

Premises

Among the numerous complaints about our public educational system, is that we have ceased teaching the fine art of critical, analytical thinking. Such things as memorization of processes, teaching for standardized testing rather than for individual measurement and growth, outcome based education (quantified only in number of graduates), etc... have all led to a decline in our society's ability to think critically and reason effectively. Couple that with such phenomena as sound-byte news, the mass availability of all things entertainment, the expectation of instant gratification, the ability to find information without any investigative work, incredible amounts of data being hurled at us without time to process it all... and consider this... the same “instantaneous results” phenomenon that occurred when the pocket calculator was introduced, have pervaded almost every aspect of our culture. You may not have noticed (but I have) that we have a population that has learned that *it need not think!*

In recent years, the following has become one of my favorite expressions. “Did you think about that for half a minute before you said it?”

It is this “thoughtlessness” with regard to premises with which we deal today. When we consider people's statements/actions, the thoughtful person will consider several things with regard to those, among which are the premises and the context . First context...

Proverbs 6:30, 31 says,

“People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving. Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; he may have to give up the substance of his house”.

Notice, that even though the thief was not removed from the consequences of his errant behavior, the context of his situation was taken into consideration.

In addition to the *context* of one's actions, the *premises* on which the action are based are also to be considered. Let's look at a couple of contemporary examples of the examination of these premises. It is my hope that this will help to give you a new perspective on “*listening*” to that which you “*hear*”.

Let's consider the contemporary matter of kneeling during the playing of the National Anthem at sporting events. The individual who began this, did so ostensibly in protest of the mistreatment of Black Americans by White police officers. That's what he told us, anyway. But, really, what did that have to do with the National Anthem. By kneeling for the Anthem - supposedly in solidarity to stated cause - the NFL football player was actually telling us the premise behind his actions. His actions were a protest against America. Why and how so? Because in his “reality”, *America* is a place where injustice is *sanctioned*, therefore, he was protesting *America*. That is his premise. Now whether or not one agrees with the assertion that Black Americans are and should be afraid of White police officers, one – any thoughtful one, that is – must also decide

whether or not he or she agrees with the premise behind the action. The *thoughtful one* must consider whether or not America itself is a place that sanctions (at least that particular...) injustice. Agree or disagree, that is his premise. It must be reckoned with.

Let me give you another example. There is a big call for “social justice”, perhaps especially in the church world. Indeed, there is an entire social justice movement in the church. We in the church world used to call this our *social mission*, or even more controversially so, the *social gospel*... reaching out to the underprivileged, the less fortunate, the poor among us, etc. While there has always been a disagreement in the church world as to where the bulk of our energies should be spent, whether in the preaching of the Gospel or in the hands on work of lifting up those cast down, that work has gone on as long as there's been a Church of Jesus Christ. Here's an example of that fact. When the Apostle Paul (the Apostle to the non-Jewish world) related for the Galatian churches, his “sanctioning” for ministry by the original Apostles in Jerusalem (those sent by God to the Jewish world), he indicated that in their sanctioning was the mandate that any new churches established in the non-Jewish world, “remember the poor”. Note...

“... when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised (non-Jews or Gentiles) had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised (Jews) was to Peter... and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” Gal 2:7-10

But the social work of the church has re-branded itself into a “movement”. It is now referred to the “social justice movement”, and it lives largely within the church. But let's think together. Jesus said, and it is recorded in three of the four Gospel accounts, “*The poor you have with you always...*”. Indeed, Mark's Gospel, records Jesus as having said, “*The poor you have with you always and whenever you wish you may do them good;*” Mk 14:7 ... and indeed, since long before Christianity began, God's people were always charged to be, and have been “caretakers” of a sort, of the poor in their communities. But the (unspoken) premise behind the *new branding* forces us to ask, whom is it who says that the aforementioned categories, the underprivileged, the less fortunate, the poor among us, etc, have been treated unjustly, and ought now to be receiving their “just deserts” (justice) from us? But make no mistake, that is the premise that is being asserted in the very name of the movement, social justice! Apparently it is ours to bring justice to those having been treated unjustly. But is poverty axiomatically the result of injustice? Who says that those folks are poor, less fortunate, etc, through some injustice or other? And let's not even talk about one person's “privilege” being axiomatically unjust, therefore axiomatically entitling some “under-privileged” one to have full access to all the advantages of the privileged one...

Words mean things, Dear Ones, and the description, “social justice” has as its premise that an injustice has been done. Hmm... But we are discussing premises, aren't we?

Perhaps we ought to consider a more insidious premise behind the deliberate assertion of false premises, eh? But for that, we'll have to think a little more critically and analytically that the way to which we are currently accustomed.

Proverbs 18:13 says, “*He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.*”.

Pastor