

Rom. 14:19
So then let us
follow after
things which
make for
peace, and
things
whereby we
may edify one
another.

John 8:32 And
ye shall
know the
truth and the
truth shall
make you
free.

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A CITY FULL OF IDOLS

by Matt Bassford

As all of us are doubtless aware, we are currently in the middle of Pride Month (*June, ed.*), a celebration of a number of different lifestyles the Bible condemns as sinful. In case we have forgotten, anytime we shop at a chain store, displays and decorations all remind us. I would not be surprised if, in the years to come, Pride Month develops the same kind of national presence as the holiday season.

Many brethren find this spectacle deeply distressing. What are we supposed to do when we see ungodliness being exalted everywhere around us? As always, the word of God gives us the answers we need. In the first century, Christians were a tiny minority in a society that celebrated ungodliness too. Let's consider, then, one Christian's reaction to such display. Let's turn to **Acts 17** to see how Paul conducted himself in Athens, a city full of idols.

First, we see Paul talking to, not just about. Consider his behavior in **Acts 17:16-21**. Note that Paul didn't come to Athens intending to preach at all. He has only traveled to the city after having been driven out of Berea and is there to wait for Silas and Timothy. Interestingly, this meeting never happens. Silas and Timothy only catch up with Paul after he moves on to Corinth.

As far as we can tell, he doesn't stay in Athens for very long. However, even this brief delay bothers him. Athens is an extremely idolatrous city, and he finds the evidence of idolatry distressing. There is a synagogue in Athens, and the Jews there would have been as anti-idol as Paul was. The synagogue is not the only place that Paul visits, however. He also goes to the marketplace and reasons with the idolaters.

In our day, it is easy for us to stay in the synagogue, both real and virtual. It's easy for us to come to church

and complain about how awful Pride Month is to people that we know already agree with us one hundred percent. It's just as easy for us to go on our social-media platform of choice and make the same complaints to Christians and other conservatives all over the country.

However, there are two problems with confining ourselves to what is easy. First, like gossip, it tends to produce self-righteousness in our hearts. The more we condemn somebody else's sin that does not tempt us, the more we begin to believe that we are more righteous because we don't know that temptation. We start sounding like the Pharisee in the parable of **Luke 18**, who thanks God for making him better than the sinners around him. If we are not careful, self-righteousness will lead us to trust in ourselves and not in Jesus.

Second, complaining about sinners to other Christians never saved anybody. We are sneering at people who are drowning in sin without even checking to see if they want to be rescued! Obviously, reaching out to sinners can be hard on the ego. In **Acts 17**, many of the sinners treat Paul with contempt, and different sinners treated Jesus the same way. However, when the value of the soul is so great, who are we to stay silent lest our egos get squished?

Notice, though, that Paul doesn't make his appeal in a contemptuous or perfunctory way. Instead, he seeks common ground. Look at **Acts 17:22-29**. All the way through this sermon, Paul is doing his best to come to Gentile idolaters on their own terms. He praises them for setting up an altar to an unknown god. He quotes their own poets to support his argument. He doesn't call them to repentance until he has gotten buy-in already.

We can and should do the same thing, even in the

context of Pride Month. On one level, Pride Month is about celebrating everyone as valuable and special. You know what? We celebrate that too! The Bible teaches, and I believe, that everyone who is lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, or any other letters out there is precious, infinitely valuable, and loved by God more than we can imagine.

In fact, we can make that argument more strongly than the world can. Pride Month arose because of the horrible way that many of those people were and are treated, often by those who claim to be Christians. Let me add, by the way, that such displays of mockery and contempt are just as evil as the sins they purport to be condemning. Pride Month is an attempt to balance the scales, but the problem is that it offers no better reason to feel good about yourself than what others are saying about you. When the parades are over, then what?

Christianity, by contrast, teaches that everyone is infinitely precious, no matter what others say or do. We are created in the image of God, and Jesus was willing to die to redeem us. This means that every one of those people with pride flags has an intrinsic worth that is greater than the world and everything on it. Pride Month does not and cannot offer an assurance like that. We don't come to them because they are disgusting and need to clean up their act. We come to them because we love and value them simply for existing.

Finally, we must point sinners to Jesus. Look at how Paul concludes his sermon in **Acts 17:29-31**. He has shown that he respects the idolaters of Athens, but they still need to repent, and they need to repent because Jesus has risen from the dead.

This must always be our appeal. People in the world shouldn't become Christians because Christianity uniquely affirms the value of everyone, even though it does. They should become Christians because God has made this Jesus whom they crucified both Lord and Christ.

The Lordship of Jesus, as proven by the resurrection, matters for two reasons. First, it means that whoever we are, we can rely on Him for salvation. As the Hebrews writer says, He saves to the uttermost. It doesn't matter what we've done. We can be as wicked as wicked can be, but His grace is great enough to erase all our sins. When Jesus stands between you and the devil, the devil isn't going to get through!

However, Jesus as Lord doesn't only offer grace. He also demands submission. The day will come when He will judge everyone on earth. This is the great tragedy of Pride Month. All of those people celebrating their sin, for all of their value and their worth, are facing

eternal condemnation. God is not willing for any of them to perish, but all of them will perish unless they repent. If we want them to be saved, we must tell them both that repentance is possible and that it is necessary. The reason for both of these things is Jesus.

The Inner Man

The phrase above is found in **Eph. 3:16** as Paul wanted them, *"to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self..."* He goes on to say that this is how Christ dwells in our hearts, how we are rooted and grounded in love, and how we are able to comprehend Christ's love (**vs. 17-19**).

It begins in the inner man. It is tempting to take verses like, *"It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps"* (**Jer. 10:23**) and misapply them. We should not be governed by our inner man without the Lord. But, if the Lord abides in us, as in the Ephesians passage, then our motives, thoughts, and feelings are what they should be. If they are not what they should be, then the Lord does not abide in us and our religion, at best, has become hypocritical. Consider a few ideas.

- Speaking to the Ephesians – Paul did not want them to walk as the Gentiles walked, describing them as *"being past feeling"* or *"callous"* (**Eph. 4:19**). In Ephesus, there would be those whose conscience was seared (**1 Tim. 4:2**). In Ephesus, the Lord revealed that he knew their works, but they had left their first love (**Rev. 2:1-7**). Our inner man's aim should never be past feeling.

- Speaking to the Philippians – **Ch. 2** begins, *"If there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy..."* (**vs. 1**). The KJ reads, *"If any bowels and mercies"*. What a wonderful picture of the feelings we should have towards each other! In **ch. 1**, we read of those who preached the truth, but not sincerely. To use the **chapter 2** figure, they had a bowel obstruction! Outside, everything was true. Inside? Things weren't pretty. No, it is in our inner man where we develop bowels of mercy as we meditate on things that are good, noble, and lovely (**4:8,9**).

- Phariseeism – Their hypocrisy is so well known yet so often imitated. Their religion was all outward. They did charitable deeds. Their prayers were long. They tithed. They fasted. They did. But they did not do the *"weightier matters of the law"* (**Matt. 23:23**). They were all about the outer, but listen carefully to what Jesus says. *"Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also"* (**vs. 26**). Repeatedly whitewashing tombs never

removes dead men's bones. No, we must begin with what comes first. The inner man. Otherwise, we are hypocrites, just like the Pharisees. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second like it..."* (Mk. 12:30,31).

1 does not equal 2. 1 and 2 are not reversible. Love outwardly (strength) is a manifestation of the inner man's love (heart, soul, and mind). The Pharisees were fake. The Ephesians were becoming fake. The Philippians needed to rekindle their love to not become fake. Let us love sincerely.

John Hines

INCONSISTENCIES EXPOSE ERROR

In its beginning, the Catholic Church taught Lord's Supper communicants should partake of the bread and fruit of the vine. This came to be called "communion under both kinds."

That agrees with passages like **I Corinthians 11:26,28** which reads *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. ... But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."*

Notice that Catholics admit this was their original practice:

Communion under both kinds was the prevailing usage in Apostolic Times. (Catholic Encyclopedia, IV, p.176)
Popes Leo and Gelasius emphatically condemned persons who abstained from the chalice. (Catholic Dictionary, p.202)

But then there was an about face made at the Council of Constance, Session 14, on 6-15-1415: *Condemnation of communion under both kinds ... no priest, under pain of excommunication, may communicate the people under the forms of both bread and wine* (www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum16.htm)

Now I've been told the Catholic Church has **changed again**, and currently allows the laity to drink the fruit of the vine.

How can the Catholic Church be a religious authority on level with Scripture, when they make changes in their teaching and practice? A changing standard is no standard at all!

In "The Faith of Our Fathers" Catholic Cardinal Gibbons wrote: *"If only one instance could be given in which the Church ceased to teach a doctrine of faith which had been previously held, that single instance would be the death blow of her claim to infallibility"* (p.74).

Here is what **Acts 20:7a** says about the frequency with which we should take communion: *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them."*

Notice the Catholics admit they have changed on this issue: *In the beginning Mass was celebrated only once a week, then three or four times, and finally, in the fifth or sixth century, every day.* (Legislation on the Sacraments in the New Code of Canon Law, p.87, Ayrinhac)

Remember, according to Cardinal Gibbons, **change is the "death blow ... to infallibility."**

Pat Donahue

Many believe the Bible teaches us not to point out the sin of false teaching.

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

Obviously the apostle Paul did not agree with this thinking.

We offer either in home studies in person or by way of Correspondence Courses.

Call me, Jim Stauffer at 913-620-0563, Evangelist at the Lenexa church of Christ.

We believe in worshiping and serving the Lord as He has instructed in His word.

Psa. 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

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