

Severe Counsel Part 2

¹ What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:1–4)

In our message last week, we began to consider the many changes that have been taking place in our nation as a result of the recent elections, changes, especially within the basic moral codes of our culture that, yes, have been building for many years, but now have quickly accelerated, changes that are breaking through barriers in our moral value systems that may never be rebuilt.

It seems that the very personality of our nation is changing before our eyes. Spurred on by an immoral news media, our politicians are making decisions and passing legislation that are changing long established moral value systems and swinging the doors wide open to immoral behaviors and conduct that are so clearly sin-based, and so clearly are not in keeping with the truths given to us in these scriptures. How grieved our Lord must be.

I asked the question of us last week and I'll ask it again, "what are we as Christians to do? What is our response to be as we live in amongst it all?"

In our message at that time, we said that God's first counsel to us can be found in 1 John 2. In those words, God warned us that we must not hold the things of this world too tightly, that we must . . .

¹⁵ . . . not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15–17)

Again, as we know, this is not an easy thing for most of us to do, to love not this world, because this world, even with the chaos it's in, is all that we know, all that we comprehend. It is where we live, where we've always lived, and we know little else.

But everything within us cries out that we must do something, we must not be "passive". But again, as our scripture text reminds us, the choices that we make through basic human instincts more often than not result in ungoverned passions.

We seem to foolishly respond to the behavior of the "fools" of this world by doing the same thing that they do, becoming like them in our foolishness, "returning evil for evil". And yes, as we do that, we do also "grieve" our Lord.

That is why God gives us these warnings that we read here in our scriptures. He wants to define for us, the responses we are to have to all the difficult matters of our day, participating yes, but ever and always from a position of being the salt and light of the Lord Jesus within a world that truly is getting "darker" every day.

As I consider the behaviors of those who took part in the Washington D.C. protests, most of whom were probably well-meaning people. I'm reminded of the counsel Jesus gave to His disciples about what their response should be to the coming troubles that they would experience. In those last moments of Jesus' life there in the Garden of Gethsemane, His disciples wanted to fight, one of them drawing a sword and cutting the ear off of one of their adversaries.

But Jesus quickly stopped His disciples from fighting, saying to them that the "fight" that was raging was on a different level from a physical struggle. And as we read further into these scriptures, we learn that all such battles are seldom ever purely on a physical level, but rather, they are all very much part of the "spiritual warfare" that "the world, the flesh and the devil" wage against the children of men, and especially against the children of God.

My caution and the caution given to us within these scriptures is that as we engage ourselves in the struggles of these days we are in, that we must be diligent to do as these words of our text warn, we must guard our passions carefully, remembering at all times, who we are as children of God, and remembering always, even in the worst of difficulties, what we really need to be about.

Dear friends, God would not have you and me to believe that we can “fix” the things that are going wrong in this world. No, that is the mistaken belief system of our politicians, a belief system that continually strives but always fails, never seeming to realize that theirs is an unreachable goal.

No, our purpose, as Christians, is very different from theirs. Recall the Parable about the “Wheat and the Tares” that Jesus told to us. In that Parable, Jesus told us that, we believers are as “Wheat”, which will, in time, become the “Bread of Life” to anyone who will listen. And yes, the “Weeds” will grow up all around us, intertwining their roots into ours, trying to choke us out.

But God’s plan is not that we would be rescued out of that situation, but instead that we would remain right where we are, living daily in amongst those “Weeds”. And as we do, bringing God’s message of life to any of those “Weeds” that will listen.

Folks, for myself, my first instinct is to despise those “Weeds” and to want to trample them down or do some other violence to them. But as hard as it may be for us to believe, some of those people that we quarrel and fight with, people who look and act like “weeds”, are oftentimes fellow believers, believers who, in their zeal for political ideology, have sacrificed their Christian values for their human ambitions. And we dare not become like them. No, those people need our help, not our hatred.

Also, for those who may be “Weeds” right now, God may, in the “fullness of time”, call them into salvation and they will become “Wheat”, just as you and me. And you and I must join with God in His plan for those folks.

That is why, you and I, must ever and always remember exactly who we are and what we are called to do within this “crooked and perverse generation” of people.

This is a clear example of what the Lord Jesus was speaking about when He prayed to the Father in John chapter 17. There, He said, Father

¹⁵ I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. (John 17:15-17)

We are where we are by God’s design and we are here for a purpose. And as you and I live and minister in amongst the ever-encroaching “Weeds”, we must be careful, lest we be drawn into their ways and into their behaviors. As we are told in 2 Corinthians 6, we must

¹⁷ “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

These words may sound somewhat contradictory to the words we read a moment ago. But they are not. We must remain in the presence of the “Weeds” of this world, but not be a part of who they are. The saying is true. We must be “in the world”, but not “of the world”.

Folks, it really is as simple as it sounds. We must remain among the people of the world in order to minister the gospel to them. But, all the while, carefully guarding the passions that rise up within us, passions that lead us to want to fight and quarrel with those “Weeds” who would be our adversaries.

That is why throughout this New Testament, God instructs us to “walk” within the abiding presence of Christ who lives within us. He is truly the Vine and we are His branches.

And again, it is as these words of our scripture text remind us, we must carefully guard the purposes of Christ within us, else we will get confused and mixed up about them and about our calling, mixed up about the difference between what our scriptural mandates are and what the culture is demanding of us.

In amongst all the confusion taking place within the churches right at this moment is exactly this sort of misunderstanding. A current issue that is dividing the churches is a confusion as to what place some of our social issues should take within the church bodies. Some of the church leaders in our nation are intertwining social demands with scriptural truths, and doing it in such a way as to cause division within the church bodies. Some people thinking that those issues are exactly the same as the scriptural mandates. But folks, they most often are not the same!

The demands regarding those social issues are coming into the church from the outside culture and even from our government. And while the things those people are saying sound so very close to our scriptural mandates, they are not.

May I say that again, because we must take warning. Yes, the demands of the world are often very close in wording to the truths of these scriptures, but folks, they will seldom, if ever, be the same. And if we misapply our passions to accomplish some of the social issues of our day, we will surely go astray from what God intends.

And unfortunately, as our scripture text reminds us, that is often where most of our misplaced passions find their “fuel”, especially within the church body.

Yes, God does call each of us, as part of His Body, to “love our neighbors”, as we love ourselves, and especially as Christ loves them. And so, we must! But how should such love manifest itself, within the church, within our families and especially politically, within the public square?

Folks, as we carefully consider what our role is to be in all the social issue matters that are being played out within the political spectrum today, our first and continual commitment must be to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, to the "holiness of God", and to His "glory". Our personal desires and the desires of our culture must take second place, and sometimes, no place at all.

Unfortunately, our minds have been well trained by the passions of this world, the flesh and the devil. And our best ideas are probably never going to be the same ideas that God would have. So, as we try our best to understand and to live out the meaning of the words, "love your neighbor", we must literally force our minds back into the exact words of these scriptures. And not just one time, but continually, so as to keep God's intent instead of our own.

We need to ask, what does God think about immoral behaviors? And not just on the national scene, but within our own families and within our church bodies. And let us continually remind ourselves that just because we want to forgive and accept and condone and be tolerant of certain sins, that does not mean that God will do as we do.

Remember that while yes, those sins do affect us and they may offend us, the sin itself is not against us personally. As David said in Psalm 51, "against thee and thee only have I sinned oh God".

Sinful immoral behavior is ever and always first against God. And it is Him who will judge a person for their sins, not we ourselves. You and I cannot and must not usurp the position of God and be the judge of another person's behaviors, but neither should we try to forgive another person's immoral behaviors. No, the kind of forgiveness that sinful people need must come from God. Christ and Christ alone has the authority to forgive sin. It is Christ and Christ alone who can take away the sins of the world!

As for our role in amongst the ever-increasing sinful behaviors of this world, Jesus told us that He came to "seek and save those who are lost". And He has said to us that just as He was sent, He sends us, you and me.

We are the ones that are now sent to minister to the lost ones of this world. We are the means of God's grace to a lost and dying world. As we have said, that is why He left us here as "Wheat" intertwined" with the "Weeds". God has plans for many of those "Weeds".

Folks, I confess that I have not done a good job of responding rightly to God's call in these matters that are besetting our nation in these present days. My first thoughts as I observe the sinful behaviors that are sweeping through the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens have not been generous thoughts. Too often, my first thoughts are condemning. And I know that I should not be that way.

And God reminds us often throughout these scriptures that it was not long ago that we ourselves were just like the rest of this fallen world, lost and dying, and not even realizing that it was taking place.

In Ephesians 2 especially, God reminds those of us who are now saved that we too were once dead in our sins. Listen!

2 And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Folks, God truly is "rich in mercy". And for all of those people out there who are caught up in their worldly behaviors, often defiling themselves openly on national television, we must remind ourselves that those people may in fact someday become as you and me, redeemed by the blood of Christ.

And yes also, all of them are someone's sons and daughters, beloved by their moms and dads. They are people, the very ones that Jesus came to "seek and to save". Whether it be high-ranking politicians and media giants that do and say unconscionable things, or it be all those naïve young people who are demonstrating in the streets, they are in many ways all the same. They are sinners in need of a Savior.

So then, as you and I observe all that is now taking place in our world each day, what should our response be? I have friends who would advise me that each of us must "take a stand" against what seems surely to be a head-long plunge of our nation into a pit of depravity.

And I understand and agree. But I do caution myself that the "stand" I take must not be simply a "political stand". While my stand may in some ways work its way out into the political spectrum, I must always remind myself, over and over again, that neither the problems nor their solutions are simply political. The problems are, at their core, "Spiritual". And no matter how much and what kind of "political ointment" we rub onto sin, it will have no lasting effect. The only "ointment" that will work on sin is the healing balm found only in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

As we close for today, the question that we began with . . . "How are we to respond? Where do we start and what must our hope and our plan be as we navigate our way through this crooked and depraved generation?" We must start within our own soul. We read in 1 Peter 1,

¹³Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:13-16)