

Grace Evangel Fellowship Pulpit

LOVE THE SINNER - BUT DON'T CONDONE THE SIN

A Message

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How often we hear Jesus quoted, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone.” This is the passage offered in response to *any* judgment of another.

Consider the full story found in John 8:3-11. A woman was accused of adultery and was being confronted by the Jewish leaders. They point out to Jesus that the penalty for adultery according to the law was stoning. Testing Him, they ask what should be done.

Jesus says to them, “Let the sinless one of you first cast a stone at her.” (v. 7) Since none were sinless, there was no one to cast the stone.

Once they had departed, leaving only Jesus and the accused woman, He points out that none remained to condemn her – and neither did Jesus Himself condemn her.

But rarely do we hear the next part of Jesus’ statement, when he turns to the accused woman and tells her – “Go, and from now on sin no more.” (v. 11)

Go, and sin no more!

What just happened here? In a nutshell – Jesus did not condemn the guilty woman, but he did condemn the sin itself – and he instructed her to no longer be sinning.

There is such a thing as sin – and it is not to be ignored or condoned. Sin is literally a “missing of the mark.” Sin is defined by God and revealed to us in His Word – the Bible. Sin is not defined by mankind. It is not subjective. It is defined by God.

The *person* is not to be condemned. The *person* is in fact justified (found innocent) because of Christ Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:19 tells us that God, in Christ, was conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their [mankind’s] offences to them.

But sin is not to be ignored or condoned.

Another passage that is often quoted is found in Romans 2, where the apostle Paul points out that in judging another, we are condemning ourselves – for we also are guilty of sinning. Yet Paul himself, in 1 Corinthians 5, encounters a situation where there is one guilty of prostitution. He finds fault with the ecclesia (“called-out-ones” – in this case *believers*) for tolerating and condoning the guilty person’s behavior – and he instructs them to “Expel the wicked one from among yourselves.” (v. 13)

Paul is not judging one who is outside the body of believers – he points out that God is judging those outside the body. But as for those *within* the body of believers, “I write to you not to be commingling with anyone named a brother, if he should be a paramour, or greedy, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner.” (v. 11)

So, clearly there are *behaviors* to be judged ... not individuals but *behaviors*. And in this context, believers were directed not to associate (commingle) with the one having sinful behaviors – this being for the good of the offender so they will repent and return to God.

When individuals hear me proclaim (from the Scriptures) that God is in the process of leading ALL of His creation to salvation – they assume that I believe there are no standards for behavior and that “anything goes.” But clearly this is not the case.

The apostle Paul makes it clear that while God's grace is magnified when sin increases (because more is being forgiven) – this does not mean we are to increase our sinning to magnify God even more! (Romans 6:1 and following) “Let not Sin, then, be reigning in your mortal body, for you to be obeying its lusts.” (v. 12)

Let's consider a few inferences from all of this!

First, despite God's grace there remains behavior that is sinful, and such behavior should not be found in believers or condoned by believers.

Second, we are not to judge individuals, but we *are* to judge sin.

Third, while we are to be concerned with behaviors *within* the body of believers and not those outside the body – there are behaviors that are sinful in God's eyes, and we should not be seen as promoting or even tolerating those *behaviors*. We have no right to do so, as we would be contradicting God.

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 where Paul describes us as “ambassadors, as of God entreating through us.” As ambassadors, Christ's *spokespeople*, let us never be seen condoning behaviors that God clearly does not approve of. Our message as an ambassador must remain true to the One Who commissioned us – just as an ambassador from a nation must remain true to the official position of the nation that commissioned them. They cannot simply concoct a message that seems right to them personally.

Furthermore, the world is watching us! We are not to become *like* the world. As Jesus said of His disciples, they are *in* the world, but they are not *of* the world. (John 17:11-15) We are set apart by God to be a witness in the world. Those of the world should see a difference in us!

Those of the world want us to not only be tolerant of their beliefs and behaviors, but also to *agree* with them – to embrace their departure from Biblical truth. But we must not – we cannot – for as ambassadors we must always stand for the truth. And truth in the issues we encounter – where those of the world want us to align with them – truth must always be determined by God's revelation to us. As ambassadors our proclaiming must always align with the Word – not with the world.

To be very clear, *salvation* is the work of God through Christ Jesus. It is grace from God, not conditioned upon behavior or works. But behavior does matter – for as Paul exhorts, grace is not to be exploited. While sinning might magnify the grace that God grants, making it even more amazing, the Scriptures are clear that we are not to go on sinning – rationalizing that in doing so we are magnifying God's grace (Romans 6).

Now, a word about how we apply all of this to our present-day society. I will use one example, as it is probably the most talked-about issue in our culture as I write this. I am not singling out this issue to the exclusion of all other issues – but I simply present this example because it is so prevalent. In fact, of any issue our culture has encountered in my lifetime, this one has proliferated exponentially in many different forms.

The issue is homosexuality.

Homosexuality is mentioned in the Scriptures *many* times, and *always* in a negative sense – *never* positive. This is true not just in Old Testament passages, but also throughout the New Testament.

Perhaps the clearest passage comes from the apostle Paul – the apostle chosen by God to bring His revelation to those of all nations, not just Israel as the others were commissioned to do (including Jesus during His earthly ministry). Paul brought to the world *new* revelation not previously granted to others. The highest of revelation is found in his later letters (Ephesians and Colossians). Note that the apostle Paul was chosen to *complete* the Word of God (Colossians 1:25). Through Paul, God has delivered to us His final word.

In Romans 1, beginning at verse 18, Paul describes the world and how it had digressed as mankind ignored God and turned away from Him.

For God's indignation is being revealed from heaven on all the irreverence and injustice of men who are retaining the truth in injustice,

Because that which is known of God is apparent among them, for God manifests it to them. For His invisible attributes are described from the creation of the world, being apprehended by His achievements, besides His imperceptible power and divinity,

In other words – the existence of God should be obvious to everyone, just based on what can be observed in His creation.

For them to be defenseless, because, knowing God, not as God do they glorify or thank Him, but vain were they made in their reasonings, and darkened is their unintelligent heart.

Alleging themselves to be wise, they are made stupid, and they change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being and flying creatures and quadrupeds and reptiles.

When these words were written in the Scriptures, men worshipped idols (visible) rather than the one true invisible God. Today, idols are things like religious systems and denominations, religious leaders, politicians, eminent authors or scholars, psychologists, philosophers, “science” – anything occupying the authoritative position in place of God.

Wherefore God gives them over, in the lust of their hearts, to the uncleanness of dishonoring their bodies among themselves, those who alter the truth of God into the lie, and are venerated, and offer divine service to the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed for the eons! Amen! (v. 24-25)

Therefore, God gives them over to dishonorable passions. For their females, besides, alter the natural use into that which is beside nature. Likewise, also the males, besides, leaving the natural use of the female, were inflamed in their craving for one another, males with males effecting indecency, and getting back in themselves the retribution of their deception which must be. (v. 26-27)

Could there be a clearer description of homosexual behavior? And consider the word “natural” in this passage!

Think this through with me. God’s command to mankind from the time of creation was to multiply and have dominion over the earth. The clear *purpose* of sexual activity is to populate – to reproduce – to multiply. And so, the “natural” purpose in sexual relations is when it takes place between a man and a woman.

Deviations in sexual behavior are outside of this natural purpose and are deemed “unnatural.” It is to ignore God’s purpose and what He deems to be “natural” to make unnatural use of sexual behavior – men with men, and women with women.

And according as they do not test God, to have Him in recognition, God gives them over to a disqualified mind,

Men think they are wise and can judge behaviors, right or wrong, without considering God. But thinking themselves wise, their minds are in truth “disqualified” as they have turned away from God, ignoring Him. It is with this disqualified mind that mankind has, apart from God, deemed himself wise, developing psychological theories, philosophies, and (I would say) education curriculum to indoctrinate the world with “disqualified” perspectives.

And now a list of errant behaviors (Romans 1:29-32) ...

To do that which is not befitting, filled with all injustice, wickedness, evil, greed, distended with envy, murder, strife, guile, depravity, whisperers, vilifiers, detesters of God, outragers, proud, ostentatious, inventors of evil things, stubborn to parents, unintelligent, perfidious, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful, those who, recognizing the just statute of God, that those committing such things are deserving of death, not only are doing them, but are endorsing, also, those who are committing them.

There is no disclaimer about those being born with certain inclinations or weaknesses, such as unnatural sexual impulses or attractions – telling them to feel no guilt and to keep living a life that makes them happy. That is the present-day psychology of men, not a word coming from God, the Creator of all.

Turning away from misguided, sinful passions is not easy – whether it is sexual passion, greed, envy, etc. But whatever the sin and however strong the urge, sinful *behaviors* are never to be condoned.

It seems that guilt is God’s way of letting us know we’re doing wrong. It is our conscience. Psychologists are saying, “Would God really want you to feel guilty?”

Would He really say that?" This calls to mind the serpent suggesting to Eve in the Garden, as she prepared to eat the forbidden fruit – "Did God really say that? Did He really say not to eat this fruit? Surely, He would want you to be happy."

It also calls to mind, once again, Romans 1:21, where we see that as mankind turns away from God, "Vain were they made in their reasonings, and darkened is their unintelligent heart." And again, in verse 28, "And according as they do not test God, to have Him in recognition, God gives them over to a disqualified mind, to do that which is not befitting ..." And consider 1 Timothy 4:1-2, where Paul writes of those who had given heed to deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons, whose conscience became *cauterized*.

Now returning to our current text, note that not only those *committing* these acts or behaviors are admonished, but also those who *endorse* them.

Now, we could focus on each of these objectionable behaviors itemized in the final verses quoted above – but through all of this notice how much attention was given specifically to the issue of homosexuality. And notice the descriptors,

- *Dishonoring* their bodies,
- *Dishonorable* passions,
- Altering the *natural* use [of their bodies],
- Into that which is *beside nature*,
- *Indecency*.

And again, notice the critique not just of those *doing* the objectionable behaviors, but also those *endorsing* those who are committing them.

Today the perversion of what is "natural" has multiplied exponentially into a number of subcategories: homosexuality, bisexuality, transgender, and on and on. But the heart of the issue in each of these subcategories is homosexuality in some form. It results in "men with men" and "women with women." It is an exchange of the "natural" for the "unnatural."

Now where does this leave us in terms of our life as a believer in the present day? Since we are not to judge the world but only behaviors within the Body of Christ, how then shall we live? And since we are Christ's ambassadors – acting as His spokespeople – how shall we speak?

Dealing with those within the body of Christ is easy to discern. We are to speak openly against any in the body who are "active" in their homosexuality. We hear many say, "But the church is a place for the sick," or "Jesus lived among sinners." The church being a place for the sick is a mantra created by men and women apart from the Scriptures. When addressing sexual sin, Paul was quite clear about expelling the sinful one from the midst of the fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). He admonished the believers for failing to judge those within the body of believers (v. 13).

And while Jesus did live among sinners, He never condoned their sinful *behavior*. He may have dined with them, but He never said a word about making them a part of the ecclesia (called-out-ones, often translated "church"). He never said, "Just go ahead and do what makes you happy."

Dealing with those outside the body of Christ is a bit different. There is no expelling from the ecclesia (called-out-ones ... often translated “church”), as they are not a part of the ecclesia.

But being Christ's ambassadors – His mouthpiece – we must never shy away from noting *behaviors* that are not acceptable in the eyes of God. And that must always be based on the Scriptures, not our own personal opinions apart from the Scriptures.

We should not be saying or doing things that condones homosexual behavior. To me, this means what we should be doing are such things as ...

- Commenting, as a conversation arises, about God's words concerning the issue.
- Not promoting “diversity” when it includes homosexuality as a basis.
- Not condoning same-sex marriage.
- Never speaking as if homosexuality is acceptable behavior in the eyes of God.

I personally believe the biggest problem is that believers are so cautious about not judging other *persons* – not wanting to hurt any feelings – that they fail to stand up and speak about *behaviors* that are objectionable. It is amazing to me that “the church” could have come to be silent on such a well-pronounced sin. Are believers too timid? Are they unsure of what God's Word says? But “the church” *without* God's Word and a knowledge of what it is saying to us in today's world – is nothing more than humanism, yielding to human philosophies.

And so, in today's world, to a large extent, the voice of God is absent in the conversation because Christ's Ambassadors are confused, and unwilling to stand up and speak on behalf of Christ as we are called to do.

Modern psychology preaches “live and let live” ... “if it feels good, do it” ... “don't heap guilt upon yourself.” But, as already stated, guilt is the God-given conscience at work within us. It should not be neglected or hardened by the “disqualified” opinions of men; even the most “expert” of men. Doing so will only cause our God-given conscience to become “cauterized.”

What does all of this mean? We are not to condemn the homosexual – the one feeling unnatural impulses and struggling with unnatural passions. We are to love them! But we also have no authority to condone such behavior, just seeking to spare feelings. God judges such behavior to be wrong. This is very clear! Who are we to condone these behaviors, or even to be silent without sharing God's revealed thoughts on the matter? We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to entreat mankind. (2 Corinthians 5:20).

On this, and any other issue we encounter in our present culture, we must search the Scriptures – and speak up as an ambassador is called to do – not in a heated way, not judging people-groups, not being obnoxious, and not based on our own opinions – but from the Word of God (the Bible). It is our only reliable source of guidance. It is our North Star as we navigate the stormy seas of our day!

This overview contains the thoughts and opinions of the author and is a work in progress as his study of the Scriptures continues. Some things that God has revealed are very clear. That Christ died for our sins; that He was entombed; and that He was roused (1 Corinthians 15:3) is clear. That all are to be ultimately reconciled to God thru the work of Christ is also very clear (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). But on many specifics in the Scriptures there are a

variety of interpretations and opinions, and none should conclude they have the complete and final understanding on these matters that are less clear. The reader is encouraged to consider various opinions, but to study and to think for himself. Within the Body of Christ we should study and discuss our understandings so as to mutually reach a more complete understanding of that which God has revealed.

Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures are taken from the Concordant Literal New Testament and the Concordant Version of the Old Testament. Concordant Publishing Concern, P O Box 449, Almont, MI 48003 (Concordant.org)

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