

June 10, 2014

2 Chronicles 29:11 (NASB), ***“My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him, and to be His ministers and burn incense.”***

I have now been in the pulpit either part time or full time for almost a decade now. When I first started preaching at that little church in Longton Kansas I didn't appreciate the seriousness of task. I was completely clueless in many ways (and still am in many ways) and was lost when it came to preparing a sermon and would have to admit that I borrowed heavily from other preachers. It wasn't until I was in seminary at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City that I truly began to appreciate the heavy burden and responsibility that a pastor has been given. There are many things a pastor does but none more important than the teaching and preaching of the word of God.

Last week as many of you now know New Heart Community Church in La Mirada California which is in the Los Angeles area, proclaimed themselves “third way” church on the issue of homosexuality and specifically on the issue of same sex marriage. New Heart Community Church is a Southern Baptist Church and as such they adhere to the Baptist Faith and Message which was last updated in 2000.

The pastor of this church is Danny Cortez who shares both in a message he preached to his church recently and in a letter to the progressive Christian blogger John Shore, why he and New Heart Community Church have made this monumental change in doctrine. He shares in the letter to Mr. Shore that this has been a fifteen year process that culminated last August during a day at the beach in which he realized, “I realized that I no longer believed in the traditional teachings regarding homosexuality.” He also shares in this letter that apparently not too long after this epiphany he shared with his son after hearing a gay affirming song from Mackelmore that he no longer believed homosexuality was wrong. At this point his son shared with him that he was gay. This all occurred before he had shared with his church about his change in doctrine.

When I read of this last week I took the time to watch the hour long message to New Heart Community Church in which Pastor Cortez shared his thinking on this subject. It was interesting to say the least. Pastor Cortez shared how he had a “heart for the marginalized” and that this heart has “continued to grow.” He also shared that in his 15 year ministry at New Heart he has had someone or often times multiple people come to him and confess that they have homosexual attractions.

What he shared next was very illuminating: He shared that this “sin” always felt different than the other sins he dealt with as a pastor. Most sinners that he met with; whether it be an adulterer, drug addict, alcoholic, or thief would for the most part accept what God's word had to say about these sins. For most of his 15 year ministry Pastor Cortez while ministering to those with homosexual attractions would tell them that God's word was clear on this subject and that they must remain celibate. This left him dissatisfied and he said, “I was basically telling them that for the rest of their life they could not fall in love.” He finished this portion of his message with this question: “Why does this commandment seem different and why does it create so much self hate?”

At this point in the message he changed gears in an attempt to find some Scriptural backup for his changing views. He shared that there are only six passages in Scripture that deal with the subject of homosexuality; three in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament. He chose Romans 1:22-32 and the first part of Romans 2 to explain his evolving views on this issue. This was an interesting choice.

He summarizes Romans 1:22-32 as describing what happens when one exchanges the truth of God's Word for a lie. Then in Romans 2 he points out that Paul is pointing at the his Jewish readers and telling them that they are doing the very same things that those he was speaking of in Romans 1 were doing. Pastor Cortez says then that the central message of Romans 1 and 2 is that we are not judge anyone. He says, "The only clear application is so that we can understand our own sinfulness..." All of which is true.

The overriding theme of Romans is that there is no distinction in God's court. We are all (born Jews and born Gentiles) sinners in need of God's grace and mercy. All of us, born Jews and born Gentiles are condemned by the Law and yet all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are justified by faith. He is right in pointing out that we are not to judge because we are indeed all sinners. We are not the judge anyway and we are definitely not qualified to judge because we are sinners. Only Jesus Christ is qualified to judge as He is without sin.

It was at this point that he put aside the Bible and began the process of ignoring the Bible as *Sola Scriptura* and began pulling in other literature to argue his point. I have yet to see an argument for the tolerance of this sin or any other sin that does not at some point divert from Scripture into extra-Biblical texts.

Pastor Cortez references the book [Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Reframing The Churches Debate On Same Sex Relationships](#) by James Brownson. In the book Brownson argues that Romans 1:27 which reads, "**and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error;**" was a reference to the Roman Emperor Caligula. Brownson and by extension Pastor Cortez argue that everyone who was reading that letter in the church at Rome would have understood *who* Paul was referring to. This was not, according to Cortez a statement against homosexual behavior but rather was just a reference to the abominable behavior of an especially vile man.

Let me just say right here that this is a bit of a stretch. First of all Caligula ruled from 37-41A.D. and Paul didn't write the letter to the Romans until 56 A.D. well after Caligula's reign. It takes a very liberal interpretation of the calendar to say that the people who read this letter would have understood that this applied to an Emperor who had reigned 13 years before they read this letter.

From this point Cortez then dropped what in my mind must have been a shock to his congregation when he announced that in addition to Brownson's book he had also delved into homoerotic literature. He went as far to say that he had "immersed myself in it." Then in a classic understatement he said, "that is a different world."

Of all of the things that Cortez mentioned during his message to me this was the one that grieved me the most. Why a pastor would feel the need to immerse themselves in homoerotic literature to justify this argument. This would be akin to one immersing themselves in pornography to better understand pornography. But he did this nonetheless and it would have been interesting to see the reaction on his congregants faces. After making this statement he said, "Our idea of homosexuality is very different from the way it was practiced then." Apparently in Biblical times the homosexual act and lifestyle was much more violent than it is today.

It was at this point that Pastor Cortez began to wind down his message and he made what in my mind was the most revealing statement of all: "My head is hurting from following (the debate) on this." It is exhausting at times but this does not give us the right as pastors to take the path of least resistance.

He ended by going back to his original argument that he has a heart for the marginalized. Pastor Cortez is to be commended for this and after watching Pastor Cortez there is no doubt in my mind that he does indeed have a compassion for the least of these. He comes across as a caring and compassionate man who loves people. He concluded with this statement: "We must look at the fruit" and "the homosexual community is marginalized by the church over and over again." So the fruit of this Biblical teaching is that those who are committing this sin feel marginalized and because of that we are then to ignore Scripture and two thousand years of teaching on this subject?

I don't deny the reality of this and there is no doubt in my mind that there are some under the Christian umbrella who traffic in hate and pass themselves off as "Christian" (see Fred Phelps). I have a strong suspicion that those who do this are not really Christ followers to begin with. The truly redeemed have compassion for the sinner, for the lost and for those who struggle with any sin.

The last statement of Pastor Cortez's message I wrote down in my notes was: "Compassion is what gives clarity in this matter." But what is compassion? Our culture and now much of the church has bought into the lie that love and compassion means that we will tolerate any sin and in fact we will redefine what sin is so no one feels "marginalized."

In John 8:1-11 a woman is dragged by the scribes and the Pharisees to Jesus who had been caught in adultery. They confront Jesus with her and ask Him what is to be done with her, trying of course to trick Him. The Law had one punishment for this sin and that was stoning the adulterous woman to death. Jesus bent down and began writing something in the dirt (what we do not know) and said the following words in verse 7, **"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."** Slowly of course they all drop their stone and leave. Jesus asks the woman, **"Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?"** She answers with **"No one, Lord."** And Jesus said, **"I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."**

Jesus had compassion on this woman but He also called on her and commanded her to **"sin no more."** True compassion means telling the truth to those we love and

sometimes the truth confronts us in our sin. Pastor Cortez and New Heart Community Church (or what's left of it) have made the error of confusing our culture's definition of love and compassion with what they want God's definition to be. They in essence are practicing idolatry because they are creating a God not of the Bible but a god in their image.

Sin is sin, whether it be homosexuality, adultery, theft, or lying. All sin is abhorrent to God which means that He hates sin. He hates it when I tell a lie just as He hates it when one is unfaithful to their marriage vows. No matter how much we justify our sin it doesn't divorce us from the reality that God hates our sin.

I began this piece with Scripture from 2 Chronicles 29:11. Hezekiah was the king of Judah at the time and he was one of the view good kings. He led the people of Judah back to the worship of the one true God. He reestablished worship in the Temple and the keeping of the Passover. In chapter 29 verse 11 he is reminding the priests of the Temple of the deep responsibility that they have.

Pastors in today's culture have just as deep a responsibility although you would never know it from what goes on in many pulpits today. We are to not be **"negligent"** in ministering to God or to His people. As pastors we are to first and foremost stay true to God's word however inconvenient that may become for us. As pastors we must align ourselves with God's word and not the latest trends or the latest redefinitions of sin. A pastor must be compassionate and loving and this at times will mean having to confront people with the truth of God's word.

As am I writing this I am aware that the Southern Baptist Convention has convened in Baltimore Maryland and this issue will no doubt be addressed. My prayer is that New Heart Community Church will understand that we can only stand on God's word and nothing else. My prayer is that they will repent of this and return to full fellowship with the convention. My prayer is that even if they do not return to the truth that Pastor Cortez and what remains of his congregation will continue to be lovingly engaged by those who adhere to the truth. But one thing we all must understand is that there is no "third way." You either believe God's word or you do not.