

Part 1

DESCRIBING THE STORM

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible has much to say about “understanding the times.” Our Lord rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees because they understood the signs which told them of the weather, but did not understand what was happening in the spiritual realm (Matt. 16:1-4). They did not realize that the Son of God was in their midst, and that the great work of redemption was being accomplished. They did not understand how they were being deluded by Satan so that they were blinded to these things (John 8:44). And the result was calamitous. How important it is, then, that we understand the times in which *we* are living. We need to realize what is happening, and what our own position is. This is the purpose of this study. This study is written primarily for younger adults who have been born to privilege. This does not mean that it can be of no use to others. But it is written primarily for those who—precisely because of their privileged status—are now “in the eye of the storm.”

“Within the region of hurricane winds...very close to the center...the winds drop abruptly from their extreme maximum to light breezes or even to complete calm. Clear skies or only thin clouds prevail. The central circular calm area bears the name ‘eye of the storm’” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1963 ed., vol. 22, p. 497).

The person who is born to the privilege of living in a Christian family, and having the nurture of a faithful Christian Church, is in this “eye of the storm.” We do not mean a literal storm, of course, but refer to the spiritual storm that is raging all around us today. We may not realize that the storm is there, but it is. We may not feel its force yet, but it is unlikely that any of us will live long without doing so. Our purpose in this study, then, is to try to do four things. (1) We will try to describe this storm. (2) We will endeavor to show what the cause of it is. (3) We will take a look at some of the ways in which people today are trying to escape. (4) We will then try to show how the only real answer is found in the Lord Jesus Christ as He is revealed to us in the Scriptures.

We would begin by stating the obvious fact that we live in a time of great change. Many things that once seemed very solid, fixed, and secure have suddenly moved. For example until very recent times it was generally assumed by people in our society, even if they were not personally Christian believers, that there is such a thing as truth. People also accepted the idea that there is such a thing as right. And it was generally agreed that the opposite of a true thing was false, and of a right thing was wrong. There was, in other words, a certain framework. It was a framework that came from the long standing influence of the Christian religion. In this framework most people lived. This does not mean that they were better people by nature than people are today. It does not mean that they were pleasing to God. No one (since the fall of man through Adam’s transgression) has ever been, or ever will be, pleasing to God except in Jesus Christ (by repentance and faith). No, what we are talking about is not that certain individuals were consciously doing things in a certain way. We are simply saying that the influence of the Christian religion was such that most people took certain things for granted. They thought in a certain way without realizing that the framework in which they were thinking rested on a Christian foundation. They thought of the universe as an ordered structure. They did not see it as “chaos” but as “cosmos.” They assumed (often without thinking much about it) that there are such things as final answers and an ultimate meaning in life. The tragic fact is that this is no longer true. We may not realize this if we are still in “the eye of the storm.” Your father and mother, let us say, do still believe in God. They believe—and taught you to believe—that the world is created. They believe—and taught you to believe—that Jesus Christ is in charge of the universe, and that He is running it all “according to His plan.” If so, then it may not have hit you yet that most young people today no longer see things this way.

Let us briefly compare these two “frameworks.” Both represent basic assumptions about the situation in which man finds himself. The old framework plainly shows the dominant influence of the Christian religion. The new framework shows just as plainly the dominant influence of modern science.

The Old Framework

God exists
The Universe is created
God has a plan for the Universe
Man is significant
There is absolute truth
There is a way of escape

The New Framework

God (probably) does not exist
The Universe is a product of chance
There is no plan (all is chaos)
Man is not significant
There is no absolute truth
There is no way of escape

This is the real cause of what is sometimes called “the generation gap.” Fathers and mothers have more contact with the old order than their children do. Even if they are not personally Christian believers, they did grow up in a day when most people still believed the old framework. The children grow up in a very different climate of thinking. And to the extent that the children conform to the new framework, they tend to have trouble communicating with their parents. This is not a thing that only Christian teachers have noticed. Even some of our modern poets and popular song writers have seen it. This is illustrated in the following quotation from a poem by Bob Dylan. It has been said that his “lyrics have helped to form the consciousness of a whole generation.”

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is
Rapidly agin'
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a changin'

Many parents fail to understand what is happening. They do not realize that they have a framework of thinking that really depends on the truthfulness of the Bible. They do not realize, either, that their children are being educated into a different framework of thinking from their own. But such is (more and more often) the case. And so it comes to pass that even so simple a statement as this—“I believe Christianity is true”—can come to have a very different meaning for the one as over against the other. For the parents it may mean that Christianity is true for everyone, everywhere, and that all will sooner or later face the Jesus of history and the Bible as either Savior or Judge. For children educated into the new framework of thinking it may mean no more than this: “Christianity is true *for me*.” If there is no God—no plan for the world no divine revelation of final truth (in the Bible)—then the most that we can ever hope to have is something that is “true for me”—or in other words, my own (self created) interpretation of reality.

Let us illustrate this point. The writer himself grew up in “the eye of the storm.” In university I sat under a brilliant young professor of philosophy. He took us on a “guided tour” of the great philosophies of history. His ability was such that he made each of them seem as at attractive as possible. He did this so well that I began to wonder which philosophy he himself accepted. Finally, toward the end of the course of lectures, I could stand it no longer. I went to him and said. “Sir, please tell me which of these philosophies you believe to be the true one.” Imagine my surprise when he said “they are *all* true.” Since one philosopher contradicted the other, this answer made no sense to me. If one was true, I thought, then the others must be false. But then my professor explained. When he said *true*, he did not mean true in the sense of *final truth*. He did not mean that any philosophy is true in the sense that all opposing philosophies automatically became false. No, what he meant was simply this: Nobody really has *that kind of truth*. The most that anyone can possibly have is his own personal view. And my professor's thought was that if that view satisfied a certain person—and seemed to be useful to him—then for him it is “true.” Or, in other words, for him it is useful. I did not realize that I (coming out of the “eye of the storm”) had a completely different framework of thinking from that of my teacher. Yet the whole year I'd been sitting under the powerful influence of this man who had, as his deepest conviction, the idea that there is no such thing as “the old framework kind of truth.”

Now it may be that a certain young person today will say, “This could never happen to me, because I do not intend to go to university anyway.” This would be a mistake, because the storm has increased since the time when the writer was a student. It is true that, for some time the problem was not so evident in general society as it was among people in some of our university communities. At present, however, this new way of thinking is rapidly spreading out through our whole culture. The masses of people are now receiving it without even being aware of the fact. It comes to them in the things that they read—in the programs that they see and hear on TV—in magazines and books—and even in the constant din of advertising. To illustrate once more from the lyrics of Bob Dylan, we quote from several of his poems.

(1) (you ask of truth?
 there is no truth
for it is but a drunken matter
 romantic? yes
tragic? no, I think not)
 the door still knocks
an’ the wind still blows

(2) good and evil are but words
 invented by those
that are trapped in scenes
 . . . there is not
one thing anyplace
 anywhere that makes any
sense. there are only tears
 an’ there is only sorrow
there are no problems

(3) I’d forever talk to you
 But soon my words,
They would turn into a meaningless ring.
 For deep in my heart
I know there is no help I can bring
 Everything passes.
Everything changes

(4) i know no answers an’ no truth
 for absolutely no soul alive
i will listen t’ no one
 who tells me morals
there are no morals
 an’ i dream a lot

(5) how does it feel
 to be without a home
like a complete unknown
 like a rolling stone?*

Modern man can be said to live in a mood of despair. By this we mean that there is no longer the sense of hope that life can have meaning and a sense of purpose (as was the case under the old framework). One non-Christian thinker has expressed this idea this way: “Man is placed in an infinite space in which his being seems to be a single and vanishing point. He is surrounded by a mute universe, by a world that is silent to his religious feelings and to his deepest moral demands.” This is not really true, of course. Man is not surrounded by a mute universe. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork (Ps. 19). Every day the universe loudly declares the power and majesty of God. It is not true, either, that man is a “nothing.” (He is made in God’s image and has permanent significance.) Yet it is true that more and more people think along the lines of the above quotation. And it is this that we must understand.

When young people today move out of the “eye of the storm,” they are often destroyed spiritually. They are not prepared. They do not understand the times. They do not realize the extent to which they are being brought into conformity with this new framework. It is this that we will seek—this understanding and awareness—in the remainder of these studies.

Questions:

1. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of “the signs of the times”? (Matt. 16:1 4).
2. What is meant by saying, “Christian young people today are in ‘the eye of the storm’”?
3. Describe briefly the framework of thought that used to prevail in our society.
4. What is the framework of thought that *now* prevails (more and more)?
5. Underline the words (or phrases) in Dylan’s lyrics that express the problem of the so called “generation gap.”
6. How would the older generation interpret the state statement, “I believe Christianity is true”?
7. How would the younger generation probably interpret this statement?
8. What did the philosophy professor mean by the word true when he said. “They are *all* true”?
9. Why did the writer fail to detect which philosophy the professor thought was the true one?
10. Underline the words (or phrases) in the five quoted excerpts from Bob Dylan’s poetry which communicate to the masses today the same basic idea that the philosophy professor taught.
11. What is meant by modern man’s “mood of despair”?
12. Express in your own words what the non Christian thinker means in the statement quoted.

Projects:

1. Bring to class your own example (from pop music, TV advertisements, magazines, etc.) of the dominant influence of the new framework.
2. Ask three different individuals—of different age groups—what they would mean if they said, “I believe the Bible is true.”

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