriminate" (i.e. "He has discriminating tastes"). But nowadays, it would be considered the ultimate insult! This should give us some idea why this matter is so difficult to understand, much less to address. We can no longer just take it for granted that words still mean what they used to in public. They may very well carry the opposite meaning from the way we intended them!

Christian apologist Josh McDowell has written an excellent book, entitled, "The New Tolerance". In it, he very accurately identifies the spirit of this age. Here are just a few of the points he makes:

1) *The new tolerance excludes justice.*

How can anyone actually plead for justice, when the demands for the new tolerance have taken preeminence in a society?

2) *The new tolerance breeds indifference.*

Why should anyone care what his neighbor believes, if all beliefs are considered to be equal, and ultimately lead to the same goal?

3) *The new tolerance demands acceptance and applause of beliefs and behavior which is contrary to the Word of God.* If everyone is to feel loved and accepted in this world, how can anyone reject what others believe, regardless of what those beliefs might be? And if one belief is worthy of celebration in a free society, should not all be?

4) *The new tolerance suppresses the expression of righteous indignation.*

What right would anyone have to be outraged over an alternative lifestyle or belief system? After all, who can judge what is right or wrong?

5) *The new tolerance teaches tolerance to the tolerant, but allows for, and actually encourages intolerance toward the intolerant* (that is, toward those who are considered

exclusivists). Since the belief in absolutes calls for decisions (i.e. "either this is true, or that, but not both at the same time"), and decisions create divisions, then those who hold them are viewed as insurrectionists, and as enemies to the new social order. Would not an exception for the rule of the new tolerance be justified, yea, and even be required, in their case?

As we've said, few have grasped the full implications of what all this means. It's more serious than we might imagine. Francis Schaeffer once said, "If there is no absolute beyond man's ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups, whose moral judgments conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions". This gives us an idea of the magnitude of the problem. It affects every aspect of society, where judgment is required!

Already, we have reached a point in history where, if you challenge even the most blatantly destructive teaching or lifestyle, you are immediately labeled a "Pharisee". You are seen as a mean-spirited, and intolerant "hate-monger", who seeks to censor and oppress the free expression of others. And, beloved, if God should tarry, this is only the beginning! The attacks will only escalate, as more and more people come under the influence of this unholy, seducing spirit! You see, it's not *the substance* of the challenge that invokes the charge; it's *the act itself*. That you would even *dare* suggest that there is an adequate base by which to compare truth-claims, or that you are somehow qualified to decide what is true and what is false makes you a "know-it-all", a bigoted, high-minded, and narrow-minded meddler, who makes it his business to "police" the beliefs of others, and impose his opinions on everyone else around him. I tell you, if ever there was a time when Isaiah's prophecy was applicable, that time is now: "*Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey...*" (Isa. 59:14-15). We are witnessing these conditions right now!

I'm sure it's the same the world over (and we've heard reports that it is), but one of the ways in which the new tolerance has gained a foothold in western civilization is through the privatization of convictions. What is meant by that is that there is no such thing as community convictions on matters of morality or ethics (unless, of course, the community favors a position *other* than those held in the traditional Judeo-Christian value-system). Every individual must be free to decide for himself, without outside interference or criticism, which set of values he or she chooses to embrace. This, strangely enough, is the way in which a united global community is thought to be brought about. No one can be criticized for the path that he or she chooses, as long as that choice does not interfere with the rights and beliefs of others.

Another reason why the "fig tree" has been so "barked" and beaten by this new tolerance is that we've failed to see how it naturally appeals to the easily-offended, overly-sensitive, and childish feelings of the flesh. How does it do that? Easy. *The new tolerance makes no distinction whatsoever between who a person is with what that person believes*. What this means is that you cannot disapprove of an individual's lifestyle, beliefs, or truth claims, without disapproving of the individual himself. It's made into a personal

matter, as if any question is an attack on the person, rather than simply a disagreement with his or her worldview. This, probably more than any other reason, has stymied God's people from speaking out for truth in our times, and has left them "exposed to the elements", so to speak, in a barren and defenseless position. Because of an abhorrence to the name calling, because we have not wanted to offend others, and because we have been afraid of somehow misrepresenting the Lord to others, it has made many of us reluctant to publically speak out on certain issues, for fear that our words might be perceived as unloving, prejudicial, and intolerant. The truth of the matter is, in one way or another, and at one time or another, we've all been affected by "the tolerance bug"!

RETRACING THE SWATH OF DESTRUCTION

Nothing could possibly be more devastating than the worldwide epistemological shift which has occurred. This subtle, but subversive shift is responsible for the current cultural crisis in which we find ourselves. Furthermore, it is directly responsible for causing "the seed to rot under the clod"(that is to say, for robbing the truth of its effectiveness in the lives of individuals and in society as a whole). It has broken down the barns, and left the garner desolate (Joel 1:17; which would be another way of saying that it has broken down people's ability to receive and retain the truth). But how did we manage to get in this condition? And what has brought us to this peculiar point in time? A brief review of history would be helpful, in order to understand this. (Please bear with me through this section, since history has not been my major. I'll relate it as best I can!)

During the 14th century, the principal influences of the Renaissance began to produce a slightly inflated view of man alongside a slightly deflated view of God. From the artist's paintbrush, the sculptor's chisel, and the writer's quill, this new view began to take shape. To be sure, God was still in the picture. But man, with all of his awesome abilities and vast, untapped potentialities, had definitely been given the greater emphasis. The primary image was that of man, august and supreme, capable of overcoming every obstacle set before him, and accomplishing things which had previously been seen as being impossible. The spotlight was clearly upon him!

The Renaissance period would not have been so significant, had it not been for what immediately followed. After it came the Age of Enlightenment, which placed an even greater emphasis on man and his ability to reason, and less on God and His revelation. To be noted, secular thinkers were primarily responsible for this shift in emphasis. They took the initiative, and aggressively led the way. But theologians also made a significant contribution, by promoting the idea of deism. As was to be expected, this teaching corresponded well with those of popular French philosophers of the era, and proved to be extremely useful in the paradigm shift of public opinion. It was this philosophical "marriage" between secular thinkers and liberal theologians that led to the birth of the worldview now commonly known as "Modernism".

In the early stages of Modernism, scientists and social theorists didn't necessarily deny God's existence to the populace; they simply set out to redefine Him in the words of their theological colleagues. Where once God had been seen as having providentially guided His creation and creatures by His unseen hand, they had now learned better than that. It was understood that He'd left the running of the world to impersonal laws; and reason and logic were man's only means of discovering truth. Of course, that naturally gave the fact-gatherers and observers of nature greater authority than either the Bible or its proponents on life's most important questions. But because they were absolutely objective and unbiased in their conclusions (or so they claimed), they could be trusted to debunk truth from myth; and, as a result, give a more perfect understanding of the world and its origin.

Gary DeMar, in his book, "War of the Worldviews", wrote, "Modernism taught that certain knowledge of ourselves and the world was possible because nature was a closed, static system of natural laws waiting to be discovered. Modernism did not deny certainty or fact, but made man his own god, to determine those truths for himself.

"Unlike pre-Modernism before it, Modernism rejected the supernatural and proclaimed the sufficiency of logic and normal sense experience. Even biblical scholarship was tainted by this high evaluation of man; reliance upon reason instead of revelation became the basis for so-called higher criticism. These higher critics rejected miracles, the incarnation, and other supernatural doctrines. Modern scholars sought to 'demythologize' the Bible and free it from the superstitious shackles that had bound it for so long." —end quote.

Predictably enough, Modernism eventually led to the conclusion that, not only was God not needed, He was not even there. This became known as Naturalism. Man came to look at himself as his own god, with the power to control his destiny. Through the analysis of scientific fact, all of mankind's problems could be corrected, be they psychological, biological, sociological, or whatever. But the concept of God first needed to be removed from man's consciousness, in order that he might save himself. This, according to the Modernist, was the task at hand; and it was pursued with vigor.

While Modern thinkers thought they were doing mankind a service by removing God from the scene, what they did not anticipate was the problem it would create. You see, while they idealistically offered a vision of a humanistic utopia to mankind; a golden age of peace, prosperity, equality and universal enlightenment for all to enjoy; there was one question which they failed to consider. That was, how could this be accomplished in an objective manner? With the absence of God, there was no fixed point of reference, and no final authority to which they could refer. This meant that someone, or something had to fill the void God had left, in order to make their vision a reality (this explains the rise of competing humanistic ideologies, such as communism and socialism, on the world scene. They all claimed to have the solution). But since there was no consensus among them, how would this be decided? The philosophy of "might makes right" was their answer.

The disillusionment with Modernism had been growing, especially since the second world war. But it reached its height during the decade of the sixties, when campuses all across the country erupted in violent, bloody protest. The dreams of Modernity had been admirable; but in the light of contemporary history seemed unable to deliver on its promises. It had promised to produce a perfect, rational, planned, and compassionate world, without the need for God; but had failed miserably in its efforts. It offered peace; but gave the world war. It proclaimed a glorious future, based on reason and logic; but, in the process, left men with a sense of purposelessness and despair. From Modernism came nihilism; and with it, a blanketing sense of hopelessness that settled over humanity. Therefore, as a reaction to Modernism, and all of its failures, Postmodern Man was born.

How might Postmodernism be best described? As reactionary. It is by nature the antithesis of Modernism, which, as we've said, is a worldview based solely on reason. Postmodernism, then, is un-reason; that is to say, it refutes the idea that reality can be known or understood at all through logical means. It is totally beyond man's ability to comprehend, and therefore, cannot be described by any metanarrative.

Again, we quote from Gary DeMar.

"The system is both complex and ambiguous, but, basically speaking, Postmodernism is anti-worldview. It denies the existence of any universal truth and questions every worldview. The Postmodernist will not tolerate any worldview that claims to be universal in

application. But this is not enough. The goal of Postmodernism is not only to reject worldviews as oppressive, but also to reject even the possibility of having a coherent worldview.

"There are many worldviews around today, and the Postmodernist believes that it is his responsibility to critique each one. Worldviews must be 'flattened out', so that no particular approach or belief is more 'true' than any other. What constitutes truth, then, is relative to the individual or community holding the belief.

"Whereas Modernism and Christianity clashed by each claiming truth, Postmodernism attacks the concept of truth itself. For Postmodernism, truth is simply 'what works for you'." ---end quote.

Gene Veith has written, "In the past, when one framework for knowledge was thought to be inadequate, it was replaced by another framework. The goal of Postmodernism is to do without frameworks altogether. In Postmodern jargon, 'metanarratives' are stories about stories, 'large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application'; that is to say, worldviews. Postmodernism is a worldview that denies all worldviews." And Steiner Kvale gives this Postmodern perspective: "The Postmodern age is a time of incessant choosing. It's an era when no orthodoxy can be adopted without self-consciousness and irony, because all traditions seem to have some value." Confusing, isn't it? Nothing can be accepted as absolutely certain; therefore, everything must be accepted, in order to have a "level playing field"! This is the ridiculous rationale of the Postmodern mind.

For the past nearly forty years, Postmodernism has progressively grown to fruition. From its revolutionary beginning in the sixties (during which time, you recall, folks fearlessly experimented with every conceivable means available to them, i.e. "free love", drugs, Eastern meditation, etc., in an effort to discover the "indescribable" experience denied by Modernism), it has mushroomed like a giant cloud over the whole of society. And there is nothing that has escaped it, either. It has infiltrated every facet and function of modern civilization, be it personal, political, educational, entertaining, commercial, or religious; and it has woven itself into the very fabric of our thought lives. The form in which it is most clearly seen is this new definition of tolerance.

THE DIRECTION OF THE SWARM

Though differing in its approach, Postmodernism is but another attempt to bring about a perfect, unified world, offering its citizenry a comfortable environment in which to live, but without a reliance upon any ultimate authority to sustain it. Its aim is to eliminate the walls which exist between nations and people, and find a common ground upon which all may stand. But the biggest obstacle to the inclusivist's dream is exclusivism. You see, exclusivism produces convictions; and convictions are seen as the things which cause wars. Therefore, in order for inclusivism to emerge victorious, and in order for all people to live in peaceful co-existence one with another, it must conquer its greatest foe.

Perhaps, now, you're beginning to get the picture. Unless one's religious beliefs are compatible with the Postmodernist's dreams, they will, of necessity, have to be eliminated. They will have to be silenced, by whatever means necessary. This, of course, makes classic Christianity a prime target, since it in no wise allows for integration with rivaling religions. And this explains why there has been such a growing contempt in the world for those who hold to its tenets.

On the other hand, this also explains why Eastern religions found such widespread acceptance during the early days of the Postmodern era; and why they continue to do so even now. It is because there is a natural compatibility between the ideals of Postmodernism and those of Eastern philosophies; a mutual agreement of purpose.

Those who are acquainted with them understand that there is an intrinsic relativism within Eastern Monistic traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism. This is seen in their belief that everything is a part of one divine essence. Since they view everything as being a part of the whole, then everything would naturally contribute to the overall perspective. Everything, they say, possesses a measure of truth; therefore, instead of looking at things from an antithetical perspective, they take the approach of synthesis.

Whenever adherents to Eastern philosophy are confronted with seeming contradictions, they will usually just discount them as illusions (for the Hindu, this would be *Maya*). But, oddly enough, while they will reject reason as a necessary tool for discovering truth (like Postmodern relativists, they believe that truth is *created* by the individual, *not* discovered), they will then turn right around, and *utilize* contradiction from a rational perspective, in an effort to lead disciples into "the higher echelons of spiritual understanding". As one defender of Buddhism has said: "Zen (Buddhism) does not follow the routine of reasoning, and does not mind contradicting itself or being inconsistent...in other words, Zen wants to live from within. Not to be bound by rules (of logic), but to be creating one's own rules—this is the kind of life Zen would have us live. Hence, its illogical, or rather superlogical, statements. However logically impossible or full of contradictions a statement made by the Prajnaparamita may be, it is utterly satisfying to the spirit. That they are not at all logical does not mean that they are untrue. As far as truth is concerned, there is more of it in them". Thus, contradictions are not a problem to the Eastern religious thinker. They will either be rendered irrelevant, or else they will become instrumental. After all, we're all saying the same thing, whether it sounds like it or not!

Well, having said that, it should be easy for anyone to see why the Eastern dialectic mindset parallels perfectly with the Postmodern worldview. In both systems of thought, relativism rules!

The alliance formed between them has created a tremendously powerful force in the world; and one which has definitely had its influence in the West. "Nothing shall escape them", the prophet said. And we would have to agree. For, of all places where it should be prohibited, it has even found its way among the elect!

The results of this invasion are predictable: an erosion of the belief in absolutes. A devaluation of the truth as it is in Christ. A breakdown of convictions which separate us from the world. And an inability to offer unto the Lord even that which is required of us (as expressed in Joel 1:9a..."*The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord*"). This has resulted in a consumption of every living thing upon the face of the earth, leaving the moral and spiritual landscape stripped and barren.

Beloved, we don't have space to go into it here, but we must be willing to acknowledge how the "locusts" of liberal theology is effecting the body of Christ. By allowing it into our pulpits, we have left room for New Age teachings to creep in. This, in turn, has had varied ramifications, all of which has caused the new wine to be cut off from our mouths (Joel 1:5). No wonder joy has withered away from the sons of men!

I realize that some will say that we are just straining at gnats, while swallowing camels. They will argue that we're making too much of such an insignificant thing, or that we're misinterpreting this prophecy altogether. But this attitude could only come from those whose eyes are still blinded, and whose spirits are still in slumber. It's time to awake to the fact that an enemy has entered into the land, strong and without number. And he'll not go away, until the right steps have been taken!

In our next message, we intend to share what we believe is the proper response of God's royal priesthood in a Postmodern world. Whether we realize it or not, this is one of the greatest challenges facing us in the 21st Century. Both the gravity of the matter, and the urgency to deal with it, are seen in the words of the prophet:

"Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has ANYTHING like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.

Blow the trumpet in Zion...let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, SPARE YOUR PEOPLE, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" (Joel 1:2-4; 2:15a, 17, NKJV)

Indeed, why?

To be continued...

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