

Friday, October 23, 2015—West Michigan Grace Bible Conference—How Did We Get to be in the Mess We In?

Introduction

- Galatians 1:4—is there anyone here how doubts that the world we live in is evil? We see corruption and injustice on all sides. We observe a creative order that groaning under the strain of sin. We see defection from the truth on the part of those who used to stand with us in the Word rightly divided.
- Our society and culture appear to be teetering on the brink of collapse. Many old timers report that this is not the America they grew up in. Moral relativism, the erosion of Biblical values, public violence, and Atheism seem to be growing at exponential and alarming rates. Serious discussions are being had regarding the feasibility and legality of implementing Islamic Sharia Law in the United States.
- The small whole in the dike has become a gaping hole that is taking on water at an alarming rate. Yet the church at large has done little if anything to turn the tide. Is anyone surprised when the body of Christ at large is floundering without a final authority and views itself as spiritual Israel clinging to the earthly promises of a previous dispensation?
- Our main purpose this weekend is to try and ascertain how the word of God rightly divided would have us to think about the nature of the situation we currently find ourselves. How should we as believers think soberly about the current circumstances in which we find ourselves?
- My charge in this first study is to try and explain how the current state of affairs came to exist. In order to do that I would like to cover the following three points:
 - Big Picture: present a Biblical framework for understanding history
 - Cyclicity in American History: present a model for understanding our current culture
 - Christendom's Response: what if anything can be done?

Big Picture: The Framework

- In my first point, I want to give a macro or big picture view of how the Bible would have you look at history. In the recent past, Brother Richard (2009, *Welcome to Winter*) has tried to help folks understand what is going on in the culture by talking about the cycles of American history.
- The framework I am going to present is comprised of three things: a line, a wheel, and a hill.

The Line

- Genesis 1:1—time and by extension history have a point of origin in the creative activities of almighty God. There was a big bang. There was nothing, then God spoke and Bang there was something. God brought time and matter into existence out of nothing.
- Revelation 21:1—the earth as we know it will come to an end. Connecting these two points establishes a line with both a beginning and a predetermined ending.
- Ephesians 2:11-13, 7—when we speak about how God has worked in “time past,” how God is working in the present, i.e., “but now,” and how God will work in the “ages to come,” we are utilizing a strictly linear view of history.
- Ephesians 1:10—time originated in Genesis 1 and is advancing forward in linear fashion toward a prophesied end, the establishment of the new heavens and new earth. When the Dispensation of the Fullness of Time arrives the purpose for which God created time will have been fulfilled.
- One could argue that mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalists ought to be the most linear thinkers around.

The Wheel

- Virtually all gentile societies have viewed time as cyclical in nature. Regardless of their geographic location or despite their lack of contact with each other, pagan cultures all possessed a circular view of life linked to the seasonality observable in nature. Pagan holidays and festivals coincided with seasonal occurrences such as the winter and summer solstices as well as the spring and autumnal equinoxes⁷. Where did the gentiles obtain this seasonal celestial view of the universe?
- The notion that early men were primitive (e.g., cave men) is an evolutionary supposition that Bible believers should reject. Adam, the first man, was not a half man/half animal creature as evolutionary pseudoscience teaches. Rather, Adam was created in the image of God as a fully functioning adult male possessing superior physical, mental, spiritual, and emotion faculties as you or I. Moreover, Adam was placed into a mature, fully functioning, and perfectly created environment.
- Genesis 1:14-19—before God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, He created the planetary bodies of the universe. Note a few significant details.
 - First, the alignment and position of the planetary bodies serve the purpose of providing light upon the earth.
 - Second, the relationship between the earth and the celestial bodies of the firmament would not only account for the differences between day and night but would also serve as a mechanism for rendering seasons as well as for counting days, weeks, and years.

- Third, the dividing of day and night, seasonal differences, and the counting of days and years were designed in verse 14 to serve as signs to the inhabitants of the earth. According to Strong's Concordance, the Hebrew word translated "signs" in the King James Bible means "a signal, a distinguishing mark, banner, remembrance, miraculous sign, omen, or warning."
- Therefore, Adam was placed in an environment in which the planetary bodies served as signs of God's existence and handiwork.
- Genesis further reports of humanity's fall into sin, which not only wreaked havoc on God's pristine creation but also clouded and distorted man's willingness to see God's handwork in the natural world.
- Romans 1:19-23—the Apostle Paul reports how mankind's fall into sin distorted his willingness to see the witness God placed within creation. The following points about post-fall man are clearly observable from this passage.
 - First, mankind clearly knew who God was through his creation.
 - Second, based on the testimony of creation alone, mankind is without excuse for not desiring to retain God in his knowledge.
 - Third, the ultimate result of not glorifying God as God, lack of thankfulness, and vain imaginations is the changing of the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man. In short, mankind took the witness of God through creation and perverted it in an attempt to escape accountability. The end result was that humanity changed the truth of God into a lie for which "God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."
- Therefore, from the very beginning mankind was aware of the seasonal nature of God's creation. After the fall, the sons of Adam, in an attempt to remove God from their knowledge, took the signs and seasonal markers God established when he created the planetary bodies and hijacked them as part of their religious systems. Herein lays the explanation for why virtually all pagan societies in the ancient world viewed time as cyclical. They were simply following the course of this world, a perversion of the knowledge of God authored by Satan and his lie program.
- Acts 14:16-17—when God allowed the gentile nations to follow after their own foolishness, he did not reorganize or restructure the physical mechanisms of his creation. Rather, God still uses the seasonality of his creation as a testimony to the nations of his existence.
- Genesis 8:22—notice that God left the signs of seasonality in place to serve as a witness to the gentiles of his existence despite their perversion of it. Sin has not disrupted the seasonal patterns of creation but has instead distorted mankind's understanding of them.
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8—while linearism remains the predominant model for understanding history, we must also recognize that God is also the author of cyclical seasonality. Consequently, to arrive

at a complete paradigm of history, we must embrace the reality that as time moves forward linearly towards its prophesied end, cycles are also occurring.

- In secular terms we can observe this cyclical in the following ways:
 - The business cycle in economics: peak, contraction, trough, expansion.
 - The rise and fall of nations throughout world history.
 - The Chinese Dynastic Cycle
- Judges 2:10-19—the same cyclical phenomenon is observable within the only nation that God formed on earth, the nation of Israel. The middle section of the book of Judges presents seven cycles of apostasy, oppression, cry for deliverance, salvation, and rest. Israel vacillates between obedience and apostasy as the people continually fail to learn for their mistakes.
- Eventually, both Israel and Judah were conquered by gentile powers thereby ushering in the times of the gentiles politically and completing Israel's fall into political irrelevance due to her habitual unbelief. Despite having succumbed to the same cyclical collapse as the gentile nations surrounding Israel, time marched on. The linear was driven forward by the covenants and promises that God made to his nation that have not yet come to pass. Therefore, while the nations are rising and falling in predicable fashion, history is being pulled along a linear plane towards God's prophesied end.
- II Timothy 4:2—we need to continue to preach the word regardless of the seasons we find ourselves in.

The Hill

- Now that we have seen that both cyclical and linear concepts are both Scriptural all that remains is to combine them into a single explanatory model. For accuracy's sake, the trajectory of our line is best illustrated by a downward sloping line. Drawing the line in this fashion sets the Christian view of history apart from other linear progressive models. Unlike the evolutionary or Marxian views of history, humanity is not improving but finding new ways and methods to rebel against God.
- Daniel 2:35-44—within Nebuchadnezzar's dream we see the entire duration of the times of gentiles politically foretold in stunning detail. The only thing not foretold in Daniel 2 was that God was going to interrupt the progression of gentile power and usher in an unprophesied period of grace and peace, namely the dispensation of grace. The mineral degeneration seen in each part of the statue reflects the Law of Human Collapse. Mankind has no hope without God. It is only the revelation of Jesus Christ at his second advent to establish his kingdom that stops humanity's descent into oblivion.
- II Timothy 3:13—things are getting worse and worse not better.
- II Thessalonians 2:7—the mystery of iniquity is already working. It is only the presence of the body of Christ on earth that is restraining mankind's full slide into oblivion.
- In short, a complete Biblical view of history must contain the following three characteristics.

- First, it must reflect the God-ordained method of Bible study by adhering to linearism as its predominant explanatory model.
- Second, it must recognize that God is also the author of the cyclical and make room for seasonality as God's linear plan unfolds.
- Third, the linear progression and imbedded cyclicity must be understood to progress along a line that is downward sloping in its trajectory, thereby taking into account the Law of Human Collapse.
- This is best illustrated by envisioning a tire rolling down a hill. When the tire reaches the bottom it will crash in catastrophe. This is where the course of this world is headed and only the return of Christ can remedy the situation. As believers we need to understand that we cannot alter or fix what has already been set in motion. All we are called to do is preach the word regardless of where the wheel is in its rotation or how far down the hill it is.

Cyclicity in American History

- While no one knows for sure when the dispensation of grace will end or how close the tire is to reaching the bottom of the hill. It is possible to know, to some degree, where a nation is at in terms of the seasonal rhythms of history.
- In 1991 William Strauss and Neil Howe wrote a book titled *Generations: The History of America's Future 1584 to 2069*. This book was followed up in 1997 by the publication of *the Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny*. Since the late 90s, their work has been applied to a host of fields including economics, leadership, and education.
- While a full exposition of their work is beyond the scope of this study there are a couple points that will help us understand our current situation. First, they say that, "Generations come in cycles. Just as history procures generations, so too do generations produce history." Each generation possess a different age location, peer personality, and lifecycle. At any given time in the life of a nation there are four different generations in existence each in its own phase of life.
 - *Childhood* (ages 0-20)—social role: growth (receiving nurture and acquiring values)
 - *Young Adulthood* (ages 21-40) social role: vitality (serving institutions and testing values)
 - *Midlife* (ages 41-60) social role: power (managing institutions and applying values)
 - *Elderhood* (61-80) social role: leadership (leading institutions and transferring values)
 - *Late Elderhood* (81+) social role: dependence (receiving comfort from institutions and remembering values)
- The nature of each generation is shaped in terms of where they in relation to each of the four turnings.

- High (Spring)—an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individual, when a new civic order. Post WWII America.
 - Awakening (Summer)—a passionate era of spiritual upheaval when the civic order comes under attack from a new values regime. 1960s and Vietnam War Era
 - Unraveling (Fall)—a downcast era of strengthening individualism and weakening of institutions, when the old civic order decays and the new values regime implants. Culture Wars of the 1980s and 90s.
 - Crisis (Winter)—a decisive era of secular upheaval, when the values regime propels the replacement of the old civic order with a new one. Where we are currently at.
- Most importantly, the make up of the various generations is shaped by where they are at in relation to a crisis or an awakening. These formative events forge each generation’s archetype or collective persona.
 - Our most recent Awakening of the 1960s and 70s was unlike any of the previous ones in America History in that it had nothing to do with the God of the Bible. It was during time that the Bible and prayer was taken out of public schools.
 - 1963—Murry v. Curlett removed compulsory Bible reading from public schools.
 - 1963—Abington School District v. Schempp established the current ban against state sponsored prayer.
 - Fast forward almost 50 years and the Christian residual effect of the Protestant Reformation is gone. The generation that led the Awakening of the 60s and 70s in *Young Adulthood* is now occupying positions of leadership in *Elderhood*. Consequently, they have able to successfully transfer/impose their values upon the whole of the country and remake the country according to their un-Biblical thinking and agenda.

Christendom’s Response

- Rather than responding in a dispensational appropriate manner the non-rightly dividing church has sought to combat the unraveling and ultimately the crisis by seeking to repossess the governmental power structures for Christ. The hope much of the professing church lies in a postmillennial seizure of governmental power.
 - *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* by Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson
- In seeking to do so, one could argue that they have actually exacerbated the problem and enhanced cultural notions of the close minded nature of Christianity.
- The reality is the church in America is more worried about Rainbow Bright, Care Bares, Star Wars, and Harry Potter than they are what Bible they are using. More emphasis is placed upon political activism then upon Bible study and evangelism.

- Even within Christian circles, decisions are made based upon how something will affect one's own personal peace and affluence rather than considerations for sound doctrine.
- Ephesians 5:14—we who know better, who understand that Paul is our Apostle, know how to rightly divide the word of truth, and understand the issues of the Grace Life need to remember:
 - Character is important.
 - That the only hope the culture has is found in the preaching of the cross.
 - That we are first and foremost members of the body of Christ.
 - That we are ambassadors for Christ who need to look at the world through scriptural eyes.
 - Follow Paul not only in doctrine but in ministry philosophy and practice.
- Titus 2:12—we need to let Paul teach us how to live soberly in this present evil world.
- II Timothy 4:12—we need to preach the word regardless of the season in which we find ourselves.
- Colossians 3:1-2—we need to have our affections in order and set in the proper place.
- Welcome to first century Roman American folks. The question we need to be concerned with is WWPD? What Would Paul Do?