

When Christians Use 'Liberty' as a License for the Flesh

I could hear the shock and pain in his voice. He could not believe what he had just seen at a birthday party for a pastor's wife.

How could this be?

I received a text from this friend during my radio show, so I called him as soon as the show was over. What he told me brought tears to my eyes.

Please understand that the man calling me was no Christian prude.

He had lived a worldly life before meeting the Lord, and he knew the party scene well.

And he was no uptight, old-fashioned traditionalist, no fun-killing legalist.

He was simply a lover of Jesus who was mortified by the spirit of the world flooding into the church, and in a million years, he would never have believed that the party he attended was for the wife of a respected pastor.

He told me that the pastor functioned as the DJ, playing 30-40 songs over the night. Not one of the songs was Christian, and some of them were downright profane—meaning full of profanity and even celebrating pot and the like. These were the sounds that filled the room.

At one point, the wife of another leader climbed onto a chair, grabbed the ceiling to brace herself, then began to dance like a stripper.

This was at a party for Christian leaders!

But should we be surprised when we hear reports like this?

After all, to speak against sin today is to be “judgmental.”

To call for holiness is to be “legalistic.”

To live differently than the world is to be “religious.”

Yes, this is the putrid spiritual atmosphere we find ourselves in today.

I don't know this pastor personally, but I do know that he errs on the side of “grace” and “liberty” and prides himself in not being “judgmental.”

And so, as grieved as I was to hear the report, I couldn't say I was shocked, especially since this pastor openly celebrates his love for carnal entertainment.

You see, it's one thing to welcome the worst of sinners into our midst, showing them the love of God, introducing them to Jesus, and being patient with them as we grow.

It's one thing to show mercy to believers who fall, reaching out to them with compassion and gently leading them back to restoration.

It's one thing to preach against legalism, which I define as externally imposed religion, meaning, laws without love, rules without relationship, and standards without a Savior.

And it's one thing to extol God's grace, recognizing that He loves on our good days and our bad days and that our relationship with Jesus is not measured by our latest spiritual accomplishment.

But it's another thing entirely to be polluted by the world in the name of liberty and to exalt the flesh in the name of freedom.

Paul warned about this plainly, writing, “You, brothers, have

been called to liberty. Only do not use liberty to give an opportunity to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

Peter warned about it as well, writing, "As free people, do not use your liberty as a covering for evil, but live as servants of God" (1 Pet. 2:16).

But there's something even worse than abusing the freedom we have in Jesus, which, for the record, is freedom from sin not to sin.

It's the fact that we cannot possibly have intimacy with God's heart and, at the same time, indulge the flesh so freely. Something very deep is lacking in our relationship with God if we can party like the world without shame.

It is impossible to be close to the Father of lights and to love darkness, just as it is impossible to be in a close, intimate relationship with your spouse while living in unrepentant adultery. If you're faithful to the one, you'll hate the other.

Take a moment and bathe yourself in these beautiful words from Paul, then go back to the scene of that party, which my friend could barely convey in words, and ask yourself if the two are compatible:

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon

the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret." (Eph. 5:1-12, ESV).

Do you want to be an imitator of God? I do!

Then let us walk in His life-giving, grace-filled light, loving what is good and hating what is evil. That is the life of a disciple of Jesus, and it is life indeed, life to the full.

But there's one more part to this story, and it's the most heartbreaking part of all: People will come flocking to hear this pastor preach on Sunday, loving his "no condemnation" message, continuing to live in sin and continuing to be comfortable in sin, deceived by this self-deceived leader. They love his message because they love the world.

May we all examine our own lives first, may we pray for this pastor and his family, and may we, as dearly loved children of the Father, "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1, MEV)

(I encourage you not to try to figure out which pastor I'm talking about, as it could easily be one of hundreds, if not thousands. Let's simply pray for him and examine our own lives.)