

Perplexed

There was a time when I thought of myself as a simple man. When I received a college education, I thought of myself as a rather smart man. When I completed my Master's degree, there was little doubt that I was a really smart man. Now that I am several years removed from all of that and have been pedaling down life's highway, living and learning, I have come to realize I am not smart at all. In fact, this whole issue of life is rather perplexing.

My life is couched in the environment of the church or Christendom. There was a time when that was a good thing – a positive and invigorating experience. Currently it presents more problems than I sometimes think it is worth. Not that eternity has no value, because it does. It is just that "Christianity" can be a real pain in the you-know-what at times.

Beliefs abound. Not just beliefs, but "firm beliefs." Beliefs based on specific scripture texts. The interpretations do not agree, but they base them on the same source. For the eternal life of me, I am not certain how that works, but apparently it does and has for centuries. Hence, churches on every corner and plenty of different Bible translations.

As I advance in age, I advance in agitation and inquiry. That is not to say that my inquiries are agitating to others, although they often are, rather it is to say that I become agitated by my own questions and inquiries. I am so eager for resolution and satisfaction that patience is pounded under the feet of investigation until I find the answer(s).

The perplexing part is often I do not find the answers. I uncover reasons, excuses, circular arguments, and volumes of noisy defenses, but often I do not find answers to the hard questions. Perhaps it is because I am not open to the answer. Or, I do not have sufficient faith to accept what I am being told or taught. Or, that I refuse to be blind to the one-sided justification of another's rationalization in thought.

Then again, it could be because my mind cannot process it all and I am just not capable of grasping larger truth. Perhaps those men and woman who still discuss how many angels can dance on the head of a pin are destined to do just that for centuries to come because that is what arouses them. After all, learning such things can indeed be important, it is what "doctors" are made of, it seems. Oh, they deny they have such arguments, but when you look at their endeavors, when you net it all out, most of it amounts to just exactly that.

On the other hand, those who have no substance, the self-help evangelists - rake in the crowds, and the cash, by dispensing wise words of eastern thought folded around tastefully selected biblical text tantalizing the innocent and titillating those thirsting in their souls. They entertain and mesmerize with words that motivate

and move the spirit. Until the thrill is gone or the prosperity poops out and then the folks move on to their next folk hero and million selling author.

Similarly, the enemy is again raising up a camp of atheists asking pertinent questions in the public forum that no one with any apparent credibility seems to be able to answer with conviction. Of course, there is some question as to the validity of the forum and the rules of engagement, nevertheless, Christians of substance ought to be able to hold their own and apparently, we are not. That is perplexing.

Is it that difficult to explain God's all-knowing character as it relates to freewill? Or is, "I don't know" the best answer? Can we discuss biblical creation without joining the camp of Darwinism? (CT, Nov. 2007, p. 79-80)

"Phooey!" you say. "Sour Grapes!" you say. "Absolutely", I am more than willing to reply. After all, I am perplexed. How can the proclamation of the eternal Son of God lose out to the gospel of academic minutiae or health, wealth and prosperity disguised as salvific good news? How can we not be more adequately equipped to defend our faith without falling back on such things as Darwinism?

If there were substantive nourishment on the table, why would anyone leave to feed out of even the most well disguised garbage can? If the foundational truth of love and grace, God alone and "thy neighbor", cannot be raised above the din of hyper-Calvinism, pre – post - and a-millennialism, "old" Pauline thought and "new" Pauline thought, than what a pitiful plight we have presented to the public at large. My goodness, we cannot even agree on what constitutes torture when it comes to war! (CT Newsletter, *Interview with Leith Anderson*, 10/29/07) How could we ever hope to agree on issues that are more pivotal!

Are you beginning to see why I am perplexed? Maybe it is just the onset of some theological dementia or pitiful lack of sheepskin hanging on my walls that cause my bewilderment. I am certain there will be more than enough folks willing to set me straight or put me out of my misery. That is fine, I have been out of my misery before and it was a bit less perplexing than where I am now.

In Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, he struggled with those who chose to selfishly use their gifts for puffery and self-edification. They chose to extol their own belief system over that of others. It was a shameful testimony to the body of Christ, for as Paul said, "You may give thanks well enough but the other person is not built up..." (1Cor. 14:17 NRSV) He goes on to tell them that in essence they are thinking and behaving as children. Selfish and thinking their word is somehow the last word. Again, Paul admonishes them to get their head on straight. "Let all things be done for building up." (14:26)

It matters little how we parse our individual differences or split our theological hairs. What matters is the testimony we present to the world and the unity we

have as the body of Christ. Whether it is a matter of tongues, prophecy, or minor details over the when, where and what of Christ's return; whether we are pre-Calvinists, post-Calvinists or Calvin Kleinists, the main thing should still be the main thing. "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures..." (1Cor.15:3-4). That is what matters, most.

It might be there is a tendency for some of us to forget that, "...God is a God not of disorder but of peace." (1Cor.15:33a) There is nothing perplexing about that.

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