

Let Us Not Love With Words or Speech but with Actions and in Truth

1 John 3:11-18

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Intro

"When one gives up Christian belief one thereby deprives oneself of the right to Christian morality. For the latter is absolutely not self-evident: one must make this point clear again and again, in spite of English shallowpates."

-Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (1888)

"Without God and the future life? How will man be after that? It means everything is permitted now."

-Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Vintage, 1991), pg. 589

The reason I share these 2 quotes with you is that you have two of the more profound thinkers of the 19th century, moving into the 20th century. Both of them had massive influence on 20th century western thought. One is Russian. The other German. One is militantly anti-Christian. One is Orthodox Christian. But they agree on the same very important, fundamental thought: If an individual loses the consciousness of the Christian God, or a culture loses the collective consciousness of Christianity, you will ABSOLUTELY lose biblical, Christian morality.

Now, morality is not the essence of Christianity. Furthermore, you do not need to be a Christian to be moral. If morality is the essence of Christianity, then I know several Mormons, a few Muslims, and a few agnostics that are fairly good "Christians," which obviously isn't the case. In fact, since in other religions your standing with God is entirely dependent on moral performance, there is arguably more incentive to be moral in other religions. But Christianity presents a unique morality, an other-focused morality, which is not about earning salvation, but is about reflecting an undeserved love that we know, and are grateful, that we ourselves have received. This is called GRACE. And THAT, grace, is the hallmark doctrine of the Christian faith.

As the world transitioned into the 20th century, the leading thinkers were all seemingly suggesting that we might be losing this concept of Christian grace in the western world.

Consequently, the 20th century was the world's great experiment in seeing what intentionally godless civilizations, intentionally godless government, would produce. Communist Russia, Communist China, and Nazi Germany eliminated an incredible amount of human life. Stalin was responsible for around 20 million deaths. Mao Zedong's regime is credited with a staggering 70 million deaths. Hitler comes in third with around 10 million murders attributed to his name. By the way, even lower level dictators like Pol Pot in Cambodia eliminated millions of lives – bear in mind, for all of the black eyes on the history of the Christian Church (Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, Salem Witch Trials, Slavery in the American South, etc.) – those *maybe* amount to tens of thousands of murders. Still completely inexcusable and completely outside the parameters of Christian behavior. But, apples to apples, on the sanctity of life issue, a culture filled with active Christians does not begin to compare with a culture that is not filled with active Christians. The end result for the 20th century, the great experiment in intentionally godless nations, was a century with more slaughter of human life than all other centuries combined.

Without question, the saving grace of the western world has been the presence of an inherited Christian worldview. Abraham Lincoln, William Wilberforce, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were able to make assertions about human rights and usher in civil rights reform based solely on a belief in the biblical Imago Dei (i.e. "the image of God") – the idea that all humans have value because God himself imbued humanity with special value. This is to such an extent that even Thomas Jefferson, who was by no means a biblical literalist, nonetheless, in drafting the American Constitution, said that he could find no basis on which to suggest every human life was valuable outside of the doctrine that humans were created *in the image of God*.

As the faith of a nation goes, so goes its perception of personhood.

Modern Shifts

As a pastor, I'm acutely aware of the shifting landscape in American Christianity. There is virtually no cultural pressure to participate in organized religion today. The Barna Group has established pretty clearly that ½ of all kids raised in churches in America will not remain in

the specific faith tradition they inherited from their parents. Nearly 70% of those who were raised in Christian churches will exit at some point in their 20s. The cultural guardrails that kept citizens roughly Christian (i.e. morally) in years past have absolutely come off.

If you're aware of these spiritual trends, you were not the least bit surprised when the New York State legislature passed the Reproductive Health Act on January 22 of this year, the 46th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. The act allowed abortion at any point during a pregnancy (24 weeks had been the prior limit) if it was deemed "necessary to protect a woman's life or health." There have already been 50 million abortions in the United States since 1970, which would be equivalent to the size of the 29th largest nation on earth today. America has aborted the equivalent of the entire nation of Colombia in 2/3 of one lifetime. It's insane to think about. And there will be more.

History

But when you're raised in the United States, it's perhaps easy to forget that abortion and infanticide is not a new problem. In fact, it has been a recurring issue in world history. The reason abortion and infanticide have been forbidden in the West for so long is only because Western values were shaped by Christianity. Author Benjamin Wiker makes the case in *Moral Darwinism*:

"[T]he laws against abortion and infanticide in the West are only intelligible as a result of its Christianization, and the repeal of those same laws is only intelligible in light of its de-Christianization."

-Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), pg. 100.

An interesting comparison of what we see happening today in America could be seen in evaluating the Roman Empire. The *Twelve Tables* – the earliest known Roman legal code, written about 450 B.C.E. – permitted a father to expose any female infant and any deformed or weak male infant to the natural elements to let them die in the fields. Philosophers Plato and Aristotle, both recommended infanticide as legitimate state policy. (cf. Plato, Republic 5; Aristotle, Politics 2,7) Seneca regarded the drowning of children at birth as both reasonable and commonplace. Tacitus correctly summarized the Jewish mindset: "it is a deadly sin to kill an unwanted child," and believe this to be another of the Jews' "sinister and revolting" teachings (cf. The Histories 5.5). The famous Roman medical writer, Celsus, goes into great detail in *De Medicina* (cf. 7.29) about how to surgically carry out an abortion. Etc.

Some of these thoughts are relatively new to America. But they're not technically new. The most influential Greek and Roman minds in history were advocating the disposal of life that was assessed as "less valuable" long ago.

What Does This Mean?

To me, then, the relevant question is: How did the early Christians, with very little political, educational, or financial clout, react to the tragedy taking place around them?

For starters, we know without question that Christians viewed abortion and infanticide as wrong. *The Didache*, a manual/catechism of church teachings written in the late first century, states in the second chapter: **"Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when born."**

Similarly, Justin Martyr, in the middle of the second century, wrote:

We have been taught that it is wicked to expose newly-born children... (for) we would then be murderers.

Martyr, First Apology, pgs. 27-29

And interestingly, while we do have some records of Christians writing letters to government officials in hopes of persuading them, this seemingly created little, if any, changes in government policy. Rather, historian Rodney Stark says that what truly influenced the Roman Empire to eventually become sympathetic to Christianity's pro-life stance ... was the Christians' 1) willingness to provide relief for the poor and 2) taking in and supporting babies which had been left to die by their pagan parents.

Historian Will Durant wrote:

[I]n many instances, Christians rescued exposed infants, baptized them, and brought them up with the aid of community funds.

-Durant, *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from their Beginnings to A.D. 325*, Vol. 3, pg. 598

The Roman Emperor Julian, writing in the fourth century, regretted the progress of Christianity. He saw that it was causing Roman paganism to crumble. Why? From his perspective:

(The Christian faith) has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.

-Letter to Arsacius, High-priest of Galatia (362), in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, Volume III (1913)

Here's the main takeaway: Yes, Christians should experience righteous anger at the thought of the slaughter of more unborn innocents. Anger is a mechanism that appropriately rises to defend what is right. But when anger, even righteous anger, transforms into repaying evil with evil, we forget that God alone justly brings wrath, and that our job is simply to overcome evil with good.

The Apostle Paul writes:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

I see no allowance in here for self-righteous social media tirades. I see no godliness in calling names like "idiots" or "psychopaths" which I unfortunately sometimes hear from friends who might politically support our goals, but go about it in a thoroughly un-Christlike manner. I see the Apostle Paul telling us that the path to Christlikeness is showing the same grace to enemies that God showed to us. I see Paul similarly telling the church in Corinth ***"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside."*** (1 Cor. 5:12-13) I see the Early Christian Church, with minimal resources, actually influencing their pagan society by adopting children, providing charity to the poor, and confounding the culture by a demonstration of humble, sacrificial love.

Social media rants cost nothing. They can ruin a lot. And I've never yet heard someone convert their way of thinking by way of social media tirade. On the other hand, picking up crosses to follow Christ costs dearly, but helps save the world and lifts up the name of Jesus.

Steven Pinker is a fairly famous psychologist at Harvard, and years ago he wrote a very influential piece on abortion for the NY Times. In his article, he stated: "The women who sacrifice their offspring tend to be young, poor, unmarried and socially isolated." The insinuation, quite clearly, was that if these women were provided adequate human resources – 1) godly men who were willing to stay with them and help them raise kids, 2) Christian friends who encourage them towards the beauty of God's will, 3) a church that is willing to financially come alongside a young pregnant woman and give her grace instead of shame – many of these young, poor, unmarried, marginalized women would absolutely make different decisions.

Quick jab, sanctimonious social media posts doesn't move the needle an inch. Sacrificial love brings forth life.

QUALIFICATION: This is not to say that wisdom brought forth in sound arguments against abortion aren't helpful. Being able to defend your Christian values using arguments from the Natural Knowledge of God are an important part of your Christian witness as well. Former NARAL co-founder, Bernard Nathanson, became a pro-life activist upon viewing the undeniable evidence before him with the advent of the ultrasound (chronicled in educational film *The Silent Scream*). He later became a Christian. Calm, logical arguments are an essential part of the public dialogue.

But the group Steven Pinker was identifying as prime candidates for abortion is shockingly close to the group of people in society that God, throughout Scripture, is constantly compelling his nation (OT) & Church (NT) to watch out for – the widows, orphans, foreigners, and poor. The Lord does not tell his people to rage against the evils of the world, but rather to keep their own lives free from evil and be a light to the world.

Through the prophet Zechariah, God says: ***Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other. (Zechariah 7:9-10)***

Brief Text Explanation

This obviously harkens back to the text I read earlier from 1 John 3. Let me read verses 18 and 16 again. Verse 18 says: ***"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."*** (vs. 18) Obviously that's a bit of Semitic hyperbole. It's not that we're not supposed to love with our words. He's saying that if you love God and others without the accompanying actions, it's just hypocrisy. Furthermore, it's not how Jesus loved us. Jesus is actually, in some respects, shockingly non-sentimental in his ministry. You'll notice, he doesn't just constantly walk around hugging people saying, "Wow, I just love you SO MUCH!" But it's undeniable that he did love us SO MUCH. Why? Because he loved us in actions and in truth. John says: ***"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."*** (vs. 16) THAT is our definition of love. It always costs something. There is no biblical conception of love without cost. Bringing the truth into the lives of others requires some sacrifice on our part. You cannot get redeeming grace into someone else's life without personal cross. And the good news is that we ALL have been forgiven and saved by a child whose life was unfairly taken. It was a costly tragedy for which we're all equally guilty. But in his infinite wisdom, God used the terrible horror of the murder of his firstborn Son to bring forth spiritual life. And he can use the horrors we've seen in recent history in a similar fashion.

In the recent history of American politics, when Christians shout, throw their weight around, and attempt to overpower sin through politics, the country gets very angry. But historically, when God's people calmly point to the truth and lovingly sacrifice like Christ to lift up life and personhood, the world has been changed.

LET'S PRAY: