The Clarion* Call

* THE CLEAR CALL OF A BATTLE TRUMPET

Jesus said, "My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27)

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America Defiles God's Word

We have fooled ourselves as a society to think that if we don't hear it, see it, or speak about it, then it just doesn't exist and all is well. The truth is: There is much evil in our world even though we turn our back on it and pretend it's not there. Listen: We actually are condoning it by doing nothing about it.

Look, again, at our text from 2 Timothy 4:2-8:

" 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Sadly, there are Christians who think Jesus said to His disciples:

"Go into all the world, teaching all men to live any way they want, and urging each to find his/her own path to God. Let not any one of you make someone feel inferior or victimized because of their beliefs. Above all, be tolerant. Verily, verily, I say unto you that what you believe and how you live doesn't matter, so long as you are sincere. And if you choose to come to the Father (or Mother if you prefer) through Me, that's okay. Now go forth to live according to whatever feels good to you." And there was much rejoicing!

What Bible translation was that? You won't find that in any passage of scripture. Yet there are plenty of people and preachers who today live as if that's exactly how the Bible reads. It seems that everybody wants to accept everybody. Nobody wants to offend others or be thought of as bigoted or intolerant.

It's tough being true to the gospel in today's world. You want to follow Jesus, you want your family and friends to know Him, but whenever you start talking about the Bible and what's right and wrong, everyone jumps up and calls you a judgmental bigot. And so you keep your mouth shut. Or maybe you're the kind of Christian who just wants to get along. Jesus promoted a life of peace, right? You're wondering why you can't love Jesus and the next guy loves Buddha; or you honor the Lord while others prefer to curse or take His name in vain.

Well, today, I want to encourage you in your Christian walk. If you're feeling paralyzed in your walk with Jesus, if you're fearful of what might happen if people find out what you truly believe, I want to take you to a new place where you will gladly stand up for Jesus no matter what the cost. I want to bring you out of the darkness of political correctness into the light, peace, and freedom of the truth. I want to take you from hypocrisy to consistency, from moral cowardice to moral confidence. I want to show you that it's not just uncomfortable to be a Christian and be friends with the world at the same time—rather, it's impossible! I want to speak out for the Lord—out of love for your friends.

To be clear: Jesus didn't say He was ONE of the ways to get to God. No, He said He was the ONLY way. When it comes to being intolerant, Jesus is the leader of the pack. He will not let you stay on the fence.

Listen: Accepting everything means you believe in nothing. When it comes to right and wrong, sitting on the fence won't get you or the people you love anywhere. Passiveness is not love. Love is getting in people's face and telling them the truth. I believe the scriptures are straightforward. I believe we, too, must be straightforward with people and be clear about all matters in life.

As we look at society today, we see a cultural landscape that has veered further and further from

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any semblance of biblically based morality. The slide into secularism—the idea that humanity can define morality apart from any divine spiritual guidance—has accelerated rapidly before our eyes.

As we consider where the cultures of the Western nations (particularly the English-speaking nations and the democracies of Western Europe) are today, we must consider the words spoken by two prophets who live more than 2,500 years ago.

The prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied not only to ancient Judah but also to nations far off into his future, recorded this prophetic message from God:

"Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people—the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words nor My law, but rejected it" (Jeremiah 6:19).

The prophet Hosea, who prophesied to both ancient and modern Israel, delivered these words from God:

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame" (Hosea 4:6-7).

Consider what exactly God was saying through these prophets:

"They have not heeded My words nor My law."

"You have rejected knowledge."
"You have forgotten the law of your God."

"They sinned against Me."

God was warning Israel (ancient and modern) of a total breakdown in morality from top to bottom. That breakdown was based on a national rejection of the laws of God.

Question: Is America making the same mistakes?

Consider these five biblical principles and laws that are being openly ignored and rejected by our culture today:

1. *"You shall have no other gods before Me"* (Exodus 20:3).

Of course, this is the first of God's Ten Commandments. It is a very basic yet powerful law: Do not put anything—not a statue, not a picture, not your own ideas, not your own pleasures, not your own desires, not anything—before the true God.

In ancient times, God's people continually failed to obey this law. Ancient Israel was surrounded by people who worshipped statues and images of made-up gods. Those "gods" had many different names but they all represented the same thing. They represented human-made affronts to God's basic law to put nothing before Him.

By rejecting God's standards of morality we have, in a sense, placed ourselves in authority over Him. It was a temptation ancient Israel struggled with from the beginning of its nationhood until its fall and captivity. And it was a temptation Israel usually gave in to.

Today, pagan gods aren't the primary challenge to this law (though they are still a problem). The primary challenge to God's command to have "no other gods" is us and our stuff. By rejecting God's standards of morality, we have, in a sense, placed ourselves in authority over Him. We've also placed our materialistic pursuits of pleasure over God and His laws.

We live in a culture characterized by men and women who are *"lovers of themselves, lovers of money ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"* (2 Timothy 3:2-4).

2. *"Do not kill the innocent and righteous"* (Exodus 23:7).

Proverbs 6:16-17 declares that *"hands that shed innocent blood"* are among the seven things that God hates. God hates violence and the taking of human life, especially innocent life. It is an affront to Him because He is the giver of life and made man in His image and likeness (Genesis 9:6). God desires a culture that honors and protects human life.

From movies, TV shows, and video games that glorify violence to the recurring nightmare of mass shootings, the United States is a nation with violence deeply embedded in its culture. Though mass shootings get the most headlines, regular violence on a smaller scale occurs every day.

The practice of abortion also is responsible for the deaths of more than 800,000 innocent babies every year in the U.S. If you total the number of abortions performed in the United States since the 1973 *Roe v Wade* Supreme Court decision, 63-million innocent human lives were denied the right to live due to this practice.

3. *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication … "* (Galatians 5:19).

These two sins are both infractions of God's Seventh Commandment forbidding adultery (Exodus 20:14).

In today's culture, sex outside of marriage, or fornication, is not considered taboo in the slightest. In a poll, 7 in 10 Americans deem sex between unmarried men and women morally acceptable. What makes that statistic even more striking is that more than 70% of Americans identify as some sort of Christian. So identifying as a "Christian" does not necessarily mean that people believe in biblical moral standards.

We need to look at the limits God has placed on sex and

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understand why those limits are the best not only for us but also for our children and society in general. This problem is inseparably linked to the issue of abortion. When you study the issue, you find that 83% of women who get abortions are unmarried and 16% are separated, divorced, or widowed. Married women account for a minuscule number of total abortions. The simple fact is that sex outside of marriage is the root cause of abortion.

It's easy to understand why many religious people try to fight abortion through politics, but restricting abortion will not solve the root of the problem. Abortion is the consequence of this much larger sin that has settled deep into the fabric of our culture—sex outside of marriage.

The real solution to the abortion problem is for people to repent of this and to limit sex to marriage (Hebrews 13:4). The problem of unwanted pregnancies that result in abortion cannot be solved by politics but only by changing the hearts and minds of human beings to see the benefits of God's laws and committing to obeying them.

We need to look at the limits God has placed on sex and understand why those limits are the best not only for us but also for our children and society in general.

4. *"God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"* (Genesis 1:27).

Just a few years ago this basic biblical truth that God created two sexes—male and female—was widely accepted as a fact backed up by basic biology. But within our lifetime, we've witnessed this basic truth being challenged and attacked by those claiming that gender is not binary. A very small segment of society that desires to live outside of the norms of their birth sex has pushed an entire cultural transformation of the meaning of the words sex and gender.

Advocates of the transgender movement hailed the U.S. Supreme Court's June 15, 2020, ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* as a major victory in their fight to redefine sex. The case was centered on a section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits an employer from firing or refusing to hire an individual based on "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." Almost everyone agrees that neither the 1964 U.S. Congress nor President Lyndon Johnson interpreted "sex" to mean anything other than whether a person was biologically male or female.

Regardless of how the words sex and marriage are defined by society today, God's definitions have not changed. But in just under 30 words, Justice Neil Gorsuch, writing the majority opinion, redefined "sex" from the basic meaning it's held for thousands of years:

"We do not hesitate to recognize today a necessary consequence of that legislative choice: An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender defies the law."

So the U.S. Supreme Court now has ruled that "sex" also means one's sexual preference and gender of choice. This ruling came nearly five years after the landmark 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, in which the Supreme Court redefined the word marriage to include unions between two people of the same sex.

Regardless of how the words *sex* and *marriage* are defined by society today, God's definitions, which go all the way back to the first book of the Bible, have not changed:

- Sex: *"Male and female He created them"* (Genesis 1:27).
- Marriage: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24).

5. *"Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth"* (Colossians 3:8).

The Bible provides much guidance on how to govern our minds and tongues. God tells us that we are not to be driven by anger and all that flows from it. Instead, biblical morality teaches us to *"give place to wrath"* (Romans 12:19). In other words, replace anger and wrath with positive, uplifting thoughts.

But we live in a world that seems to be increasingly fueled by anger. Anger is rampant everywhere—in television news, social media, entertainment, politics, social movements, etc.

Perhaps one of the most discouraging things you can do today is wade into the comments section of any news article shared on social media. What you'll often find is comment after comment of unbridled contempt spewed by people against other people. And this anger is not limited to one end of the political spectrum. It exists across the spectrum—from the far left to the far right.

Sin is never solved by angrily multiplying other sins. Tragically, we have seen extreme anger in some U.S. cities through protests that turned violent, destructive, and in some cases, into all-out rioting. Regardless of how legitimate a cause may be, acts of unrestrained anger and violence always lead to more and more suffering and injustice. Sin is never solved by angrily multiplying other sins.

We also see angry and demeaning communication

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displayed by our national leaders. Instead of engaging in respectful debate and attempts to work together for the good of the people, we find name-calling, mocking, insults, and character assassination. And, again, this takes place across all parts of the spectrum. It seems as if the virtues of civility and respect are dead, replaced by venomous anger and hatred.

This is not behavior God approves of regardless of the political cause one claims to represent.

God's standards of conduct in all areas of life remain unchanged and represent a stark contrast to the culture we see around us today:

"Lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Timothy 2:2).

"Speak evil of no one, … be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men" (Titus 3:2).

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

If we wanted to, we could add scores and scores of other examples of our culture's rejection of biblical principles. But the question you may be asking is: What can be done about it?

Ultimately, the solution is simple, yet profoundly vital: repentance. Repentance is recognizing when our ways are wrong, feeling deep remorse, asking for God's forgiveness, and striving to turn around and live the right way. Nothing short of national repentance is needed to change our culture.

But the sad reality is that national repentance rarely occurs. History shows that when a society degrades into moral depravity, it rarely reverses course. The history of ancient Judah is a case in point. Like the northern kingdom of Israel, Judah's history was mostly a downward slide into immorality. They did have two major reforming kings, Josiah and Hezekiah, who tried to lead movements of national repentance from the top down. But both attempts to revive national faithfulness to God were short-lived. Simply put, the downward slide into immorality was too ingrained in the lives of the people to be permanently reversed.

We have likely reached that point in America today—which means national punishment may be the only way to get our attention.

But that doesn't mean YOU have reached that point. The Bible shows that individuals, no matter how wicked and corrupt the society around them might be, can reject the corrupting morals of their culture and live differently.

The apostle Paul quoted these words to the Corinthians, who lived in one of the most morally bankrupt cities in the Roman Empire: *"Come out from among them and be separate"* (2 Corinthians 6:17).

Instead of just going the way of the culture around us, we can come out of it and be spiritually separate, just as:

- Noah came out of his violent pre-Flood world.
- Abram came out of the society of Ur.
- Lot came out of Sodom.
- Daniel remained spiritually separate from the idolatrous and violent Babylon in which he lived.
- Jesus Christ's disciples came out of a *"faithless and perverse generation"* (Matthew 17:17).

The list goes on and on of people who lived in evil cultures but chose to be different.

You can be that person today.

But that's just part of the story. The ultimate good news is that an even bigger change is coming. Jesus Christ will return to this world to save us from destroying ourselves spiritually and physically and to establish an entirely new society and culture based on God's immutable, unchangeable law.

The establishment of His Kingdom on earth will reverse the downward moral slide of our world through the eternal truths of God's law. The prophet Isaiah wrote of this future time: *"Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"* (Isaiah 2:3).

My friends, I believe it is long overdue that we open our ears and our eyes and our mouths to the evil that is so very prevalent in our nation and world. I intend to. How about you?

Let us pray.
O Lord God: Bring, we pray, a revival into every city and town across these United States of America and let it begin with us. Help us to proclaim faithfully the Gospel as revealed in Your Word so that the deaf will hear, the blind will see, and the mute will speak the truth in love. Raise up Christian leaders who will not compromise their integrity and who will resist the temptation to be immoral or disobedient to Your laws. Give them a powerful voice to speak into the lives of the many who walk in darkness. Help them to point people in the right direction so that they can lift the standard of morality far higher than it has been. And, Lord, enable them to lead people into a closer relationship with the Living God so that this country will become, once again, a God-fearing nation. Amen.

This is my message preached on 16 July 2023 from the pulpit of the historic Fort Snelling Memorial Chapel, Minnesota, entitled "Hear-See-Speak No Evil" based on 2 Timothy 4:2-8. It is available on CD and DVD.