

"RIGHT IN THEIR OWN EYES"

(John MacArthur)

The Book of Judges describes one of the longest, bleakest epochs in Old Testament history. It covers a 450-year time frame extending from Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land until the time of Samuel—more years than America has been a nation. That entire era is riddled with horrific acts of evil, bloody conflicts and tales of human misery. It was an age of absolute moral chaos.

During that time, at intervals, when the people of Israel would grow desperate and cry for help, God would raise up some unlikely leader to conquer whatever enemy was oppressing them. These deliverers, known as "judges," weren't necessarily upstanding models of spiritual virtue. But the Lord would empower and use them to deliver His people from servitude or national disaster. And then when peace was restored, the nation would fall right back into another long stretch of sin and apostasy. It happened every time. The cycle is repeated over and over again.

In Judges 17:6 and 21:25 (the book's final verse), the writer sums up precisely why it was such a miserable time: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

That statement would be a fitting estimation of the moral state of our generation, too. In this increasingly secular culture, most people no longer believe there is any fixed, inviolable moral standard they need to obey. People regularly prompt one another with phrases like, "Find your own truth" and "Follow your heart"—as if that were a purely noble and upright way to live.

But that, according to Scripture, is the distilled essence of sinful foolishness. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 12:15). "Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 26:12). God condemns "evil people, who refuse to hear [His] words, who stubbornly follow their own heart" (Jeremiah 13:10). In short, "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26).

When Moses gave the law to the people of Israel, one of the chief principles he underscored for them was, "You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes" (Deuteronomy 12:8). The idea that everyone should get to define for himself what is right and true is a recipe for disorder and disaster. It is the very definition of moral anarchy.

But it is also the defining principle of postmodernism—the value system that rules the current generation. Truth is regarded as a matter of personal perspective. People today believe nothing can be known with settled certainty. This is not a new phenomenon. Pontius Pilate cynically asked Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Today's society collectively answers that question in the most skeptical yet arrogant way possible—namely, with the disastrous false notion that the only truth that ultimately matters is whatever seems right in your own eyes.

Of course, those who see the universe that way can't really believe anything outside themselves. If you can't be certain that objective truth exists, the suggestion that there is something to believe in simply makes no sense. Moral or religious convictions are out of the question. What is anyone to do except "whatever is right in his own eyes"?

In case you hadn't realized it, that kind of thinking now dominates our society. The concept of settled, knowable truth is widely considered intellectually inept and politically incorrect. The common phrases "my truth" and "your truth" suggest that everything is ultimately just a matter of perspective. All truth claims are really nothing more than just personal opinions, and they deserve to be treated that way. Every point of view, no matter how bizarre, demands equal respect. Because, after all, no one can say for sure what is ultimately true.

How did we get here? This is the wreckage of a post-structuralist approach to knowledge, where all texts must be deconstructed; any spiritual precept or article of faith must be met with unyielding skepticism; authority is despised; certainty is deemed the very height of arrogance; feelings count more than facts; and common sense, moral values—even knowledge itself—are scorned as relics of a more naïve epoch of human history.

There is zero tolerance for moral absolutes in a climate like this.

Western society was built on beliefs that are rooted in Scripture, starting with the truth that God exists and has made Himself known. The whole weight of the United States' Declaration of Independence hangs on truths about God and His creation that our nation's Founding Fathers regarded as "self-evident," and they were right about that.

All creation is filled with important realities that are self-evident—axiomatic—beginning with the very foundation of all truth. The Bible says



some basic knowledge of God is innate in every human heart: "That which is known about God is evident within them" (Romans 1:19, NASB 1995).

Furthermore, God constantly displays His glory through creation in a way that is hard to miss. Whether you study the vastness of the universe or examine a single drop of pond water through a microscope, you will see ample evidence of God's infinite power, wisdom, creativity—and a host of other attributes. These truths (precisely the kind of ultimate, objective realities the postmodern mind rejects) are purposefully built into all of creation at every conceivable level.

Scripture goes on to say, "God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20, NASB 1995).

Humanity's problem is that because of our sin, we resist accountability to God. We suppress that innate knowledge and ignore or try to explain away what is literally spread across the universe in all its resplendence before our eyes. Because fallen minds refuse to see what is obvious, they lose the ability to make sense of anything. "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22, NASB 1995).

That, of course, is the main theme in the opening chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans. The apostle goes on to chronicle some steps of decline that are reminiscent of those cycles in the Book of Judges. It is a familiar pattern throughout human history. It is a descent into sin and depravity that has brought down every one of history's most powerful empires and currently threatens our civilization. It is a path that goes from unbelief to complete intellectual futility, and it drags whole societies through idolatry, uncontrolled lusts, degrading passions and every conceivable expression of unrighteousness.

And it happens whenever people decide that everyone should do whatever is right in their own minds.

The end result is "a depraved mind" (Romans 1:28, NASB 1995)—a soul utterly given over to wickedness, irrationality and contempt for everything that is truly righteous. In an act of divine judgment, God withdraws His grace and allows an individual (or an entire culture) to reach that point of moral and spiritual insanity. Here's how the apostle says it:

"Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:28-32, NASB 1995).

We have literally watched this play out in living color, with Jerry Springer narrating, as our culture has sped down the exact path of spiritual decline Paul outlines in that chapter. Hollywood, hip-hop, shock radio and a host of other pop culture obsessions—helped by mainstream media and the secular academy—have indoctrinated recent generations to accept and even encourage every imaginable kind of depravity and radical "alternative lifestyle."

We're not supposed to notice the overtly self-destructive nature of popular moral deviancies or the aberrant subcultures they spawn. Anyone who is still offended or appalled by such things is considered ignorant or ill-bred. Our mainstream media have displayed a stubborn determination to advance and encourage the moral meltdown. They will, for example, portray months of lawlessness and rioting as legitimate expressions of free speech—insisting that it has been "mostly peaceful," even though the destructive result is clearly evident to anyone with eyes to see.

Meanwhile, nothing is more politically incorrect than religious belief. Genuine faith in God is commonly represented as a dangerous, disqualifying disorder. Our culture has quite simply lost its religion. Everyone does whatever is right in his own eyes.

Although public discourse today is full of cries for justice and structural change, there is simply no way to affirm any coherent standard of justice—much less is there any hope of change for the better—apart from a sweeping return to the God of Scripture, who is the source of all truth.

We desperately need a generation of men and women who will open their eyes to that reality, turn from the unbelief and cold skepticism that define our culture, and flee for mercy to the God they have spurned. The good news is that God does offer full and free forgiveness and abundant blessing for those who will heed the call of Jesus Christ and come to Him in repentant faith. ©2021 Grace To You