

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Judgment and Our Savior

Richard Garbi

We live in a world filled with sin. Our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and other people flaunt their sins on social media or in public. Some do it because they have blinded themselves to the wrong they are committing. Some do it to provoke a reaction in others. Some do it out of a misguided desire to affect social change. Whatever the reason, we daily see the sin of others. How should we react to it?

In John the eighth chapter, an account is given of a thought-provoking encounter between Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees, and a woman caught in sin. Leading up to the story of the woman caught in adultery, it is revealed that it is nearing the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (**John 7:2**). Three times a year, all Jews were called to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, (**Exodus 23:14-19**); the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Booths or Ingathering), was one such feast. Jesus' brothers urged him to teach and do his works in Judea. Jesus responds to them: "Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet fully come." Yet Jesus does go up "in secret" (**John 7:10**) and begins teaching in the temple. His knowledge of the scriptures appeared to surprise those who heard him. The rest of chapter seven recounts Jesus teaching in Jerusalem during the feast, and his actions caused the people to debate his identity. "But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?" (**John 7:26**). On the day after the feast, early in the morning, Jesus came back into the Temple from the Mount of Olives (**John 7:53, John 8:1-2**) and began teaching the people. At this moment, the scribes and Pharisees try to trap Jesus.

They seek to trap Jesus by bringing before him a woman caught in the act of adultery (**John 8:3**). She was guilty. Jesus did not deny it, and we have no record of the woman proclaiming her innocence. It would have been hard for her to protest her innocence when she was caught in the act. Both she and the man with whom she was engaged in adultery were to be put to death according to the old law (see **Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22**). We are never told where her partner was. Jesus does not directly address this inequity either, so we will not dwell on that aspect of this account either. So, here is this woman caught in adultery brought before Jesus by the scribes

and Pharisees so that they might trap him.

Why did the leaders assume this would be a good trap for Jesus? They must have assumed that he would seek to circumvent the punishment of this woman, and when he did, they could accuse him of being against the Law. They were correct! Jesus did desire mercy for this woman, and he was successful in averting the death penalty. What would lead them to believe he would seek mercy for this woman? While we can only speculate, it is possible that they heard his teaching, "But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (**Mark 9:13**). Or, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (**Mark 2:17**). From these two teachings, they might have concluded how he might react. Whatever led them to this assertion, they rightly predicted that

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Jesus would not want this woman to be stoned.

That Jesus would desire mercy is probably one factor that led to his actions in this case. Our Lord's desire for mercy is one of the many blessings for which we should all be thankful.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Another factor could be the rather blatant lack of regard for justice demonstrated by the scribes and Pharisees. They did not seek to follow the Law they sought to use this woman's sin as a tool against the Lord. If they desired justice, they would have brought her partner. If they desired justice, they would not have brought her before Jesus. Jesus, seeking mercy and to stop the manipulation of a sad circumstance, decided to intervene.

How should we react to the sin we see in others? While the

continued on the next page...

The More Excellent Way, Part 1

Steve Wright

scriptures bear out that our actions toward a brother or sister in sin may be different than what is appropriate for those in the world (**Galatians 6:1, Hebrews 3:12-13, 1 Corinthians 5**), there are some common themes. Jesus' response to the scribes and Pharisees reveals at least one facet of this: "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*" (**John 8:7**). Jesus asks the scribes and Pharisees to look inward first. He asks that they examine their own lives and asks that they apply the longsuffering and mercy they received to this woman also. He reminds them that their own position before the Lord does not give them the standing to condemn. There is broad applicability for us, too: "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (**Romans 3:23**). This does not mean that we change the standard the Lord has set, but rather we should first recognize our humanity and allow that attitude to temper our reaction.

This teaching from the Lord is not isolated to this passage. In **Luke 6:41-42** we are admonished by our Lord to look at ourselves before we seek to intervene in the lives of our brethren. Further, in **Luke 18:9-14** Jesus instructs that we should not take pride in our "*righteousness*." Or, we should not compare ourselves to those in sin, but rather we should be humble and remember all that we have done and all that the Lord has done for us. Paul echoes these thoughts when he writes:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves (**Philippians 2:3**).

When we see the sin of the world, it should move us to sorrow and compassion. "*For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil*" (**Ecclesiastes 12:14**).

Actions taken in reaction to the sin of others should be motivated by love and to foster repentance. Again, Jesus sets the example for us. To the surprise of Jewish leaders, he sought out those who could use his teaching most. Jesus, who has every right to condemn, seeks to save. Let us pray that all hearts be turned to the Master "*who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (**1 Timothy 2:4**).

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He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? (**Micah 6:8**).

"What's love got to do with it?" This is the question Tina Turner belts out in her distinctive raspy voice as she sings the title to the song written by Terry Britten and Graham Lyle, which started being played on the radio in 1984. The "it" the song refers to speaks strictly of gratifying physical desires as if "unburdened" by anything more. But that is NOT what this article is about. And the love I will be speaking to has everything to do with the "it," so to speak, that I will be addressing.

The love that I mean of course is agape.

Agape (love) is one of the rarest words in ancient Greek literature but one of the most common in the New Testament. This particular Greek word for love, unlike our English word love, never refers to romantic or sexual love. The Greek has *eros* for that, a word that does not appear in the New Testament. Neither does *agape* refer to mere sentiment or a pleasant feeling about something or someone. It does not mean close friendship or brotherly love for which *philia* is used. Nor is *agape* limited in its meaning to be only charity, a word carried over from the Latin by the King James translators and which in English has long been associated only with giving to the needy.

In the New Testament, **chapter thirteen of 1 Corinthians** is itself the best definition of *agape*. Therefore, in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** we read:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Everything a Christian does should be done in love (**1 Corinthians 16:14**). Correct theology is no substitute for love. Religious works are no substitute for love. Nothing substitutes for love. Christians have no excuse for not loving, "*because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*" (**Romans 5:5**). It is ridiculous for us as Christians to think that we must manufacture love, since we only have to share the love that we have been given. This love is not of any human origin or teaching, but instead, we are "*taught by God to love one another,*" (**1 Thessalonians 4:9**). And so, we are told:

- To “pursue love” (1 Corinthians 14:1)
- To “put on love” (Colossians 3:14)
- To “increase and abound in love” (1 Thessalonians 3:12, Philippians 1:9)
- To be sincere in love (2 Corinthians 8:8)
- To be unified in love (Philippians 2:2)
- To be “earnest” in our love (1 Peter 4:8)
- To “stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24)

In other words, we are simply to allow God’s love to flow in us and through us.

THE GREATEST POSSIBLE ELOQUENCE WITHOUT LOVE IS NOTHING

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1).

In New Testament times, rites honoring the pagan deities Cybele, Bacchus, and Dionysus included speaking in ecstatic noises that were accompanied by smashing gongs, clanging cymbals, and blaring trumpets. The original recipients of this letter got Paul’s point: no matter how well you speak, unless your speaking is done in love, it amounts to no more than those pagan rituals. It is merely meaningless noise in a Christian guise.

PROPHECY, KNOWLEDGE, AND FAITH WITHOUT LOVE ARE NOTHING

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).

In this installment, let us consider the loveless heart and work of the prophet Balaam.

Balaam was a prophet of God. He knew the true God, and he knew God’s truth, but he had no love for God’s people. Without hesitation, it seems, he agreed to curse the Israelites in return for a generous payment by Balak, the king of the Moabites. God told Balaam NOT to go with Balak and do what he was asking, but Balaam went anyway. God tried to stop him but in spite of the severest of obstacles and most unusual of signs (an angel sent to slay him, his donkey talking), Balaam persisted in his stubborn greed. But when the prophet failed to curse Israel, no matter how many times he tried, he resorted to misleading and corrupting them into idolatry and sexual immorality. For these crimes, the LORD killed him (Numbers

22-25; Revelation 2:14; Numbers 31:8, 16). The prophet knew God’s word, spoke God’s word, and feared God in a self-protecting way, but he had no love for God, much less for God’s people.

In the next installment, we shall contrast the godly work produced by the love-filled heart of the prophet Jeremiah, and we shall say a few words about the prophet Jonah as well.

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“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

Here and There

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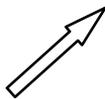
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Continued from page 3: "Here and There"

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The church of Christ on Smart Road, Greenwood, MO, is pleased to announce several upcoming events. The congregation plans a **special study for ladies** on Saturday, March 11. The study begins at 8:30 with lunch provided. All ages are welcome. For more details, please check:

<https://smartroadcoc.org>

On April 15-16, the congregation plans a **special study for teens**. Evangelists **Tad Morris** and **Wade Stanley** will be the teachers, Lord willing. Please check the church's website above for more information.

The congregation plans to host a **one-week meeting** during the week of **July 23-28**. More details will be available in future months.

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May God bless you as you seek to know, and do, His perfect will!

Special Meetings

2023 Meetings

- March 18-19.....Section Church of Christ (Osage City, KS)
- April 15-16.....Teen Meeting, Smart Road, Greenwood, MO
- May 27-28.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO
- June 10-11.....Vandalia, IA
- July 3-7.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO

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