

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Teachers and Experts—Fathers and Leaders

I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand teachers in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. —1 Corinthians 4:14-16

In the recent months I have been railing against the hordes of experts, scolds and fear-mongers who have been spreading a message of hopeless gloom and causing real depression among the population. Researchers and scholars love the attention and are glad to share their latest theories of immanent tragedy. The news media loves the ratings that grim predictions bring, and folks will keep tuning in to see how the disaster actually plays out. Political officials are glad to have a crisis to make themselves seem all the more important, and from crisis they can extract additional powers. While every day may be a new day, I am ever astounded by how the scriptures present us with very similar events which occurred thousands of years ago. One might think that the ancient Church of Corinth was full of COVID experts!

The problem in the Corinthian Church (one of many!) was not of medical experts or politicians but of teachers. The Church was full of teachers. A Church can never have enough good teachers and the problem in Corinth was not in the quantity of teachers, but of the quality and motivations of these instructors. These teachers felt themselves to be irresistibly wise and they loved to teach others so they demonstrate just how smart they really were, and how ignorant the common people were! They were puffed up with their own sense of superior knowledge and importance, and were jostling for positions of authority in the Church. In time many would try to denigrate Paul and claim his place of apostolic authority. Doubtless, many of these teachers were very intelligent people, but Paul did not see this as the true and only measure of a teacher. In actuality, these people cared little for the students in their charge. Their real concern was making themselves feel important, even if this meant looking down upon their pupils. In Eugene Petersen's delightful translation of the Bible, *The Message*, he presents Paul's comments on these teachers in this way: *There are a lot of people around who can't wait to tell you what you've done wrong.* They delighted, not in building others up, but in building themselves up at the expense of others.

Paul's timeless message speaks directly to our modern world where intelligence is held up as the all-important virtue, and genuine concern for others is scarce. Paul explained that they needed something greater than teachers. They needed *fathers*, and he presented himself as such a parental guide. A father or mother is one who

deeply cares for those in his or her charge. Paul was appealing for Church officials who would show genuine concern for building up a family of healthy and informed believers with a wholesome and comprehensive understanding of faith and life.

The Corinthian Church had too many teachers, when what they really needed was fathers and mothers. In this twenty-first century, it appears that our world has too many experts and not enough *leaders*. We have too many people who are anxious to prove their intelligence and authority by touting their latest fear. What we really need are leaders in science, media and government who can see and communicate the big picture story, project a future with a few rays of hope instead of endless scolds, and give reasonable instruction for wise and responsible living.

Far too many in high positions are afraid to speak a word of hope, for fear that they will face criticism if all does not go according to that hopeful message. Many have simply become too accustomed to the much safer business of selling fear. Let us pray that real leaders will step forward to offer a broader vision, encouragement and genuine wisdom to a world which longs for such guidance. The Church always needs more fathers and mothers, and we desperately need *leaders* and not mere officials in our halls of power and government.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*Almighty God, whose is the eternal only power,
and other men's power but borrowed of thee:
we beseech thee for all those who hold office that,
holding it first from thee, they may use it for
the general good and to thine honour:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

—William Tyndale, 1494-1536 (adapted)