

Dear members and friends of St. John,

"I know what you're saying is wrong, Pastor!" exclaimed a woman, many years ago. I responded, "What did I say that was wrong?" She said, "It can't be true. There are so many unmarried people living together in the United States, I know that your statement that they are openly sinning cannot be true!"

This introduces the "trap" that many people fall into: Shouldn't human reason, feelings and emotions provide us with a sound basis for deciding the validity of Scriptures? Yes, we have God's Word. And it's much more than a collection of old stories. We are told that *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"* (2 Tim. 3:16). God is the author of the Bible – all of it. God also warns about removing parts of His Law. Jesus said, *"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished"* (Matt. 5:18). "Iota" and "dot" represent God's Law down to the finest of details in its original language. The Law will remain as the standard that God uses for moral and ethical behavior, up to and including when He comes again to judge the world and make all things new.

Finally, God condemns people who openly sin, in defiance of His Law. We read Jesus' own words from Matthew chapter 18: *"And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire"* (v. 8, 9). Willful sin – knowingly doing what is contrary God's Law – leads to eternal death in hell.

So, getting back to the argument that unmarried people can have sexual relations with each other without sinning – what does the Bible say? God's word is clear: men and women must honor God's institution of marriage if they want to be sexually intimate (see Hebrews 13:4, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 18, Romans 1:24, Matthew 15:19). And homosexual relations are also strictly forbidden (Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Lev. 18:22).

The woman who was arguing that I stated a falsehood, that God will indeed honor two people living together out of wedlock, was using human reason, feelings and emotions to build her case. "When two people really love each other, God knows what's in their hearts!" Feelings and emotions must matter to God! Sorry, but God did not make an exception for "true love." "Just look at all the couples who live together today – and look at all the Christian churches that say that they are fine in doing so!" This sounds reasonable, but false denominations that toss out God's word when it isn't convenient or popular have been around for thousands of years. Scriptures warns of this. From 2 Timothy 4: *"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths"* (v. 3, 4).

What happened to the woman who was arguing with me about cohabitation? She left the Lutheran Church for another denomination that openly defies God word. Now, this woman was, to my

knowledge, not violating the marriage covenant. She was also quite knowledgeable about God's word. But, ultimately, she couldn't accept God's word as written.

This problem was not "new" to our Lord. He understood how reason, feelings and emotions can cloud our pursuit of God's will for our lives. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 18: *"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'"* (vv. 1-4).

Jesus is calling us to trust His word like a little child trusts his mother: The child believes his mother; it is enough that she has said so. True humility is shown when we set aside human reason, feelings and emotions to simply trust in whatever God has said. Humility is a sign that God is working to rule and reign over our hearts and minds. Sinful pride would not allow the woman to simply believe what God wrote. She would not relinquish control of her heart and mind.

This text (and others) lead us to conclude that 'childlike faith' in Jesus Christ is the greatest of faith. No matter how little faith we may have for the moment, we should believe that God provides because He has said so. No matter what sins we have done, we should believe that Jesus' blood blots them out. Why? Because, He has said so. The temptation to alter God's truth, using human reason, feelings and emotions, will always be a struggle for us. When we willingly allow sin to continue in our lives, we are in fact on a path to eternal death. But our Lord faithfully works to lead us to repentance, and a faith that is more 'childlike,' as we remain connected to Him through Word and Sacrament. He leads us to 'put away' the sin that was slowly killing us. May we never set aside the Truth, because of the temptation: "Did God really say..." May we simply trust in Him – because His Word is truth.

Pastor Travis