

How Do We Now Live? Part I of IV

Our present age can be characterized as “suspicious of everything”. A “hermeneutic of suspicion” was once a trademark of 20th century progressive philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault. It has now become a mark of our present age. In a 2018 article from *First Things*, editor R.R. Reno writes, “*Our present cultural moment is one of suspicion, anxiety, and worries about vulnerability... we’re pictured as eyeing each other with competitive suspicion... there’s a great deal of heat and not much light.*”

People are now asking, “Can I trust anything?” Truth is now a game, a play of power so that whoever has the power can create the truth. We now play according to the rules of a tribe. If someone we normally disagree with says something, we treat it as false, regardless of whether it is accurate or true. We will take words out of context, attribute false motives, or twist words, convincing ourselves that it is truly what our opponent thinks. But if someone from your own tribe says something, you treat it as true, regardless of whether it is accurate or factual.

One of the most important things Christians can do is not play this worldly power game. Amid a flood of debauchery, Peter instructs the church to be “self-controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers” (1 Pet. 4:7). Peter assumes that the church is already praying. But as Jesus warns us that when trials come, our love will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). Perhaps Peter remembers that sad occasion in the Garden of Gethsemane when with others he was sleeping rather than watching and praying (Mark 14:37–38). His carelessness in that time of testing played a major role in his subsequent denial.

Peter gives the instruction to the church because the church is a countercultural institution. Their lives are directed and shaped by the Word of God. Christ instructs His people through the preaching of the Word, forming them by the power of the Spirit to grow up in all

things. The church also matters because it is harder to lie and distort the truth face-to-face. You will see the fruit of your speech and your character will be shaped in a community of believers.

Our present age is a mess marked by a hermeneutic of suspicion. We have formed tribes to play a game of power. But the anti-social arena of cyberspace will not provide a way forward. Instead, the church must model an alternative. This is the local church, the face-to-face interaction with other believers who follow the instruction of self-control and sober mindedness according to the Word of God.

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