

The Deadly Dangers of Moralism

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-257

One of the responsibilities that a preacher has is to bring the Word of God to bear upon the church and the world and to give God a voice to clarify and discern issues. So on the one hand we are called to the exposition of Scripture, explaining the Bible verse by verse, book by book. But the other hand, as well, we are called to address the issues of our time that affect us and to bring the truth of God to bear upon our understanding.

It falls to me tonight, as it has for a number of weeks, to do the latter, to address an issue. And to begin with, I want to read a portion of Scripture, open your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, I'm not going to do an exposition of this Scripture but I want to read it because I want it to be set in your mind. Second Corinthians chapter 5 verses 17 to 20. One of the great passages in all the Bible, definitive as to our priorities and responsibilities, duties and mandate as believers, this passage lays out for us the responsibility that Christians have in the world.

Beginning in verse 17, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Just a comment, old things pass away and new things come when a person is a new creature in Christ. That is what makes the difference in people's lives. "Now all these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Without argument it is clear that that passage says that newness is related to being in Christ, that God has sought to reconcile sinners to Himself through Christ and in that reconciliation to produce a new creature in which everything is new. That glorious reality is reconciliation to God and God has given to us, according to verse 18, the ministry of reconciliation. In verse 19 He has given to us the Word or the message of reconciliation. We then are ambassadors for Christ and no other and God is begging through us sinners to be reconciled to God through Christ, the very One that He made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Without any lack of clarity, without any

argument, therein lies the mandate for the Christian in the world, the ministry of reconciliation to God through Christ which brings about righteousness, transformation and a new creation.

There is, however, today in Christianity in its evangelical element, an emphasis on another kind of effort. It is an effort to produce morality. And this is growing rapidly. I have through the years addressed the issue on a number of occasions but it seems as though it needs to be addressed again because the interest is only being heightened today.

There is a call to Christian to get involved in calling our nation to a higher level of morality, in engaging ourselves with all of our energy and all of our resources, all of our time and money in an effort politically, through the media, through pressure groups to change the moral character of our country. Many Christians are engaging themselves in this effort.

In the year 2000 I wrote a book called Why Government Can't Save You, it could have been titled a lot of things, that's the title the publisher picked...Why Government Can't Save You. And what I tempted to say in that perhaps somewhat sarcastic title was if you're dealing with the issue of salvation, the government won't help. But I was really trying to say and did say in the book was that for Christians the mandate is not about some kind of cultural morality, the mandate is about salvation and the government plays no role.

Well the book didn't generate much interest, not too many people bought it and even fewer read it even though it carried an important biblical message that the mandate for Christians is what we just read. It's the ministry of reconciliation, it's the word of reconciliation. It's not morality that we preach, it's reconciliation with God through Christ, gospel witness. In that book I expressed concern regarding the morally debauched culture we live in, no question about that. It doesn't please God. It doesn't please believers. It certainly doesn't please me.

And I expressed the fact that we should desire virtue and we should desire integrity, and we should desire honesty and morality. And those things do express God's will and God's law. Certainly every way and at every opportunity I support a biblical morality, what Christian could do less? It is our responsibility to address sin, to confront sin, to call it what it is, to expose it and to attack it. What preacher, what Christian could do less?

That's really not the issue. It's not about whether we're against immorality, of course we're against immorality. It's about what do we view as the solution, that's the issue. Of course we would desire

true and lasting virtue to characterize people. Of course we would desire righteousness rather than unrighteousness. But the issue is...how do we get there?

For many in Christian profession today, in politics, in media, lobbying, public intimidation have become the means. Pouring millions of dollars into elections, media events, an almost endless list of political pressure groups, the effort is being made to superficially sanitize America. But the question has to be asked...is this the solution? Is this the Christian mandate?

There are people who think that if America becomes moral, God will bless America. There are people who think if America becomes moral and religious, then God will doubly bless America. So, let's put God back in the public discourse, let's put prayer back in the schools, let's put the Ten Commandments up on the wall in public places, in courtrooms. Let's stop abortion. Let's stop rampant homosexuality. Let's stop pornography, etc. And if we can just bring about some kind of morality, and better yet, some kind of commitment to God, then we will be blessed.

Well let me make a very clear point at the outset here. Morality and religion will not invite or secure the blessing of God. They never have and they never will. A more moral America, a more moral and religious America does not advance in divine favor one inch. A more moral and a more religious America will not escape divine judgment any more than Pharisaic Judaism in Jesus' time escaped the devastating judgment of God in 70 A.D. when hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered by godless Romans. And Jesus warned about that on several occasions.

There's only one thing God blesses, just one and that is He blesses saving faith in and love for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the only thing He blesses. Anybody who does not believe in and love the Lord Jesus Christ is among the cursed, right? As Christians, of course we are for morality. We're not for immorality. And we can do some topical, some superficial good, we can through political means because we live in a republic and a democracy, we can mitigate public indecency in some ways. We can mitigate public scandal, can use our democratic privileges. But that does not advance us in divine favor either individually or collectively. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 16:22 it is said, unmistakably, "If any man doesn't love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema," cursed, judged, damned, condemned. There's only one thing God will bless and that's faith in and love for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, that sort of sets the picture for you. And some of those truths are in my book, *Why Government Can't Save You*. Well, it seems as though, as far as I could tell, hardly anybody read my book, but that's okay. One man read it and wrote a book against it recently. I came under serious attack by a

writer who questioned the truth of my book and also apparently questioned my courage because I don't take stands in the political world. And so maybe the book will do a little better now that it's under assault. The new book against it is getting a wide reading and so I've been asked to respond to it. So this is my response.

I'm not against those people who hate evil and wickedness, I am among them. It's not about that. It's about the solution. It's sort of like 1 Timothy 4:8, "For bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things since it holds the promise of eternal life, not just this life but the life to come."

I mean, so am I going to spend all my time in working people into some level of bodily discipline to sort of restrain themselves from doing what their fallen natures finds very easy to do? Am I going to be concerned about the superficial behavior of people, or am I going to give myself to that godliness which is profitable for all things, that true godliness of the soul which is connected to eternal life? It's a question of...what is our mandate and where should our energy go? But it's more than that and I want to take it beyond that because I am concerned that people are getting caught up in this. And what captures you in it is because you do hate sin and you do hate immorality and wrong and unrighteousness and wretchedness and wickedness and all of that.

But when you get swept away by this and this becomes the consuming enterprise of your life in the name of quote/unquote Christianity, you're seriously off target. Many professing Christians are consumed with the public morality issue. There's a new and growing effort of what is now called "The Religious Right." It's a kind of, I guess historically it's a kind of neo-liberalism. It wasn't too many years ago that those of us who are fundamentalists and you can't use that word anymore or somebody will think you're an Islamic terrorist, we have to keep getting new words, but years ago we were...we who were believers in the Word of God, I guess we have to use a phrase, we were condemning the liberals because the liberal denomination, you know, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Episcopalians and the Church of Christ and many others, the liberal denominations who had gone liberal had replaced the saving gospel with the social gospel. And I grew up in an era in my seminary training when the big assault of those who believed the Bible was against the liberals who had replaced the saving gospel with the social gospel. And now what we've got in evangelicalism is a neo-liberalism where people are setting aside the saving gospel again for the social gospel.

But morality, I warn you, folks, morality damns just like immorality. And morality does not bring divine blessing. Jesus went head to head with the most superficially moral people in His world, the most religious people in His world, the Pharisees and the scribes. And He used His most scathing, His

most searing, His most severe invectives on the religious right of His day. Matthew 23, Jesus addressed the religious leaders of His time, the moral people, the people who were the fastidious keepers of the law of God and human tradition and He says to them in verse 13, "Woe...which means damn, judgment...curse you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..." verse 14 He repeats that, verse 15 He repeats it, verse 16, "Woe to you, blind guides," verse 17, "You fools and blind men," verse 19, "You blind men," verse 23, "Woe to you again, scribes and Pharisees," verse 24, "You blind guides," twenty-five, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Verse 26, "You blind, Pharisees," twenty-seven, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees," and it just keeps going like that all the way along.

Then the end of the chapter He says, verse 37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets, you stone those that are sent to you." Verse 38 He says, "Your house is being left to you desolate...desolate." And He was looking ahead to the destruction of 70 A.D. as well as the profound spiritual judgment.

Jesus never used such words as that on the outcasts, the prostitutes, the criminals. In fact, Jesus spent His time with those people, the outcasts of His day, tax collectors. And they said, as we learned this morning, that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard and a friend of tax collectors and sinners. That was a label put on Jesus by the religious right.

Moralism was never the message of the Old Testament prophets, it was never the message of the Messiah, it is never the message of the New Testament apostles and prophets, it has never been God's message to the world because when all is said and done, listen to what Isaiah said, "All your righteousness is filthy rags." Romans chapter 3 is a very important chapter because it describes the condition of human wickedness and in chapter 3 verse 10 it says, "There is none righteous, not even one. There's none that understands. There's none who seeks after God." So whatever imaginary righteousness men have, whatever superficial morality he may exhibit, in the end they're not righteous before God, it gains them nothing...nothing. There's no one good enough, not even one...verse 12 says. Everybody, verse 19 says, everybody under the law, everybody who lives according to the law to some degree or another will find that their mouths are closed, they have no defense and the whole world is accountable and guilty before God because by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.

So I say again, you can become moral, you can change, you know, you can turn over your life and have some kind of as it used to be called "moral rearmament," come through a crisis and decide you're going to turn away from living an immoral life or you're going to start to live a better life, a cleaner life, clean up your act, and that has no bearing on your relationship to God whatsoever.

Listen, the biblical message is not that humanity is divided between the moral and the immoral, or that humanity is divided between the good and the bad, or that humanity is divided between the virtuous and the wicked. The message of the Bible is that ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that there is no division, they're all immoral, bad and wicked. It's only a question of degree, or kind, or manifestation.

Whatever somebody's external degree of morality might be, all are condemned sinners headed to hell. You might be the most moral Pharisee in Israel, you might be the most moral rabbi, you might be the most moral cleric, you can take it from there, the most moral self-righteous, clean-living Mormon, and you're going to hell with the prostitutes. Unless you've been reconciled to God through His Son Jesus Christ, and then if you have been reconciled to God through His Son Jesus Christ, you have become a new creation and the old behaviors are replaced by new ones.

So if we want change, what is the means? Morality saves no one. Morality does not command the blessing of God. In Romans 2:11 and 12 it says, "For there is no partiality with God." That sounds like a sort of hopeful statement at first, "There's no partiality with God." But listen to this, "But all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law."

You know what that says? It says whatever might be your relationship to the law of God doesn't matter to Him. It doesn't matter to Him because you can't keep the law to His satisfaction because, as we learn in Galatians 3, if you break the law in one point, you've broken the whole law. Romans 10 Paul said that the Jews not understanding the righteousness of God go about to establish their own righteousness. And he says they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

So you might get the idea that trying to moralize the country is some noble effort and I will admit a more moral society would make life easier in some ways. But how to get that, how to...how to bring that about? Not through politics, we are not a kingdom of politicians, we are a kingdom of priests. And what is a priest? He's a reconciler. We bring people to God through Christ.

Now, so I just have begun to think and talk with some of the people I work with about some of these issues and I wrote down some of the dangers of this cultural morality effort. I'm just going to give you a list and make a few comments.

Cultural morality, CM we'll call it, cultural morality, first of all, and I'm going to give you some of these dangers, so just kind of write them down as we go, is not our commission. It's not our commission. We just read 2 Corinthians 5:17 to 20 which is our commission, we could add Matthew 28:19 and 20 or any of the other passages on the great commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." It's not our commission so right at the outset we're doing something that we have not been mandated by God to do. This then becomes a diversionary activity. And who is it that wants to get us off track?

Secondly, it wastes immense amounts of precious resources, time, money, human energy. It wastes it. It doesn't matter whether you go to hell as a prostitute or a policeman, it only matters that you go to hell. All this effort to clean up America, can the leopard change his spots? Can the Ethiopian change his skin? So says the prophet, are you able to become something other than you are? It's just a waste of resources.

Ephesians 5:16 says, "Make the most of your time because the days are evil and understand what the will of the Lord is and don't be foolish." And I tell you, I know what the will of the Lord is cause it's laid out, it's to preach the message of reconciliation, it's to preach the gospel. That's the will of the Lord. And to do something else is to be foolish, to waste time. I'm not interested in making this country moral, I'm interested in bringing people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ so that He can recreate them so they will become moral.

Thirdly, this effort at cultural morality sets up inevitable failure...it sets up inevitable failure because you can't do it. No one can be truly righteous and moral before God apart from the transformation of his soul by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. "The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." And if you don't change the heart, all you do is redirect the sin. If some sins become illegal, then people will do other sins, or they'll do the ones they want to do in secret. ??? said(?), "Cultural morality is programmed for failure."

Fourthly, cultural morality fails to understand the nature of the Kingdom of God...it fails to understand the nature of the Kingdom of God. Listen to what Jesus said, John 18:36, "My Kingdom is not of this world." There's no connection. "If My Kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting." That's interesting to me. If they're...if My Kingdom was of this world, we'd be engaged in a battle here to prevent you from taking Me captive. Jesus says, "My servants would be fighting that I might not be delivered up to the Jews, but as it is, My Kingdom is not of this realm."

To spend all your time and energy and effort fighting for some element of human society misses the point, fails to understand the nature of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the realm of salvation where

God rules over and blesses those who are in Christ. You want to bring blessing to this nation? Then preach the gospel because there is no connection between a national entity and the Kingdom of God. Jesus said it as clearly as He could, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Two completely realities.

Why is it that somehow we've gotten this idea that we have to posture America politically for the advancement of the Kingdom of God? They have absolutely no connection. I've heard people say, "If America keeps going the way it's going...if sin is more and more acceptable in our society...if it gets more and more corrupt, it's going to cripple the impact of the gospel...it's going to cause evangelism to be hard to do if not illegal...it's...we have to fight for all these freedoms in order to have them to preach the gospel." There is nothing that can be done, has been done, would be done on the face of the earth by men politically or socially that has any impact whatsoever on the purposes of God in redemption.

Fifthly, this effort puts the responsibility on man rather than God, well-intentioned people trying to do the impossible.

I'm a pretty realistic person and I don't mind tackling a hard task if I can do it. But I really don't want to spend my life trying to do what I know I can't do and what I know I can't do by my own ingenuity. I do not, in myself, folks, with my persuasive powers of speech, with my intensity, with my self-discipline and my work ethic, I do not have the ability or the capability to make people moral. I can't make this country moral. It's just a battle I can't win because those who are accustomed to doing evil, Jeremiah 13:23 says, can't do good.

Number six, this effort at cultural morality creates morality without theology. I don't like anything without theology. I want theology in everything. I don't like anything without theology because I cannot understand anything apart from God's revelation of it. My understanding of the world is completely subject to what Scripture says. But in this cultural morality, this sort of growing religious right effort there is a severe ignorance of theology, some ignorance of God, ignorance of His Word, His holy law so that they're trying to accomplish something that doesn't have the theological underpinnings, it's just a matter of money, persuasive speech, media events, pressure groups forcing people to do things. That is...that is not how you get it done. There is such a severe ignorance of God's truth, such a severe ignorance of God's Word.

There was one gentleman who is involved in this being interviewed and asked some very penetrating questions. He replied, "Well, I'm not a theologian, so I don't know about that." Well you ought to be enough a theologian to know about it.

I'm very concerned about efforts at morality that are not undergirded with theology because they don't have the right motive. You hear people say all the time, "Well, we've got to protect our children." Well, that's a reasonable thing. That is not the highest motive for what we do. My goal in proclaiming the truth is not to protect my children, that's my responsibility before God. I'll do that. I'm not trying to create a national environment that's going to somehow incubate my kids. It sounds good. But my motive is the glory of God and the honor of God. And sometimes I am so consumed with the honor of God that I feel very comfortable praying like David did, "Kill all the bad people, God, kill them all because they're dishonoring Your name, and they're wicked and they're our enemies and for Your own glory." It's like the people in the sixth chapter of Revelation under the altar, "How long, O Lord, how long are You going to let this go on before You bring a stop to it and be glorified?" If you don't know theology, you really run amuck. This is a movement that could use some pretty serious injections of sound theology.

Number seven, it fails to understand this movement in cultural morality, it fails to understand that salt and light as indicated in Matthew 5, we are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, that salt and light are not moral influence, but gospel witness and the power of holy living. They always say, "Well we have to be salt and light...we have to be salt and light...we have to be salt and light." Well, the image of...the imagery of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount with regard to salt and light is the image of the shining forth of truth. That's the light, and the preservative of godly living. We are light when we proclaim the light and manifest our good works, that's what He says, and glorify our Father who is in heaven. And we are salt when we are a preservative because of the virtue and the godliness of our lives.

Well, number eight, and I'm just kind of giving you just a quick look at these. Number eight, cultural morality is dangerous because it has no New Testament model to follow except the Pharisees. So if you're going to try and find a New Testament pattern for this effort, you're going to end up with the Pharisees. They were the moral ones. And you know what Jesus said about them? Matthew 23:15, He said, "When you're through making somebody a convert to your morality, you have made him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." Wow...wow! So if you're looking for a New Testament model for cultural morality, you're going to end up with the Pharisees. They were legalistic, I don't know about you, I don't think I would be rejoicing to live in a Pharisaic dominated society...dominated by the mandates of self-righteous, cruel, merciless legalists who laid heavy burdens of people, right?, and gave them no help to bear them, Jesus said.

Jesus said to them one day as they picked up stones to stone an adulterous woman, "Whoever is without sin throw the first stone." The stones started dropping. I don't know if I would like to live in that kind of environment. There is no New Testament model for political action. Jesus didn't try to overthrow slavery, neither did Paul, neither did any in the Old Testament. Both Jesus and Paul, however, did say, "If you're a slave, be a good one, be a faithful one, be an honest one, serve your master well, make wise investments, do it unto the Lord and God will reward you. And if you're in a hard, difficult situation, you'll know His grace."

Number nine, this cultural morality, and this is a very important one, creates unholy unions in which the unbelieving and enemies of the gospel are welcomed...are welcomed. You can find a lot of non-Christians to agree that we ought to have a more moral country, right? You could get the Muslims in on that one. You can certainly get the Mormons in, there's a lot of that. Get the Roman Catholics involved. You can get Jewish people involved, those who are orthodox, committed to the Old Testament. So now what you've got, you've got an alliance like ECT, Evangelicals and Catholics Together for the purpose of creating for the purpose of creating a cultural morality. You create these unholy unions, you do exactly what 2 Corinthians 6 says not to do, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has light with darkness, what agreement has Christ with Satan? Come out from among them and be separated."

But what happens? You're trying to achieve something through the legal system or through the court system, or through lobbying, or through media intimidation and in order to get your power up to a level where you can make a dent in the society, you embrace people who agree on the issue. You get it with other people who are anti-abortion, anti-homosexual, anti-euthanasia, who are against pornography and you get all together and you're going to accomplish this with these co-belligerents and something immediately happens, and that is this, the gospel is eclipsed because if you proclaim the gospel in that environment, you'd blow up your organization you spent so much time and money to bring together. The gospel then would become destructive.

So that leads to number ten, this effort at cultural morality leads to acceptance of inclusivism. And what I mean by that is, it starts to stretch the boundaries of the Kingdom of God to embrace these people who are not in Christ. And we've been through that, haven't we, over the last couple of years. You have people saying, "Oh, you know, certainly there's going to be well-intentioned Jews in heaven and there are going to be people in the Catholic Church in heaven, and there are going to be Mormons in heaven. There are going to be some people," and I've read you quotes from everybody from Billy Graham down through the ranks who, you know, are saying, "Sure, there are people who are going to experience the wider mercy."

This is...this is part of why I wrote the little book *Why One Way?* So important. But if you've spent all your time working on this cultural morality you've dumped all your money in, and you've pulled all these people together to get the money and the power to pull off your enterprise, you can't introduce the gospel because the gospel will undo everything you've done. As soon as you say to these people, "By the way, you're on your way to hell. By the way, we really need your money and we want your energy and we want your power and your political clout, we want this and we want that, but we also want you to know that you're not in the Kingdom of God," as soon as you say that you've just blown your organization up. So, you don't say that and eventually what you do is you just get this inclusive idea and that fits wonderfully well with post-modernism which says there's no such thing as absolute truth anyway, and if there is absolute truth, we can't know it. So, your truth is your truth, my truth is my truth. Create these moral alliances in which you embrace people who don't believe the gospel. And Paul says, "If you meet anybody who gives you any other gospel than the gospel I gave you, let him be cursed." And he said it twice in Galatians 1.

You can't do that in that environment. You've got to walk a fine line or you'll blow up your whole organization. You can't preach the gospel. The gospel gets eclipsed.

Well, there's a few more things to think about. I have time for a couple more. Number eleven, this effort at cultural morality becomes selective as to the sins it attacks...it becomes very selective as to the sins it attacks. I don't notice that they're really hard against pride, do you? I haven't seen a great effort in the Religious Right against materialism. I haven't seen a great effort even against divorce. In fact, they rarely say anything about adultery. They're really against homosexuality, that's so bizarre and abnormal. They're really against pedophilia, that's sick and abnormal. They're against killing babies, that's safe, who can imagine doing that? They're against filth and pornography. And there's a certain satisfaction in their morality about that but there's a lot of other things they don't talk about. At one point in America, the greatest advocate for the Religious Right, the national spokesman, well-known politician, was while he was developing the contract on America involved with a woman who wasn't his wife. It's a selective thing.

And let me put it down where it really needs to be. It doesn't deal with the worse sin in the world, the worse sin in the world. You say, "Do you know what the worse sin in the world is?" Of course, so do you, you know what the worse sin in the world is. You don't think you do? Yes you do. What's the greatest commandment? What is the greatest commandment? "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." Therefore what's the greatest sin? To break that commandment. How you doing? You've committed the greatest sin.

You want to talk about morality? Let's talk about that. You want to talk about sin? Let's not pick out five that we can easily assault because it, you know, we don't do those five. Let's talk about the fact that you have broken the greatest commandment, therefore you've committed the greatest sin that any human being can commit and that is the sin that sends you to eternal hell. You have failed to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And, as R.C. Sproul one time said, "And you know you haven't kept that commandment at any time in your life for five seconds." You can't keep that commandment. It's impossible. Well let's talk about that.

If you want to go after America's immorality, then let's indict the whole nation for not loving God. That is not only the first and great commandment, that is the sum of the commandments. And the second commandment is to love your neighbor as...yourself, and you can't keep that one for five seconds. So if we're going to get moral, then let's go where we need to go because that, wrote the apostle Paul, is the sum in Jesus' (????), the sum of all the law. Why do we have to pick these selective ones?

If we're going to call America to morality, then let's indict them where they need to be indicted and let's indict our own hearts where we need to be indicted and say we've broken the first and great commandment, and we've broken the second one, and we do it all the time and therefore we are all condemned to hell in desperate need of grace and forgiveness and salvation. That's the message.

Well, number twelve, this effort at cultural morality fails to understand the true nature of spiritual warfare. It fails to understand the true nature of spiritual warfare. They talk about this as spiritual warfare, this is spiritual warfare. This is not spiritual warfare...not spiritual warfare to engaged in human efforts, politically to change laws. What is spiritual warfare? Second Corinthians 10, spiritual warfare is smashing down all human ideologies with the truth of God. That's spiritual warfare. And bringing captives out and bringing them into obedience to Christ, submission to the truth of God through the Word of God.

The real spiritual war is simply this, you have a whole world of people who think wrong, they're thinking is damning. They think wrong about themselves. They think wrong about God. They think wrong about Christ if they think about Him at all. They need to think differently. They need to know the truth. They need to know the gospel. They need to know the truth about themselves, the truth about God, the truth about Christ, the truth about His work, the truth about salvation, grace, forgiveness. They need to know that truth. And it's when you bring that truth to the person and you engage in the war with their mind so that you can bring the truth to bear upon wrong thinking, that's the real spiritual war. It's an ideological battle. But the real war is bringing the truth of Christ to those

in error.

So what is the church to be doing? To be preaching the glorious, extensive, complete and whole message of redemption in Jesus Christ and to take that great message to these people who are fortified in these ideological fortresses in which literally they're going to die unless somebody smashes the walls of those lying fortifications with the truth. That's the real spiritual war. It's not a political one, it's for the minds and eternal souls of people and it's about the truth, delivering them from error to truth.

This is important, thirteen, I don't think I have too many sermons with this many points. Thirteen, this cultural morality thing is dangerous because it makes those we are commanded to lovingly reach with the gospel into the enemy rather than the mission field. Have you noticed that? The unbelievers, the immoral people, the pornographers and the homosexuals, and the abortionists, and whoever else become vilified and hated. They become the enemies. They aren't the enemies, folks, they're the mission field. They're the mission field. I think again about Jonah. The Ninevites were wretched people. I mean, they were really wretched. They were pagans. They slaughtered their enemies and they piled their skulls in pyramids. They damned up rivers with dead bodies. They would cover pillars in buildings with the flayed skin of a conquered ruler. That's ugly stuff. Wicked, haters of God, enemies of Israel and God tells Jonah, "Jonah, go preach to them." He says, "Ah, no chance." And he heads two thousand miles in the opposite direction. That is a repulsive thought, preach forgiveness to a Ninevite.

Eventually after being swallowed and vomited, frankly any fish would have vomited up a bitter prophet like Jonah, he went to Ninevah and he preached, six hundred thousand people, probably, and the whole place repented. And then he was really mad. He was. He was miserable. He was so mad he wanted to die. That's the severe danger in moralism. He was...he was sort of a racist, Jonah was. He was a legalist. He didn't want any of these wretched wicked Gentiles that he had grown to hate horning in on forgiveness.

I always want to make sure that the sinners in my world know that I love them enough to offer them forgiveness. I don't ever want them to think that I hate them. There is a holy hatred of sin and the sinner. But Jesus could even weep over them and so must we.

Well a couple more, number fourteen, cultural morality brings persecution and hatred of Christians for the wrong reasons. Boy, could I talk about that for a long time. Of course, I could talk about almost anything for a long time. But in particular this. You know, Christians are getting vilified today in the

media, they're getting persecuted for the wrong reasons, not because we're preaching the gospel. I remember one time when Georgie Vins was in this pulpit, this was in the days when Russia was still closed to Christianity and Georgie Vins was one of the leaders in the underground church in Russia and he was out and he came here to our church and he spoke and his daughter was his interpreter. And I asked him the question, I said, "Georgie, are you persecuted in Russia? Are you persecuted by the Communist regime?" And he was saying how they were persecuted and in prison, killed and telling the whole story. And I said, "You know, do you ever...do you ever protest this kind of treatment? Do you do anything to bring this to the attention of the people? Do you use any means that typically in America we use to raise the consciousness of people of these injustices, etc.?" And I'll never forget what he said to me. He said, "You know," he said, "we have determined as a church that if we are ever to suffer, it will be always and only because we have proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ." And that's right. First Peter 4:14 says, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed." People who call themselves Christians today are getting vilified by the world for their political positions and for their animosity and hostility toward the people who are the people we're supposed to reach.

Well, two more...this cultural morality reverses the divine order...it reverses the divine order. That is, it makes morality the power for salvation. The idea is if we could get a more moral America, then more people are going to believe the gospel. If we can clean up the country, it will give greater opportunity for the gospel. And that's really a reverse of the divine order. Morality is not the power for salvation, salvation is the power for morality, right? So if we want to change the nation, what do we need to be working on? The gospel.

And lastly, and I'm not going to develop this at all because I've done it in the past, this effort at cultural morality fails to understand the wrath of God...it fails to understand the wrath of God. In Romans 1 it tell us that when God is angry with a nation that has turned against Him, when they knew God they glorified Him not as God, remember that? When God is angry at a nation that has had the truth and spurned the truth, it says three times, "He gave them up...He gave them up...He gave them up." That's a form of God's judgment, He gave them up to sexual immorality first, He gave them up to homosexuality second, Romans 1, then He gave them up to a twisted reprobate, useless mind.

We look at our nation, we see sexual immorality rampant, we see homosexuality rampant and we see the reprobate mind everywhere. This is evidence of the wrath of God. Can I by my political effort overturn the wrath of God? I don't know what God is doing in the world, but I know what my mandate is. My mandate has to do with the gospel and the gospel alone.

Well, in summary, moralism confuses and misses the priority for Christians in the world. It misrepresents the divine message that man, moral or immoral, is damned and must be saved and can be saved only by believing the gospel. And remember this, it was the highly moral, highly religious Jews, fastidious about righteous standards, who joined with the immoral idolatrous Romans, flaunting their sins, and together they killed Christ. It is very moral people who are trying to kill us...flying planes into our buildings.

Don't over-estimate morality. By the way, the moral and the immoral combined to kill Jesus and in His dying He provided a salvation that they both desperately needed.

So to what are we called? Well, Paul said this, Romans 1, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." I'm not ashamed of the gospel. That's the power of God unto salvation.

In conclusion I say, it is admirable to advocate virtue. It is admirable to advocate moral behavior and ethical conduct. It is even admirable to advocate free market economics. I think that's biblical. It is even advocate to...even good to advocate limited government, strong sentences on criminals. And when all of those things are in place in a nation, life is more comfortable and superficially more enjoyable and easy. But that has nothing to do with salvation...nothing to do with soul transformation and therefore nothing to do with divine blessing.

One closing passage, Philippians 3, I'll leave this indelibly in your mind, Philippians 3. Paul in verse 4 says, "If anybody has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." You want to meet a moral man? You want to meet a moral man? Here's a moral man. "I was circumcised the eighth day," cause that's what the law prescribed. "I was of the nation of Israel, the chosen people, I was of the tribe of Benjamin, a notable and very honorable tribe." I..."A Hebrew of Hebrews," what does he mean by that? Kosher, toeing the mark, following every tradition. "And as far as the law, I was a Pharisee." Wow, fastidious. "As to zeal, I was a persecutor of the church." And then this, "As to the righteousness which is in the law, I was found...what?...blameless." Here's an ideal citizen.

Now it all sounds good but in verse 7 he said, "Whatever things were gain to me I now have counted them as...what?...as loss." You know why? Those were damning him. His morality gave him the illusion that things were right with God. So in verse 8 he says, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish." The word is manure, that's what morality was, manure compared to Christ.

So our calling is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. The transforming power of the gospel will make new creatures and for those new creatures, as we have already experienced, all things become new. That's the way God has designed it to work.

Thanks again, Lord, for the Word which speaks to the issues that face all of us. We pray for many dear people, many dear friends who are feverishly engaged in these kinds of efforts. So much time and energy can be diverted from the most needful things. O God, how we pray that You would raise up a great force of people who would preach relentlessly the gospel of salvation. Then and only then can a people, a nation, be changed. And we pray, O God, that You would keep our focus clear and help us to be those ambassadors with the ministry of reconciliation who claim the word of reconciliation in order that hearing people might believe, believing they will become new creatures in whom all things are new. In Christ's name. Amen.

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