

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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AS LONG AS IT DOESN'T HARM ANYONE

One of the most prominent moral justifications heard today is that as long as the practice doesn't harm anyone, then it is right and should be allowed. The primary argument this is being used for today is gay marriage, to no one's surprise. However, it carries broader applications, and those applications aren't just about politics.

"The practice is not harming anyone, so you need to let them do what they want." Doesn't that just make sense? How can we not agree with that?

First, the argument from "no harm" makes assumptions not only about what "harm" is or is not, but also about who should or should not perceive something as harmful.

We might notice that when people talk about what doesn't "harm" anyone, they don't really define what they mean. They assume that everyone's on the same page, and proceed to argue from their assumptions. Interestingly, some of the same people will argue against all religion on the basis that they believe religion "harms" people, showing that "harm" is often a matter of perspective.

What does it mean to "harm"? "Harm" means to injure or do damage to something. Something good can harm something bad, and something bad can harm something good. Truth will injure the false, and what's false can damage the cause of truth. The issue shouldn't be so much, "does it cause harm?" but rather, "is it right or wrong?" What we should always be concerned about is doing what is right, and "no harm" isn't to be equated with "right." "Harm" is too fluid of a concept to be anchored to "right" or "good." If what's good harms what's bad, then that's as it should be.

Is there such a thing as universal harmlessness? Is there really a practice that is totally and completely harmless to everyone and everything in all circumstances? When people say that a practice "doesn't harm anyone," are they making some universal statement of

truth? Or are they focusing on a particular circumstance? Are there bigger issues that we ought to think about?

What of something considered harmful to one group or person, but not another? Do we ignore part of the equation in order to push an agenda? Who gets to decide that? Who is the authority on what harms people?

There are different kinds of harm, including physical, emotional, and moral harm. These seem most obvious, but let's also consider the idea that something can be subtly harmful overall because it chips away at and destroys the structural foundation of a society. When it comes to matters like living together apart from marriage, having children apart from marriage, easy divorce, or gay marriage, we are looking at practices that challenge the infrastructure of the family, which in turn harms the structural foundation of our society.

By redefining marriage or family, against both God's revealed will and all conventional wisdom of many thousands of years, we are naive if we think that there is no harm to the structural foundation.

Of course, the worst of all harms is spiritual in nature. Sin is always the real harm, so if something is sinful, as defined by God, then it is absolutely harmful to the ones who practice the sin as well as the surrounding society. We all ought to desire avoiding that.

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

If we take something that is sinful, then argue that it is acceptable because it doesn't cause anyone "harm," then we have misunderstood the true nature both of what is harmful and the consequences of sin. We are no different from those who called good evil or evil good (Isa. 5:20).

Rather than asking whether something is harmful, we need to ask whether something is right. "Right" isn't defined by our own selfish perspectives, but by a Creator who ultimately knows what is most beneficial or harmful to all of us.

Finally, the gospel addresses the situation in that it calls on us to repent of sin while offering forgiveness and reversing the eternal effects of what sin does to us (Acts 3:19). When we deny the harm that sin causes, then we deny the power of the gospel to overturn our sinful condition. This will result in irrevocable and permanent harm to us, and none of us can afford that. This is why we need to diligently teach the truth that will set us free from sin (John 8:31-32). This isn't about taking a political position; it's about reaching a lost world that needs to come home to God.

- Doy Moyer

WHAT IS WRONG WITH “EXCLUSIVE?”

A sad reality in our current political and religious world is that we are being constantly drawn into a condition of shared mediocrity. The main pillar of a communist state is the mandated sharing according to ability, and receiving according to need – the ultimate consequence of which is to remove the incentive to work for what you have, both on the part of the worker, and the “receiver.” Only the extremely naïve refuse to acknowledge the relationship between the two.

Socially and religiously, this goal is accomplished through the denigrating of “exceptionalism.” More and more, we seek to be “like the nations around us,” and find a common ground based on meaningless banalities. Individual achievement and excellence are minimized, and it is no longer politically correct to praise victory and face the reality of defeat (unless it can be done without the winner receiving greater praise than the loser, or the loser feeling the sting of failure).

Borrowing from the political and social “multi-culturalism” which promotes the “advantages” of diversity, the religious goal now is “inter-faith interaction,” and a passivity toward distinctions in doctrine and practice. In other words, in the name of “unity,” anything goes!

BUT:

GOD IS EXCLUSIVE – there is only ONE! — Eph. 4:3-6. And He is not a “generic” god, to be addressed as Allah, Buddha, or some “new age” caricature of Jehovah.

THE BIBLE IS EXCLUSIVE – It is the ONLY source of divine revelation. — 2 Tim 3:16, 17. And it should not be confused with, or relegated to an equal status with other so-called writings. The ONE God says all He wants to say in it, and condemns these counterfeits.

THE CHURCH IS EXCLUSIVE – There is ONLY ONE body! – Eph. 1:22, 23. And it is not intended as an “umbrella” under which many diverse groups serve according to their unique view of truth. It is identified by its relationship to God’s truth – and truth is EXCLUSIVE!

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS EXCLUSIVE – The ONLY life is one where the gate is “strait,” and the way is “narrow.” – Matt 7:13, 14.

AND,

HEAVEN IS EXCLUSIVE — Rev 21:27. “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Me? I don’t work at finding “middle ground” with the world, it will not work! (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

- Aubrey Belue

A Battered Reed and a Smoldering Wick

The prophet Isaiah said of Christ:

"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice." (Isa. 42:1-3).

Matthew quotes that passage in his gospel account (Matt. 12:18-21), where he is indicating that the Lord charged people that He healed to withhold His identity at that time. Included in this prophetic statement are two very interesting images: a battered reed and a smoldering wick. By these, Isaiah depicted physically and spiritually sick people that the Christ would not reject.

Reeds were quite common, easily procured, and used to make many helpful things. A reed that was battered, bruised, bent, or otherwise not in perfect condition was thrown away and very easily replaced. Likewise, a smoldering, smoking, dimly-burning lamp wick, made from flax or linen, was also an item that was discarded and replaced easily when it merely flickered and did not function properly. These two items underscore the gentleness of Christ (“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” – Matt. 11:29).

Jesus, as a loving Redeemer, always encouraging the weak to greater strength, never discouraging, would heal battered and bruised people. Jesus, always patient, always longsuffering, would not extinguish the slightest evidence of a flame, but would fan the spark of dying energy into a stronger and clearer bright flame. He never treated the weak with contempt. What a merciful Savior to the weak, downtrodden, unstable and immature!

Christ died for those with a slow growing seed of faith as well as for those who are strong and mature. Is there a lesson for us in this passage?

- Gary Smalley

A little boy asked his dad, "Dad, what is a "Christian?"

The father replied, "A Christian is a person who loves and obeys God. He loves his friends and neighbors, and even his enemies. He prays often, and blesses God's Holy Name. He is kind and considerate, gentle and holy, and is more interested in going to heaven than in all earthly riches. Now that is a Christian!"

To which the child responded, "Dad, have I ever seen one?"

- > "The Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who is not!"
 - > "Jesus invested His life in you. Have you shown any interest?"
 - > "If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably does not lead anywhere!"
 - > "It is not difficult to make a mountain out of a molehill - just add a little dirt!"
 - > "Some people have yet to learn that they cannot travel in the wrong direction and reach the right destination!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Love and Forgiveness!*" (Matt. 6:14-15); Sunday evening: "*The Voice That Wakes the Dead!*" (John 11:17-45).