

Franklin Graham: Heaven Is Not for Cowards!

Heaven is not for cowards! Recent comments I made while speaking at an event in Washington, D.C., have drawn some controversy. In a challenge to those who are afraid to speak out on moral issues addressed in the Bible, I referenced a chilling passage—a warning from God about the most catastrophic indictment the world will face someday: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:7-8).

Christians cannot ignore parts of God’s Word because they are unpopular or cause division. Our commission is to proclaim Christ and all He stands for. This is what the church’s presence in the world is all about. We cannot sincerely proclaim the truth of God’s love while ignoring what He hates, and God hates sin. His love pours out the remedy for sin that holds mankind in bondage. It is found in His unmerited grace—the gift of salvation. For this reason, the whole gospel must be preached, as demonstrated by the apostle Paul.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed” (Rom. 1:16-17). What immediately follows this bold declaration demonstrates the importance of God’s entire message to the human race.

Paul wrote in connection to the gospel: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them ... so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not

glorify Him as God ... but became futile in their thoughts. ... Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom. 1:18-21, 24-25).

Followers of Jesus Christ, and especially pastors and church leaders, have a responsibility to speak the truth of Scripture, calling sin what it is, and acknowledging that it has always reigned in the hearts of the human race. It is not any worse today than it was "in the beginning." After all, sin brought about the Great Fall and then the Great Flood because "the wickedness of man was great in the earth" (Gen. 6:5). It is not just a debate about abortion or homosexuality; all sin is immorality—and all immorality is evil. In America today we are experiencing an epic drought. It is not just the basic misunderstanding of the Word of God; it is the absence of God's complete Word.

Christians are called to shun acceptance of sin in all forms, not because we are perfect people but as a testimony to the transformation God brings about in a life surrendered to Him, washed clean by the blood of Christ and clothed in His righteousness. We must be people of endurance in the face of criticism or any form of persecution. If we do not exhibit godly courage to stand strong in the faith, we cannot overcome Satan's seducing spirit that grips the world. The Bible says:

"Now the Spirit [of God] expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared. ... If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:1-2, 6).

If we as God's people refuse to speak about sin because it will make others uncomfortable, we are cowards. We are called

to sound the alarm, warning them that God demands obedience to His perfect law, which is designed for the good of the human race. Do not miss the staggering truth that God's law brings about contentment. "The law of the Lord is perfect ... rejoicing the heart" (Ps. 19:7-8). Those who reject this truth reveal that they do not know Him. "Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God. ... His commandments are not burdensome ... and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 3:10, 5:3-4). True faith is what empowers us to speak God's Word and live it before an unbelieving world.

Someone has said: "To sin by silence when they should protest turns people into cowards." The definition of a coward is one who refuses to do the right thing for fear of consequences. This certainly falls short of possessing godly character.

We are soldiers in God's army, and we cannot stand down on biblical issues out of fear of being labeled a homophobe or judge. People make judgments every day. The world's system passes judgments accepted by governments and citizens. But the world considers Christian judgment to be biased, judgmental and intolerant. Christians have only one standard on which to base judgments—it is called the Bible. Without its instruction and authority, we cannot possibly know how to live, so we are told to "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). It does not matter how mankind defines sin; the ironclad Word of God has already laid it bare, and it is unchangeable.

"If anyone ... does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words" (1 Timothy 6:3-4). Twisting God's Word leads to rejecting God's message. We must guard against handling the Word of God in a cowardly fashion but rather preach the entire Word of God because His grace and His judgment flow from His love.

Sin is at the very heart of all that is against Almighty God; it is bowing the knee to worldly living, serving selfish desires so that the things that we used to call sin no longer seem to be sin to us. Some pastors I know say they just want to preach the Gospel and not become targets by speaking out on specific issues that Jesus Himself did not address. Sadly, this reveals a lack of basic Bible knowledge. That would be like suggesting that because Jesus never preached a sermon about jealousy it is not a sin; however, the Bible states clearly that jealousy is a serious sin against God (Gal. 5:20).

Jealousy is the very sin that caused Lucifer to rebel against God. The point is that God's servants cannot preach part of the Gospel. They must preach the entire Word of God, regardless of how it may impact church attendance or trigger unfavorable tweets! Those who say they stand on biblical principles need to understand that persecution will come in some form, even if only losing popularity, the least of all maltreatment.

The Lord Jesus was certainly a target. Yet He willingly went to the cross and suffered for us. He died, was buried, rose from the grave and ascended to Heaven. That was more than 2,000 years ago, and still today He is a target. He is hated. He is rejected. How can we fear rejection by the world when He gave His all for us? But still He extends His salvation to all who will come to Him. He is the One who empowers us to stand strong in the face of persecution for what the world does not affirm. He gives us the power to overcome sin, and that includes cowardice, triggered by ignoring all that God proclaims.

"Many are my persecutors and my enemies, yet I do not turn from Your testimonies. I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, because they do not keep Your word ... The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Ps. 119:157-158, 160).

If God's people do not stand strong, who will? Many in the church have accommodated worldliness (a devotion to temporal interests and pleasures to the neglect of spiritual things) in order to be relevant and increase attendance. This approach has desensitized the conscience.

There was a day when God's messengers was preached against drunkenness. Unfortunately, this is seldom heard from the pulpit anymore; rather, there is widespread acceptance of the intoxicating drug. When preaching falls short of God's whole truth, it becomes easier to overlook or redefine evil behavior. The result is that we get our worlds mixed up. We are not to become like the world; we are to illuminate the world with the light of Christ and distinguish ourselves from the darkness. There are those who minimize this astounding message in an effort to make sinners comfortable in their sin.

This is egregious to Almighty God, and He has prepared a lake of fire for those who reject His truth. In other words, there is grave danger in not preaching, as the apostles did, the whole gospel.

Just as our nation has drifted from the strict interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, so has the church seriously drifted from taking God at His Word. Sin is destructive to people, to families, to nations and to the church. Sinful behavior that is excused and repackaged as personal choice is Satan's greatest deception. His greatest victories today take place within the church by those who remain silent, who are not aware of his divisive presence.

The body of Christ must recognize that we have allowed Satan to distract us with non-essentials. It is time to get back to the basic teaching of God's Word. It is cowardice to excuse sin by claiming we have no right to judge what God has already judged. There is only one personal choice that decides where we spend eternity; if we choose Christ and all He stands for, we gain Heaven; if we deny Christ's Word, we are cowards and

deserve hell.

“Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law: Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults. ... You have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor” (Is. 51:7, 13). We can be fearless when we stand strong on the Word of God because as Joshua proclaimed, “The Lord your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you” (Joshua 23:10).

What are the characteristics of God’s people? Have we become so accustomed to the worldly system that we fear we cannot overcome it? Or do we draw strength from the One who has overcome? Can we stand with the believers at Thessalonica who did not seek comfort and fulfillment but endured hostilities because of God’s Word? Paul wrote to them: “So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer” (2 Thess. 1:4-5).

Who does not remember the cowardice of Peter, the salty fisherman—the sea-walking but fainthearted follower—who denied Jesus Christ? Out of his anguish he overcame his greatest failure, and a bold and mighty faith emerged. He became a soul-winning fisher of men—the disciple who instructed others in serving as effective shepherds of God’s flock (1 Peter 5:2). He wrote: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles [the very Word] of God” (1 Peter 4:11). We must understand that the very Word of God is the Bible.

Let’s overcome cowardice with courage. Let’s be fearless ambassadors of Christ and stand strong for the glory of God our Savior, pulling others from the fire of eternal judgment (Jude 23).

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