

Have We Rendered Ourselves Vulnerable to Deception?

I've often said that, whether liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, religious or nonreligious, too many people no longer think. They just feel, and that rather mindlessly. While this has always been the case with human beings to some degree, I see it as an accelerating and destructive trend in our current culture and even—perhaps especially—in the church. Because we don't think, we render ourselves vulnerable to deception and manipulation by whatever and whomever makes us feel something.

How many Christians today, for instance, pay attention to those portions of the Bible they like and feel while ignoring the portions they find difficult or that impinge on their personal conception of freedom and morality? We don't think. We just feel, and we confuse feelings with truth rather than measure those feelings against an external and unchanging standard that can be rationally identified, understood and obeyed.

I recently was asked to pastorally address a situation in which a Christian man with a loving wife believed that God had told him to divorce her. Are you kidding me? Were the words of Jesus not clear enough? And this is not the first time I've encountered this kind of delusion. When we make law and morality relative to the feelings and opinions of the individual rather than live by absolutes handed down from a sovereign God, society inevitably collapses.

I write Bible study guides for the cell groups in my church, New Song Church and Ministries. I do it because I want my people to have solid resources at their fingertips based in solid biblical exegesis revealing the intended meanings of the authors and applying it to life.

A couple of years ago, I decided to examine some small group Bible study materials produced by a publisher I respected back

in the mid-1970s when I was in seminary. I therefore ordered copies, hoping to lighten my workload. When they came, I was deeply disappointed to find they focused on questions like, "What does this verse make you feel?" or, "What do you feel this means?" I wouldn't have been so disappointed if the material had provided responsible, content-rich answers to those questions, but it didn't. People were left to make it mean whatever their feelings told them. Those books went directly to the dumpster.

I found the 2012 election cycle in the United States frightening. Why? Because I never saw or heard a really honest rational debate on the issues. Romney thought he could win on the merits of his record and the strength of his ideas, while he did what he could to make people fearful of Obama. Even as he presented his own ideas, Obama knew he could win by being the more charismatic of the two and by inflaming the passions of the populace. He could prevail by making people fear Romney and by making them feel he would do them more good than Romney, whether or not his record and his policies would substantiate the claim. Romney did his share of that as well, but the man with the charisma won by doing a better job of making people feel something.

Please understand that I'm not making a political statement here, and I'm not saying that Romney was right and Obama was wrong. Ultimately, history will render the verdict. I'm saying that, right or wrong, people win elections in this culture based on feelings rather than rational presentations of fact. No one will win public office who does not understand this and know how to work it. It's a dangerous and slippery path we've fallen into, and it sets us up for all kinds of deception. A populace that will not think is a populace that can be manipulated. I can't think of a single historical instance in which that didn't ultimately end in disaster.

Israel found itself in a similar situation not long after leaving Egypt. Korah led a rebellion against Moses by inflaming the emotions of people facing hardship in the wilderness when they had been promised a land flowing with milk and honey. All Korah had to do to marshal their anger and

fuel the rebellion was play upon their fears, their anxieties and their sense of disappointment that Moses hadn't immediately led them to that Promised Land. Never mind the long string of miracles performed through Moses that had freed them from slavery. It wasn't about rational thought and evaluation. It was about demagoguery through emotional manipulation. Korah and all who were with him perished, and so will we if we continue to throw our brains on the table and choose the same course.

Yes, we must be led by the Spirit, and, yes, that involves feelings, but that doesn't mean we stop thinking and begin living by our unstable emotions, desires and inclinations as if those feelings were truth. God built us for better things. This is the One who said in Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together." God gave us minds with which to think things through, even in our relationship with Him.

We are witnessing the beginning of the catastrophic collapse of a once-great culture—not perfect, to be sure, but once-great nevertheless. Destruction comes, and I'm afraid it can no longer be stopped. Now is the time for Christians to stand firm on the foundation of the gospel, the Word of God once for all delivered, and to rise up as a beacon of love and redemption in a darkening world. Think! Then add to it godly passion, and we will rescue multitudes from a mounting tide of destruction.

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