

## Forgetting, Remembering, and Celebrating Life

*“Tell me what the world is saying today, and I’ll tell you what the Church will be saying in seven years.” -Francis Schaeffer, Christian Apologist*

### Forgetting Who We Are

How did we get here? How did our society become so decadent, vapid, and filled with evil? Where has the Church been in all of this? The short answer—the Church has been silent, cowardly, and forgotten who She is.

In the year 640 BC, a young boy ascended to the throne of Judah. His father was Amon, a wicked king. Amon did what was evil in the sight of God, just as his father Manasseh had done. Manasseh worshipped the host of the heavens. He built altars to pagan gods in the Temple. He burned one of his sons as an offering. Manasseh used fortune tellers, omens, necromancers, and mediums. He did so much evil in the sight of God, the Lord was provoked to anger, promising to destroy the kingdom. Manasseh led the people astray to do more evil than the nations had done before, those whom the Lord had wiped out. Amon continued in his father’s train, worshipping idols, abandoning the Lord, walking in all the ways of his father. Amon was killed by his own servants, conspirators against the throne. An eight year old boy was left. His name was Josiah.

When Josiah was twenty-six years old, he sent his secretary to the house of the Lord. “Go up to Hilkiah, the priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the Lord’s house, which the keepers of the house have collected from the people.” Josiah intended to repair the Temple and provide for its upkeep. But Hilkiah gave something else to the secretary. “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.” The Word of God had been lost, fallen into disuse. So, Josiah’s secretary Shaphan took the book to the king and read it before him.

When Josiah heard the words of this recovered book, he tore his clothes. He commanded that the priesthood inquire of the Lord, for him and all the people. . . for all of Judah. “For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.” Good King Josiah made many reforms during his thirty-one year reign. He repaired the house and purified it from gross idolatry. He pulled out all the abominable vessels and statues made for Baal and Asherah. He reinstituted the sacrificial system prescribed by the Lord, and tore down all the places of false worship. He ground up their altars into dust and cast them into the Brook of Kidron. He even burned up all the priests of these wicked high places, all who had practiced abominations and led the people astray. He put away all the necromancers and mediums and household gods and established the words of the Law, written in the Lord’s Book. And Josiah kept the Passover feast, as God had commanded. We are told, “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any arise after him.” (2 Kings 23:25) Most importantly, Josiah remembered who he was, what he was to do, and showed courage of conviction to do it. But he was a king. What about the rest of us? The hidden hero in this tale is Shaphan. This high-level administrator, after receiving the lost Word of God from the priest, confronted the king with it. “Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, ‘Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.’ And Shaphan read it before the king.” (2 Kings 22:10) This act of reclaiming God’s Word and confronting those in power provides a clue of what we are to do.

For like the people of Judah, we have forgotten. We have followed the ways of the world, glommed onto whatever cultural idea suits our fancy. We have forgotten that we are God's people, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Jesus. We are connected to Him, as He is our Head. But we have forgotten. Oh...we might reflect on it privately, individually...but corporately, we act as if we are no more than a non-profit, tax-exempt, loose collection of like-minded individuals. We've been cowed into silence by the berating of bureaucrats and political talking heads, who demand that the Church be silent about anything "political." The Church has cowed itself, Her clergy too worried about attendance numbers, worried about keeping a relevant place in polite society, worried about anything but proclaiming the full truth of God. We have forgotten.

The biggest cudgel used against the modern American Church is the eleventh commandment—*Thou shalt not talk politics ever from the pulpit*. We are constantly reminded that there must be a wall of separation between the mighty State and the cowardly, docile, impotent church.<sup>1</sup> But what has happened in my lifetime? In yours? Do you recognize the changes...do you celebrate the "progress" and "evolution in thinking"? The question we should be asking is, "What does God's Word say?" For those clinging to the trope that the Church must be silent about "political" issues, I ask you: does the Church have anything to say about marriage, and sexual morality, and issues of biological realities? What about the sins of adultery and pornography? Do pastors have anything to say about the murder of the unborn? What about the sin of sodomy and marriage between two same sex individuals? All of those things are deemed to be "political." Here is the reality—the political topics *du jour* have come into the realm of the Church...and the Church has been silent. We as the Church have forgotten our duty.

We've forgotten God's clear teaching on all these issues, trading in His truth and coopting a false vision. The Church has stopped speaking and instead "the world" has taken up role of catechizer. We've suffered amnesia—not just culturally, but biblically. Pastors have become cowards, unwilling to teach and proclaim clear, biblical truths. The people in the pews (as well as pastors) indulge in wicked behaviors and ideologies. The nominal Christian merely wants a place for a wedding, funeral, a baptism of a grandchild. The regular attendee very rarely studies God's Word to know what it says. The result is ignorance and complicit acceptance of the spirit of an evil and adulterous generation. The ignorance of the Church is more dangerous for the culture than the decadence of the world. The Church—the pastors and people—are the problem.

### **Greater and Lesser Sins**

This article will be posted and sent out, hopefully read by a handful of people, on June 1. June, of course, as any red-blooded American citizen knows, is "Pride Month." Every retailer signals they support "the lifestyle" and that all people should be celebrated as having a voice and place. For those of you who feel revulsion by this progressive onslaught to our secular calendar, I ask you, "How did this happen?" Well...like the proverbial frog slowly being boiled alive...one moment you're in a cool pot of water and the next—frog soup! Better put, we've had these vile ideologies and practices dripped into our veins, by a slow, methodical cultural IV, making what is so vile seem so normal. The issue of "pride" has consistently been marketed and messaged until deemed harmless. Openly gay characters in movies. Entertaining singers and comics who

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the biggest farces perpetrated on the American Church. There is no separation stipulated in our founding documents, other than, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." I have gone over this ground many times, most recently in the *Tough Topic: What Is the Church's Role in Politics?* You can find a recording of it on the website.

come out. Rush Limbaugh had Elton John play at his wedding, right? This has been going on for decades. Each generation has become less faithful and more accepting, immune to God's reality. So, perhaps the first thing to do is call a thing what it is—*pride month is nothing more than a cultural and corporate effort to normalize sodomy and the sexualization of children*. Pride is a sin. It is, in fact, the greatest sin. More on that in an upcoming sermon.

But I suspect the reticence of Christians to have open ears to hear God's truth and pastors to preach it is because so many of us have family and friends who identify as "gay" and participate in open "homosexual" relationships.<sup>2</sup> And we genuinely like, even love them. They are sons and daughters, grandkids, nieces and nephews, co-workers and valued neighbors. So, the rationalizations begin. "I don't approve but they have to live their lives...It's not for me to judge...we're supposed to 'hate the sin but love the sinner'." And so it goes. But one of the biggest Christian rationales for overlooking and condoning same-sex activity is the "all sin is the same" trope. It goes something like this: everyone is a sinner. You sin and I sin. God sees all sins as the same. Therefore, how can we judge anyone else's sin? You've heard this, right? You've said something like this, right? I have heard people in this congregation say things like this to justify the sin of sexual immorality. "It's the same as running a stop sign or speeding in the eyes of God." The problem with this line of reasoning—it's wrong. It's a lie. And it's satanic.

Is everyone a sinner before God? Of course. We are all miserable sinners. We are only made righteous, declared to be just on account of the work of Jesus Christ alone. We receive this mercy freely, and passively. That is, we don't earn it; it is given as a gift. By grace through faith. But with respect to the world, our neighbor, our conduct as it relates to God's created order, there is a hierarchy of greater and lesser sins. By the way. . . we all know this! We sin in thought, word, and deed. So, thinking a lustful thought is not as great of a sin as talking about it, and certainly not as great as putting it into action! To be crass, rape and murder are greater sins than gossip. We know this. We need to stop with the rationalizations. Jesus says to Pilate, "He who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." (John 19:11)

As far as the "hate the sin, love the sinner" thing. . . it's true that we are to hate sin. God hates it; we should too. But we never seem to get around to "hating the sin." The application is often "I'll ignore the sin and even condone it because I love this person." Besides, if we truly loved the person caught in a sin, living a life without repentance, we would tell them the truth! We would tell them God's desire for their repentance, that they might amend their lifestyle. We love the person because they are God's creature, fearfully and wonderfully made. That's what we love. We don't want them to be separated from God's love forever. For there are certain sins that are specifically called out for being ones that can keep a person from inheriting God's Kingdom. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor 6:9-10, NKJV) So, there seems to be some sins that are worse than others. To be even more bold, the sin of sodomy or any same-sex activity is worse than sexual immorality between a man and woman. This shocks you to hear, but same-sex sin goes directly against God's natural order. It violates it in a way that "garden variety" immorality doesn't. See Genesis 19:4-8!

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<sup>2</sup> The two terms in quotes are highly problematic and misleading. I refrain from using them here on out, because they obscure reality.

The point: this “all sins are the same” business is really a stumbling block to dealing faithfully with the issues in our culture that are openly endorsed in many churches in America and quietly condoned in countless others. Before I go on though, let me give you the next part of Paul’s words in the above citation. “And such **were** some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” This is the powerful working of the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins offered to all who repent and change their lives. But this can’t happen if we don’t call a sin a sin, and actually fail to confront real evil in our midst. We are putting people’s eternal lives at jeopardy.

### **The Deluge of Our Cultural Moment**

The eternal stakes are high in our present day and age. Every epoch of time is full of wickedness, but we have invited demonic forces into our institutions and even our homes. We’ve been caught up by what Paul calls the “mystery of lawlessness.” (2 Thess 2:7) Our American moment, certainly experiencing a great cultural decline (regardless of one’s political leaning), has completely lost all shared, common values. We have no agreed upon morality with which to conduct ourselves. We are tribal, compartmentalized, individualized. But at the same time, we have adopted as “self-evident” the notion that men marrying other men is “love.” That any activity done either in the home or public square is permissible. That children can put off their “gender assigned at birth,” that parents willingly subject their children to harmful treatments and diabolical mutilations. That the worst thing a person can do is be “judgy.” Again, Paul, speaking to his age but foretelling ours says, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to the deceitful spirits and teaching of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...” and “The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” (1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Thess 2:9-10) What is the vehicle for the wickedness all around us? Satan and his lies. The very truth of God is under attack. That which corresponds to God’s reality is rejected.

What then happens to a society, a republic, a people who traffic in such things—either actively promoting what is false, or passively by sitting by and letting lies be told in their midst?

“Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in the lie.” (2 Thess 2:11-12) In other words, God will judge and condemn to hell all who depart from His Word, His truth, His will, His Son. This is our cultural moment. We have been deluged by immorality, baseness, and carnal license. Like the great deluge of The Flood, God will judge wickedness, as He always does. People will be given over to this evil and destroyed.

### **Loving Confrontation**

What, then, do we do? As a pastor in Christ’s Church, I am to actively preach and teach God’s truth. This is something I always strive to do, and believe I have done. But the lectionary doesn’t always line up with “cultural events” or situational topics. The first thing is to recognize June not as “pride month” but “life month.” So, in the last two Sundays of June, I will preach sermons—one on the perversion of the “rainbow” and wickedness of same-sex ideology and the other on “pride”...with a focus on the personal struggle with sin related to the cultural moment. I will be sensitive to personal situations and “little ears,” but will speak directly about these topics. I will preach God’s truth but also offer the consolation of the Gospel. In other words, I will strive to do my calling, which starts with rejecting the premise of the cultural moment.

In a broader sense, we all need to be confronted with the truth of God's Word. Knowing what is true is always the start. Flowing from this, we can strive in having good, clear, faithful conversations with those trapped in damaging lifestyles or pridefully self-secure in their sin. Screaming at people doesn't work. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar the saying goes. . . though you catch the most with a dead squirrel. We need more dead squirrels. So we need to have "confrontations." These are truthful talks with those we like, love, and respect. It is part of the great commission of the Church—to teach all that Jesus has commanded. While Jesus didn't speak specifically about "same sex" matters (why would He? Everyone knew it was wicked), He certainly does about sexual immorality and God's desire for man and woman in marriage...and His Word certainly has direct things to teach us. So, our conversations need to be grounded in God's truth and not Satan's lies.

These confrontations may be hard. They might involve uncomfortable moments. But if we truly love the people God has put in our spheres of influence, then we must be truthful. Love is never, ever disconnected from the truth. In fact, "it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth." (1 Cor 13:6) So, loving confrontations do two things—speak the truth but with gentleness and respect. We are not condemning to hell—that's for God. But we are to make clear the consequences of an unrepentant lifestyle and ideology. It is a very different thing for someone who struggles against a besetting sin. It is a far different circumstance for someone who pleads for God's mercy and wants His help in changing. But there are people who are seared in their conscience, hardened in their heart, and absolutely want nothing to do with God's truth. We can't change a person's heart, but the Spirit can and does. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. We then are to speak that Word with boldness, with clarity, and with love. To remain silent, tacitly (or actively) support a "lifestyle" or public position clearly contrary to God's Word is not an option for a Christian. We are to be agents of truth, all while living repentant, faithful lives.

### **Remembering Who We Are and Promoting Life**

It's easy to get lost in the "culture wars" and battle of ideas. So much public discourse happens under the cloak of anonymity or behind a keyboard or touchscreen. But we must remember who we are. We are God's chosen, redeemed, holy ones. Again, St. Paul:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thess 4:3-8, ESV)

We must remember Who claimed us from darkness. What it cost. For we are not our own, but were bought with a price. Because this is so, we have no other option than to stand up for the truth and life. We are to be the Church, every place God puts us. Some are uncomfortable with the Church being "political." But consider—what's known as "politics" has come into the sphere of the Church. Political entities have tried to coopt the Church's realm, while at the same time telling Her to be silent. The bureaucracies of the state and the bleating voices in the public square have catechized people in the new "religion": inclusivity and equity. Terms emptied of all reality, filled with satanic substitutes. So, we remember. God is our Creator and governs all

spheres of activity. We remember that God is the author of all biological, natural truth. We remember that God is over our country and we are “under” Him. Under what? His blessing (if we act and govern according to what is good) and His judgment if we forget Him. The Church (the institution and people) needs to reclaim Her voice and speak. The Church has forgotten this. We are to speak from our pulpits, our publications, from the platforms God gives to all Christian.

But we are also to offer a positive vision of life, of what is good, true, and beautiful. We are to promote life. Life, that all people are made in the image of God and bear His indelible mark. Life, that marriage is always according to God’s standards, between one man and one woman and that good, healthy marriages lead to families and form the bedrock of all society. That all human relationships thrive when living in line with God’s Word. That all conceived in the womb are miracles of God—a union of soul and body that only God can endow and create. That life is precious to God, that it matters to Him, for He sent His one-and-only Son to redeem all of it. That every life matters. How we live life matters...to God and to our neighbor.

This has always been the Church’s posture. It’s what caused Her to grow in the first century and beyond. Christians rejected the wicked, pagan practices of exposing children to death or killing them with poisons and implements. Instead, Christians rescued the abandoned, nursed the sick, visited the lonely. God worked through the hands of the saints to bring His vision of life to the Roman Empire, the most powerful entity in the known world. We see God working through institutions to this day for the promotion of life. It was on June 24, 2022, that *Roe* was struck down by six fallible, often misguided justices. It was an act of God. For on this same day in the Church year, June 24, the Church celebrates the Feast of St. John the Baptist.

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:39-45, NKJV)

So, we remember before it’s too late. For God will not abide perversity, especially among His Church. He will judge it. Yes, He has judged all sin in His Son; that’s true. But until Jesus returns, puts all things to right, ushering in the new creation, we are to remember His truth and live in His teaching. His will must be done on earth as it is in heaven. This starts with each and every one of us finding our voice, reclaiming our courage, clinging to God’s Word, remembering who we are. Like Josiah, we are to **tear down the high places of false worship and pagan practices in our midst**. Like Shaphan the secretary, we confront the kings of our age with the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. We bring the Word of truth to those who reject it, and in so doing, offer them the eternal life God desires all to have. With renewed hearts, purposeful mouths, we act in true love, abhorring what is evil, and promote life in all its forms.

