

## *I Believe in God's Sexual Ethic*

Barry O'Dell

**F**/CGN is currently publishing a large series of articles that answers the question, "What do you believe in?" Many religiously minded folks are known only for what they are against. It is absolutely the case that spiritually minded people are against certain things. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). God Himself is against certain things (Pro. 6:16-19) and the child of God must stand with God! However, the Christian must also be able to articulate what he stands for. In this edition of the paper, three topics are scripturally addressed.

Ethic is defined as, "a set of moral principles, especially ones relating to or affirming a specified group, field, or form of conduct." While on earth Jesus said, "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48). That text goes on to say, "I have not spoken of Myself" (Jn. 12:49, KJV). I prefer the reading found in the New King James: "For I have not spoken on My own authority." In other words, Jesus did not take it upon Himself to speak. Rather, as He said, "...the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak." Jesus did not speak or act independently from His Father. Such being the case, when speaking of the Christian's ethic, we must know what Jesus has spoken (Heb. 1:2).

As Israel was approaching the Promised Land, many laws were revealed to them by God Himself. One such case is found in Leviticus 18 and it was in regard to the sexual conduct of God's people. The Bible says, "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 18:1-5). Then, from verses 6 to 23, God revealed, in great specificity, things that the Israelites were to avoid. Because of the sinful behavior practiced by the inhabitants of Canaan, "the nations are defiled" and "the land is defiled" (Lev. 18:24-25). God then forewarned Israel of the consequences of engaging in such disgusting behaviors (Lev. 18:26-30). God had a very clear sexual ethic for ancient Israel.

What about today? The Bible student knows very well that what is recorded in the Old Testament, while not binding as law today, serves as an example and as a teacher (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11). We must learn from what is revealed in the Old Testament and be governed by what is revealed in the New. There is one very simple passage in the New Testament that summarizes God's sexual ethic: "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers [fornicators - NKJ] and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). God deemed, from the beginning of creation "...male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Mk. 10:6-9). God's ethic in regard to a sexual relationship is that it be between a man and a woman, only within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual relationship is fornication. Paul wrote, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2).

**"...the Christian must be able to articulate what he stands for"**

There are many passages which address this subject. For instance, before their conversion to Christ, some of the Corinthians had been fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, and abusers of themselves with mankind (1 Cor. 6:9). He then stated that those who practice such things will not "inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:10). In Romans 1:26-28 Paul addressed issues that are "against nature." He wrote of, "vile affections" in regard to women being with women and "men leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another." The stated reason for the degradation of God's sexual ethic is, "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom. 1:28). Colossians 3:5 informs us that some of the recipients of the wrath of God will be those who are fornicators. Fornicators will not be permitted to enter the heavenly city (Rev. 21:8). The list of passages could go on and on!

Here is the main point - God has revealed a sexual ethic to humanity. It goes all the way back to creation itself and it applies to all - believer and non-believer (Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:4-9). The sexual relationship is to be enjoyed within and only within the bonds of marriage and only between a male and a female. While trends change and certain behaviors are tolerated, truth does not change!

**A**s the Lord was bringing Israel into the Promised Land, He deemed it essential to give them instruction about teaching their children. Every generation needs to know about the Lord God and what He expects of them. The truths given in Deuteronomy 6:5-7 are so very relevant for us today!

*“Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God.”* These words were spoken just after Moses instructed: *“Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always...that thou mayest fear Jehovah thy God, to keep all His statutes and commandments”* (Deut. 5:29; 6:2). Love was to be shown by walking in all the ways of Jehovah (Deut. 11:22; 19:9; 30:16). The Lord was their God and they were to be devoted to Him. Right now, our homes, our churches, and our communities need to see us as Christian parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents loving the Lord our God! Not things, possessions, lands, houses, cars, boats, toys, guns, and dresses. Not vacations, retirement, money, and investments. Not entertainment, free-time, and sports! Love for our God is to be much deeper than something we say - it must be demonstrated in the decisions we make (1 Jn. 3:18-19). *Love Him with all your heart.* The Bible “heart” is the seat of our emotions - emotions which Israel were to devote to Jehovah their God. God wants our emotions to be guided by His desires, not ours (Ps. 119:97, 105, 133; Jam. 1:14). We must let God’s word be our guide, not our conscience and our emotions (Pro. 14:12; 28:26). Do we love the Lord our God with all our emotions and affection? *Love Him with all your soul.* The soul represents the essence of life and it stands for the personality in us and God is describing our love as pervading our entire self-consciousness. We are to love the Lord God with our entire personality and self-consciousness. There is no room for a split personality when serving God. *“No man can serve two masters”* (Matt. 6:24). The psalmist wrote, *“I hate them that are of a double mind [the divided mind], but Thy law do I love”* (Ps. 119:113). *Love Him with all your strength.* To love the Lord God with all our strength is to love Him with all our effort. God blesses those who *“seek after Him”* (Heb. 11:6). God is not pleased with half-hearted efforts! Are we putting forth all our strength and effort in serving God? The first thing we as adults must do in teaching our children is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength! I believe in teaching our children because they are watching and learning!

*“And these words which I command thee.”* The book of Deuteronomy is the Divine, written record

of Moses’ final three inspired speeches to a new generation of Israelites just prior to his death and their entering the Promised Land. God has communicated in the same manner by which all intelligent people communicate, and that is by words. Thankfully, we can know God’s will by reading His word! Our children need to see our respect for and obedience to the word of God. Deuteronomy 5:2-3 says *“This day.”* Today, our children need to learn the importance of the Old Covenant, how Jesus fulfilled it, and enacted the New Covenant (Rom. 15:4; Matt. 5:17-18; Lk. 24:44-45; Col. 2:14; Heb. 8-9). They need to see their parents rightly dividing the word of truth and loving the sum of God’s truth (2 Tim. 2:15; Ps. 119:160). *He wants His word upon our hearts.* When God’s word is truly *“in our hearts”* we will not neglect God, His ways, His church, nor our fellow man. Our lives will not be characterized by willful sin nor will we make excuses for our sin (Ps. 119:11; 2 Sam. 12:13). *God has commanded parents to teach their children.* Truly, parents are full-time youth ministers. No one has more potential influence on children than their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents (2 Tim. 1:5; Eph. 6:4). If we are not intentional about this command, our children will be at a great disadvantage. *God wants this training to be done diligently.* To do something with diligence is to do it with great effort and energy. Children need to see their parents working hard to teach them the Bible. Parents must purpose to study and learn. Many parents are woefully unaware of what the Bible teaches because they do not read it. Perhaps, at best, they read it occasionally. In addition to living right before our children (Acts 1:3), parents must verbally teach their children. *We must talk of God’s things when we sit in our house.* Is most of our time used in sleeping, watching TV, surfing the internet, and eating? The home is a very special place where God intends for us to train our children in a godly and protected environment. May we as parents make wise decisions and not fool ourselves into being merely a *“friend”* to our children when they are young. *God said to do this when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up.* The word of God must saturate our home life, be the center of conversations, and the means of instructing our children. Are we as parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents doing this? Every generation needs to know about the Lord God and what He expects of them. If we do not teach them as we should, we will hinder them from coming to Jesus. The Israelites were to teach their children lest they forgot Jehovah (Deut. 6:12). I believe in the necessity of teaching our children because they are watching and learning.

**M**oses described God as being “*a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He*” (Deut. 32:4). God’s justice is underplayed in today’s religious world, which would instead focus on God’s love and righteousness as if they could be separated. However, God’s love and righteousness are a part of His justice, and His justice is always perfect. God’s justice requires Him always to do what is right, which means those who choose to rebel against God will be punished, and those who choose to trust and submit to God will be rewarded. God will never punish those who trust in Him, and He will never reward those who offend His holiness. This is seen in Numbers 13-14 as God deals with individuals who refused to trust in Him.

In Numbers 13, God gave Moses permission to send (*shelah-lekha*, literally, “to send for yourself”) a representative from each tribe into the Promised Land to “*search the land*” (Num. 13:2). Moses obeyed and organized a group of twelve men, one from each tribe, to enter the land secretly and come back with a report of what they found. The spies obeyed and returned 40 days later. Beginning in verse 26, the spies reported to the congregation of Israel everything they had seen. The report started positively, confirming what God had been telling them. However, the spies were fearful of the people in the land who were mightier and more powerful than Israel. They focused on the obstacles standing in their way instead of the promises of God. Caleb, however, contrasted this report by reminding the people that with God on their side, they could easily conquer the land (Num. 13:30). This first report by the spies was called “*evil*” (Num. 13:32). After a night of wallowing in their lack of faith and fear, the population of Israel overwhelmingly began to speak against Moses and Aaron, going as far as to say, “*let’s just go back to our slavery in Egypt*” (Num. 14:2-4). They did not simply want to return to Egypt, but they were willing to “*make another captain.*” In other words, Moses’ leadership was no longer good enough for them. By refusing Moses’ authority in this way, they also said that God Himself was no longer good enough for them. Joshua tried to convince them otherwise by reminding them of God’s faithfulness to His people. The people refused to listen and instead wished to have Joshua stoned. Ultimately, the Israelites’ refusal to hear was a referendum against God.

Pause for a second and take in the failure of Israel that occurred. This should have been a time of triumph for God’s people. They had finally reached the border of the Promised Land. They were standing at the edge of victory. God’s love and grace have led

them to the fulfillment of a promise made centuries before to Abraham. They should have been smelling the sweet smell of success. Instead, the children of Israel turned what should have been a wonderful celebration of God’s grace and love into a time of disbelief, fear, and utter failure. They should have marched into Canaan full of confidence and thanksgiving, but instead, refused to enter at all, preferring to turn back to Egypt’s slavery. They ran a marathon from Egypt to Canaan only to quit inches from the finish line.

God began to speak to Moses in verse 11, stating that because of the provocation of the people, He would “*smite them with pestilence, and disinherit them.*” Moses implored God to stay His hand by arguing that the nations were watching and would claim that He couldn’t fulfill His promises (v. 16). Moses made a second appeal to God’s justice by quoting to Him the words of introduction that God said to Moses on Sinai, “*The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.*” God relented and punished those who did not trust in Him and allowed the innocent ones, Joshua, Caleb, and those under the age of 20, to enter Canaan after forty years of wandering through the wilderness. In making this decision, God told Moses that “*all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*” (v. 21).

The account of Numbers 13-14 serves as an example to the modern Christian. When God enacts justice, His glory is seen throughout the world. God’s justice is a stark contrast from the injustice which fills the world. Humanity, being made in the image of God, finds the injustice of the world as being cruel and disgusting. However, God’s justice shines as a light in this dark world to all of those who place their trust in God. This is because God is the standard for justice (Gen. 18:25). However, many in the world today will see God’s justice as being cruel. They claim a God of grace cannot punish. A God of love forgives. These arguments assume that grace and love stand as the opposites of justice. Yet, all of God’s judgments are perfectly in line with His grace and love. It would have been unloving for God to punish those who were innocent. Likewise, it would have been just as unloving for God to reward those who would have turned away from Him. The idea that one who lives rebelliously against God deserves God’s grace contradicts the concept of grace itself. It reduces the mercy of God to an entitlement. Justice is always deserved, and God will impartially judge every man according to his deeds (1 Pet. 1:17).

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### The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

#### Salvation

- Saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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