"The only fool bigger than the person who knows it all is the person who argues with him."
—Anonymous

13-Sep-13

No Meeting of the Minds

Have you ever done something and almost immediately regretted doing it? It is easy to do such things from our computers, whether it is sending an email critical of the boss or a coworker to the whole company instead of just one colleague or making an off-the-cuff Facebook comment that seems innocent until you realize it contains an embarrassing double entendre. My mistake among many this week involved neither of those things, yet even so, what I did opened a can of worms that I would have avoided if I had known what a minor tempest it would cause.

My Facebook and Twitter accounts are linked, so what I post on the former mostly items in the news or religious or archeological articles that I think are significant or helpful simultaneously appears on the latter. Usually, this feature causes no problems. My Facebook friends are predominantly family, church members, and school friends who know me and my beliefs to a certain extent. Comments are usually supportive and understanding, but if they disagree, they are more often restrained and respectful than not.

If Facebook can be compared to a barbeque with friends, Twitter is a food fight in a college cafeteria. I signed on to Twitter mostly to stay on top of
news and commentary on the events of the day, as a kind of raw feed of what is occurring in the world. I make only a few comments directly to Twitter, but my Facebook page makes many more for me. One of these stirred up a hornet's nest among a group of feminists and atheists that troll Twitterdom. (Trolling, for those not up on Internet lingo, is "deliberately posting derogatory or inflammatory comments to bait other users into responding" or simply to stir up trouble.)

My sin—in their eyes—was to link to an article on Christian marriage and make this comment: "If husbands loved as they are supposed to, wives would have no problem submitting to them." To us, this is a true, benign statement in accord with Ephesians 5:22, 25. But to feminists and to atheists who support them, I may as well have slapped their faces with a gauntlet and challenged them to duels! The first reply, from a person with "secular" in her Twitter handle, reads, "why [sic] would I ever want to submit to someone who should consider me an equal, and why would he want me to??" The second, from a young man who describes himself as "20-year old Uni. student, atheist, secular humanist," simply says, "That doesn't make any sense." From there, the tweets became far worse and a lot more profane.

After just a few back-and-forth exchanges, it became frustratingly obvious that there was no meeting of the minds. None. We could not even agree on simple definitions of words like "submit," "equality," "love," and "instruction"! For instance, my interlocutors simply refused to consider that submission in a relationship of equals is even possible. To them, submission always indicates a superior-inferior relationship, thus a wife submitting to her husband is admitting a lower status—and feminists will never take a back seat to a man. Once this kind of thinking became plain to me, any idea of explaining humility went right out the window!

From what I could tell from the scant amount of information that is available about a person on Twitter, almost all of them were young adults, militantly and proudly atheist and thoroughly steeped in secular humanism, the guiding philosophy of progressives the world over. They had been educated solely in the ideas and aspirations of men in "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). My only point of contact with them was being of the same species.
Our minds, our thinking, could not have been more different. As atheists, they would not accept any argument based on Scripture, and my every argument on this subject came out of God's Word. For my part, I could not comprehend a relationship in which both partners refused to allow the other to lead. Such a relationship of stubborn insistence of superiority (which they called "equality") is bound to fail. As Herbert Armstrong often said, in any relationship of two people, one of them must be the leader—even the relationship of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). He voluntarily submits.

To my Twitter opponents, though, voluntary submission was unacceptable and self-contradictory. How can there be any hope of even mild understanding, much less agreement, when the two sides of a conversation have no common foundation, language, or objectives? Seeing how ultimately futile it was, trying to explain physics to a fungus may have been easier.

My experience highlights a few spiritual realities. The first spiritual reality is that, because mankind has continually rejected God and every proof, not only of His existence, but also of His power and involvement in the affairs of humanity, God has allowed most people in this world to continue along the path of their own godless thinking and reap the consequences. As Paul phrases it in his revealing explanation of this truth, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Romans 1:28). He tells the Ephesians that "the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Ephesians 4:17-18).

The second spiritual reality is the flipside of the first: Those whom God calls are a new creation (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:9-10), and with the gift of the Holy Spirit, their minds have been enlightened with the understanding of divine things. Jesus tells His disciples:

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him;
but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. . . . I will come to you. . . . However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 14:16-18; 16:13-14)

Paul summarizes this in I Corinthians 2:10, 16: "But God has revealed [His truth and plan] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. . . . [W]e have the mind of Christ."

These two realities are why there is no meeting of the minds. People in the world are functioning and reasoning on one wavelength and Christians on another, and the two are diametrically opposed (see Galatians 5:17; Romans 8:5-9). Paul warns us in II Timothy 3 that this widening difference will make "the last days perilous times" (verse 1), and "evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (verse 13). Giving a reasoned defense of the hope within us (I Peter 3:15) will only become more difficult in the days ahead.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

What We Can Learn From This Day of Atonement
by John W. Ritenbaugh

God has a plan to recreate Himself, bringing mankind into at-one-ness with Him. Peter preached to the called-out ones to repent and yield to God through His Holy Spirit. We need to be in awe of the cost of Christ's sacrifice for us, demonstrating reciprocity as we wholeheartedly yield to God. Mankind has separated itself from God, having followed the example of our parents, Adam and Eve. God's solution to mankind's separation was sending a second Adam, Jesus Christ to make reconciliation and justification possible. Believing Christ and His message has the effect of making a
repentant person at one with God. Through sanctification, a person in Christ becomes a new creation. Fasting not only emphasizes that we can resist a powerful bodily drive, but shows us plainly our dependence upon God.

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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