

Sexuality: The Church's Moment of Testing

Recently the president of Chick-fil-A had the audacity to say out loud and in public that he believes in the biblical model of human sexuality and marriage. He even said (gasp!) that such biblical views influence the culture of his company. Following these outlandish statements, Dan Cathy was then ridiculed by pundits and lambasted by politicians, all outraged at Cathy's bigotry and backwardness. I think Osama bin Laden got a better press than Dan Cathy.

Which all serves to illustrate my point: *The church is at a moment of testing in the area of human sexuality.* We have arrived at a point in our culture where it is increasingly costly and hazardous to be a follower of Christ who seeks to live according to Scripture. If you hold to a biblically faithful definition of marriage and sexual behavior, you are more and more likely to be called an extremist, a bigot, or an enemy of freedom *by the leaders of our society.* Churches are more and more likely to be accused of hate speech, and in some cases penalized, for merely teaching the Scripture on a number of topics. Christians are increasingly demonized and lampooned for believing things that Christians have always believed and practiced. The trends are for this to get worse, not better, and I assure you that no political election is going to change this. The church is at a moment of testing.

Now if we want to fail the test, there are two sure-fire methods. We could *compromise* clear biblical principles because we want to be liked. Nearly all the branches of the "mainline" church are trying this as are some in the so-called "emerging" church. If compromise isn't your cup of tea, then you can *respond in kind* to meanness and ugliness with more meanness and ugliness. Numerous members of the "conservative" church are perfecting this quite well. (I'm thinking of the protesters holding up signs that said, "God hates fags.") Both compromise and responding-in-kind are failures because both fail to follow Christ in accordance with Scripture.

So how do we succeed in our moment of testing? 1 Peter 4:12-19 instructs us well.

1. *Our situation is not unusual.* "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (v12). It is a common experience for those who are serious about following Christ to clash with the prevailing culture around them. It is also a common experience for God's people to experience a refining fire. The purpose of a test is to reveal the facts about the one being tested; it shows the true condition or quality. Our moment of testing is not unusual and it has a good purpose. When it becomes expensive to follow Christ, then we will find out if we really believe all this stuff we've been saying.

2. *The test is an opportunity for renewed joy and hope in Christ.* "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (v13-14). Testing means the true church can shine. Our response to testing can mean revival!

3. *Do not respond in kind or participate in evil.* “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler” (v15). The Devil wants to use the test to warp your thinking, to get you to participate in evil or use the ends to justify the means. He wants you to sin in the face of the test so that what you suffer is the consequence of wrongdoing, not sharing the glory of Jesus.

4. *Remember that all people must give an account to the Lord . . . and the line starts with us!* “For it is time for the judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (v17). The test reminds us that it is not our job to set everyone straight (no pun intended in the current sexual climate). The Lord will do that thoroughly and completely in His time. Our job is to be prepared for our own judgment by a) putting our faith in Christ as the only way of salvation and b) living and proclaiming faithfully in Christ as His redeemed people.

5. *Our test strategy is simple: Trust God and do good.* “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (v19). Submit yourself to the Lord in faith knowing that He is in control and He will be faithful to you. Be countercultural. Look for opportunities to do good to all people, especially those you might perceive as your enemies. Pray for them, do good to them, and rejoice that you get to share in both the sufferings and the glory of Jesus. Share the good news of Christ and the teaching of Scripture with a smile and a tender heart. Be informed and prepared to minister to those who struggle with sin in today’s sexual climate.

Church, this is your test. I’m praying you get an A-plus!