

Moral Indifference and the Boiled Frog Syndrome

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In case the reader might be among those who are unfamiliar with the “boiled frog,” that age-old, metaphorical admonition regarding the ill effects of incrementalism on the moral fiber of society, I will repeat it now. If a frog is dropped into a pot of boiling water, it will promptly extricate itself with the use of a vibrant and instant propelling force, which is innate within the relatively large muscles of its hind legs, those being the parts of froggy that make those succulent, garlic and butter-sautéed delicacies. No matter how often the frog is plunged into the torrid cauldron, its natural instincts for survival will overwhelm the seething potential of a hurried demise in a watery grave and out it comes. On the other hand, if that same frog, which is no stranger to the damp regions of earth, is placed in another cauldron, where the temperature is roughly that of pond water (i.e. 70 degrees), the frog will consider the place environmentally friendly, thereby holding its soggy position within the pot. If one then desires to boil that frog, one need only raise the water’s temperature at particularly small intervals, say one degree per minute, and after a period of 142 minutes the water in the pot will have reached its 212 degree Fahrenheit boiling point, begin to simmer, and the unsuspecting frog, oblivious to its impending doom, will be poached to death. So it is with the moral fiber of society.

Days Gone By

When those of us who were present during the 1950s at a time when television viewing was gradually being ushered into the regular habits of the American family, the producers of those early variety shows, dramas, serials and sitcoms were very careful not to offend the moral integrity of the sponsors, the actors or the viewing public, no matter how far off the standard, moral mark either the performers or the audience may have actually been. It was just

considered in bad taste to make sexually explicit remarks, voice profanity of any sort or display cast members in any manner of undress. In fact, Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, who were married in real life and who obviously occupied the same bed in their home, were always depicted climbing into twin beds on the set of their sitcom, while their actual sons David and Rickey tucked themselves neatly into their bunks. Both the boys and their parents were seen only in full pajama tops and bottoms, even often protected by a bathrobe.

The same can be said for the cast of *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*. Jim Anderson (Robert Young) and his lovely wife (Jane Wyatt) would share a love pat on the cheek but never a full, mouth open, buss so typical of today's screen lovers. The bedroom was also graced with twin beds. Ward and June Cleaver were seldom seen in the bedroom, and June was hardly ever viewed apart from her ever-present string of pearls and Sunday go-to-meeting clothes, while cleaning the house in a neatly tied lace-lined apron. Even Wally and the Beaver wore full "jammies" in their night-night scenes. Those were the days my friends, and as the song goes, we thought they'd never end. But they did.

Many of us remember the uproar that came about when Elvis Presley wiggled his hips back and forth while crooning his rock-a-billy style musical version of *Blue Suede Shoes* on the Ed Sullivan show one Sunday evening. It's as memorable to most as where we were when JFK was shot. From then on Elvis was always viewed from the waist up; that is, until the frog began to simmer.

The Effects of Moral Relativism

We should not be surprised by the moral decline of our national conscience because the events

of the past several decades have increased the natural proclivity for sin by removing the moral restraints that were previously taught in our institutions of learning. No longer is God or His Ten Commandments permitted a mention in our public schools. Situational ethics and relativistic thought have replaced the moral absolutes once taught in K through 12. Couple that with God's own caveat spoken of in Genesis 6:8 (prior to the flood) and repeated in the context of Genesis 8:21 following the judgmental deluge, *Every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil all the time.* The flood changed everything but mankind's soul.

But though that is a very old reference, the days of the past were at least tempered by a Christian consensus and a sense of right versus wrong. There was a price to pay for disobedience in school and at home, and disrespect for authority; it was called discipline, a practice that has given way to extreme tolerance. The result has been what G.K. Chesterton wrote early in the 20th century, "The Christian doctrine of original sin has been proven empirically through six thousand years of human history." If you doubt that, just read this evening's newspaper.

Writing in the midst of the 18th century celebrated American author James Fenimore Cooper expressed his chagrin over the behavior of persons in his day in his historical novel *Heidenmauer*, "We gradually come to substitute inclination and interest for right, until the moral foundations of the mind are sapped by indulgence, and what was once regarded with the aversion that wrong excites in the innocent, gets to be not only familiar, but justifiable by expediency and use."

Sadly, the moral foundations of which Cooper spoke are even less firm than they were in his

day. Furthermore, in an era when relativism trumps absolute truth, one hardly knows any longer just what right is. He was perfectly describing the "boiled frog syndrome" when he wrote that wrong becomes ". . .justifiable by expediency and use." Eighteen hundred years before in the 1st century the apostle Paul wrote of much the same attitude when he penned these words, *They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice... They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them* (Romans 1:29-32).

Cooper also warned of the dangers concerning the departing of social graces from society: Such things as a gentleman opening a door for a lady, dropping her off at the door of a restaurant or church instead of making her walk through the parking lot, giving a lady a seat in a crowded bus or waiting room, taking one's hat off in doors, pulling a chair out for a lady to sit at a table, etc. Cooper wrote this caveat concerning those graceful behaviors, "If the gentleman and the lady vanish from a society, they take with them polite learning, the civil force of manners, the example of elevated conduct, and that high sense of station which lifts private and public duty above mere salary earning. If they go, eventually civilization will go with them." It has been said that a rising tide lifts all boats. The rising tide of decent civility will elevate the public conscience as to what involves a lifestyle that practices common decency. That levitation will begin in our homes as our children and grandchildren see common courtesy displayed by natural impulse between parents.

Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville was the author of that marvelous 19th century documentary on our one hundred years as a nation entitled *Democracy in America*. In that treatise he wrote these words, "Society ought to be designed to encourage the highest of moral and intellectual qualities in man; the worst threat of the new democratic system is that mediocrity will not only be encouraged, but may be enforced." If that is not a warning against "affirmative action" I don't know what is. That practice put into law in the past score of years has dumbed down the level of education in our institutions of higher learning. It judges a person's worth in educational and occupational opportunities, not on his intelligence or skills but on his race, ethnicity and gender. Martin Luther King said that he looked for the day when "A man would not be judged by the color of his skin, but by the content of his character." It is the moral and intellectual qualities of people that contribute to their excellent character. Warning of the dangers of a completely democratic system, Harold Laski remarked, "Legislative power, once it is wholly in the hands of the mass of men, is applied to purposes of economic and cultural leveling." That is especially so when the conservative legislature is unseated by a morally liberal (indifferent), socialistic class of legislators. Cultural leveling is what relativism and mediocrity are all about. There is no right or wrong, no moral or ethical absolutes, no striving for excellence; only a mediocrity of behavior and performance; an I'm ok, you're ok mindset. A tyranny of mediocrity, a standardization of mind, spirit and social condition enforced by a central government is what Laski calls "the collectivist discipline."

The Church was Called to be the Salt of the Earth

In the days before refrigeration, salt was rubbed into the surface of meat to prevent the

adverse bacterial action and proliferation that would result in a decay of the meat. The tenets of Christianity applied to the moral fiber of society could do much the same; that is, preventing moral decay. Russell Kirk, writing in *the Conservative Mind-7th* edition, said this, "Moral decay first hampers and then strangles honest government, regular commerce and even the ability to take genuine pleasure in the goods of the world" (211). Insert our recent national history into those words with these, the Watergate and Enron scandals, plus pornography in movies, TV and the internet.

There was a time when the church attempted to mold and preserve society, but the tide has turned and society is now shaping the church. The church is supposed to be in the world but is not to be of the world. In the world we are secular; that is, we are time-oriented, and that is as it should be, *There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven* (Ecclesiastes 3:1). However, when the world gets into the church it becomes secularized; it develops the patterns of the world. Paul warned of that when he wrote, *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:2). That renewal of the mind comes about through a familiarity with and the application of God's Holy Word.

De Tocqueville saw that America's greatness had been in part the result of her faith in God. He also saw that America was slipping away from her religious heritage and wrote these words of warning, "Since religion has lost its empire over the souls of men, the most prominent boundary that divided good from evil is overthrown; kings and nations are guided by chance and none can say where are the natural limits of despotism and the bounds of license." DeToqueville would be rolling in his grave if he knew of the moral decay that has come about in

our society. The salt (the Church) has seemingly lost its savor. Jesus reminded us that in becoming flavorless, the church would be worth nothing in its mission on earth.

The Negative Effect of a Liberal Ideology

Most people in the liberal establishment (religious, media and political) deny the existence of original sin and have basically expunged the notion of sin from their vocabulary, replacing that word instead with such euphemistic terms as errors, mistakes, wrong doings, blunders, faults and oversights. Conservatives the likes of John Adams, our 2nd President, believed the existence of sin to be an incontrovertible fact. "Recognition of the abiding power of sin is a cardinal tenet in conservatism," so said Russell Kirk when quoting Adams in the 7th Edition of his award winning book *The Conservative Mind*. Furthermore, Kirk pointed out that "conservative thinkers believe that man is corrupt, that his appetites need restraint, and that the forces of custom, authority, law and government, as well as moral discipline are required to keep sin in check." Unfortunately, the lack of moral education and discipline in our public systems, the lack of respect for authority (especially that of the Most High of all Sovereign Authorities), and the corruption in both law and government agencies have caused decency to become an uncommon and unaccustomed practice among the citizenry.

Those on the left fear Christianity because they fear that our country will become a theocracy, ordered up by and controlled through the dictates of religious bigots and papists; those who revere the supreme authority of the Pope. On the contrary, as Kirk (a devout Roman Catholic) points out quite correctly, "The sovereignty of God, far from repressing liberty, establishes and guarantees freedom; authority is not the antagonist of liberty, but its vindicator."

Jesus Himself assured His followers that the Truth would set them free. In a truly Christian society, man is not the final authority, but God is. The ultimate "freedom" is anarchy, and the only historical solution to that is an ultimate police state, a martial law that may even decay into a totalitarian dictatorship.

Kirk goes on to say that "Obedient submission to God is the secret of justice in society and tranquility in life, quite as much as it is indispensable to eternal salvation." Furthermore, he avers that a "Democracy, more than any other form of government, rests upon the postulate of a moral law, ordained by an authority superior to human wisdom." That Roman Catholic sage could not have sounded more evangelical, and his words are a direct parallel to those that Dr. Brent Allen has taught us through the first three months of 2007 in his series "Obedience to Dedication." If our democracy fails, and few governments have ever lasted as long as ours, it will be because the liberal establishment succeeds in its goal of removing moral law from our schools and our halls of public discourse.

One cannot teach morality from secular knowledge alone. John Henry Newman, a British Conservative in the mid 1800s, insisted that "Secular knowledge is not the principle of moral improvement, nor is it the direct means or the antecedent of moral improvement. Without personal religion, secular knowledge is commonly a toll of unbelief. Conviction is not produced by the logic of words or the accumulation of facts. In morals as in physics, the stream cannot rise higher than its source. Christianity raises men from the earth, for it comes from heaven; but human morality, creeps, struts or frets upon the earth's level, without the wings to rise."

The Water Is Simmering

The insidious, sinister nature of sin is illustrated in numerous examples throughout God's Word, but no more so than in the fall of the apostle Peter on the night of the Lord's arrest through the betrayal of Judas. We read of this account in the gospel according to Luke, Chapter 22. In verses 31-34 Jesus warns Peter of his impending fall and denial of Christ. Peter emphatically and boastfully denies that such an egregious act is possible, thus rejecting the prescience of his Savior and the malicious power of Satan. The first step in sin is spiritual pride. Solomon warned that, *Pride goes before destruction* (Proverbs 16:18). Next we read of the agony of Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane and the fact that his disciples, including Peter, could not stay awake. Spiritual lethargy often follows the overwhelming nature of pride. We get the notion that we are so mature that we need not study God's Word or *Pray that you will not fall into temptation* (Luke 22:40). Having boasted of his superior spirituality and then having become complacent, we read that when Jesus was arrested and led off to face his accusers *Peter followed at a distance* (Luke 22:54). That is step number three in the ominous decline in one's obedience and dedication to Christ. We still identify with Christ, but we lag so far behind that hardly anyone recognizes our faith. In verse 55 we find that when Peter arrived at the house of the high priest, the Lord's captors, His arch enemies, kindled a fire and *Peter sat down with them*. The final step in our unrestrained fall, before denying our faith and our Lord is an intimate relationship with His enemies. Paul's caveat is most applicable here: *Bad company corrupts good character* (1 Corinthians 15:33). One should not take this to mean that we are to separate ourselves from a world of unbelievers. What is essential, however, is that we do not become prideful, that we keep alert for the wiles of Satan, that we keep in the Word and on our knees and that we walk closely to our Lord and Savior, being filled with His Holy Spirit.

Only then will we be effective witnesses and be the salt and light that we have been saved to be.

Speaking from that sad and very personal experience, the apostle Peter warns us with these words, *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour* (I Peter 5:8). That forerunner of evil, the first of all of God's creatures to fall, wants to nullify your effectiveness and mine as we do the work of Christ. He does not come in overt ways but is a covert enemy that works on our old sinful natures and drags us out of the ministry for which God has prepared each of His chosen ones. It results in a gradual flaming of the fires of Hell, in ways so subtle that we can not recognize what has happened until it is too late. The prince of Christ becomes a frog (in direct antithesis to the famous fairytale in which the frog became a prince) and is ultimately boiled until his effectiveness for Christ is lost.

The Difference the Old North Church Can Make

First we have to be aware of the problems we face in our society. They have come upon us so insidiously that most people have just come to accept that status quo. It is sort of like one fish saying to another fish, "How's the water?" The other fish naturally asks back, "Compared to what?" In II Chronicles 12:32 we read about the " *men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do...*" For each of us to be effective as salt and light, we must know where to apply the salt to prevent further decay and to make folks thirsty for the Truth of God and where to shine the light of Truth. In order to shine the Light of Truth we must be aware of the True Truth present in God's Word. That takes instruction, both in a formal class setting and in one's personal time with the Holy Spirit of God as He leads us into truth through a meaningful study of Scriptures. We must also gauge current events in the Light of God's Word.

Next each Christian must discover and begin to use the gift or gifts that God has provided each one of us to do His work in this world. (See Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12) That is one of the reasons why every Christian should be active in a local church. By active I do not mean simply having one's name on the roll and attending worship services on Sunday mornings; rather I mean that the local church (Especially Old North) has many opportunities for service both in and outside the church doors (ex cathedra) and we should each take advantage of those opportunities. The apostle Peter has said this, *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*" I Peter 4:10

We should not take that Scripture lightly. If you are prone to think that the apostle's admonition is frivolous I would suggest that you study the parable of the talents taught by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 25:14-30; it may cause you to think otherwise. We shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ to answer for our witness in these perilous times and we had better be ready with the right answers. (See II Corinthians 5:10)

Soli deo Gloria