

Are You Writing Too Many Parking Tickets To Dead People?

Ben Giselbach
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It was a pleasant September day when a Los Angeles Country parking control officer found an illegally parked car on Piru Street. A motorist had wrongfully parked his Cadillac next to the curb on street-sweeping day. The officer walked up to the car, wrote a \$30 parking ticket, and - reaching through the open driver-side window - placed the ticket on the dashboard^[1].

What the officer failed to notice was that the driver was still in the car - dead! The owner was sitting in the front seat with a bullet wound in the head.

And I wonder, **how often do Christians write parking tickets** (metaphorically speaking) **to people who obviously have a much bigger problem?**

How often do we condemn the symptom rather than the actual illness? When we strongly criticize non-Christians for homosexual practice, adultery, drunkenness, drug-use, dishonesty, violence, stealing - do we sometimes forget the underlying problem? **The bigger issue is that they do not know God.**

If the homosexual stopped practicing homosexuality - if the adulterer stopped fornicating - if the drunkard stopped drinking - if the drug-user stopped doing dope - **he/she is just as lost as they were before. If we convince the sinner to simply stop sinning, what have we accomplished? Nothing. We have just written a parking ticket to a dead person.**

Don't take this the wrong way. In no uncertain terms, Christians need to condemn wrong behavior. The idol worshipers, drunkards, homosexuals, and thieves of ancient Corinth were commanded by Christians to stop their sinful behavior - and the Christians were commended by the Holy Spirit for saying such things (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The Real Problem: Exchanging The Glory Of God For Something Else

In the first chapter of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul pictures sin as “exchanging the glory of God” for something else (Rom. 1:23). Sin is “falling short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Ancient man happened to exchange the glory of God for graven images (cf. Rom. 1:23-25), and modern man exchanges the glory of God more contemporary forms of idolatry.

Today we exchange the glory of God for the god of *evolutionary biology, political-correctness, self-gratification, money, materialism, pleasure*, etc. People worship themselves and their own selfish desires. Our culture proudly proclaims, “Image is everything.” America is now a secular nation that has exchanged God’s glory for *something else*.

“Alternative” sexual lifestyles, the apostle Paul says, are a result of this exchange (Rom. 1:26-27). But not just homosexuality; **all sin** (cf. Rom. 1:28-31) is a result of ignoring God’s glory.

Christians, remember this: **Homosexuality** is not the ultimate problem. **Murder** is not the ultimate problem. **Pornography** is not the ultimate problem. **Atheism** is not the ultimate problem. **Racism** is not the ultimate problem. **Lust** is not the ultimate problem. Oh, these are definitely problems - big problems! But they are all a result of one underlying issue: **exchanging the glory of God for something else.**

Those Who Already Know God’s Glory

With this perspective in mind, the apostle Paul distinguishes the sins of non-Christians from the sins of Christians. He writes,

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. **For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”** (1 Cor. 5:9-13, ESV, emp. added)

There is a difference between how we treat the sins of non-Christians and the sins of Christians. The Christian knows the glory of God – and there is no excuse for him/her to return to a sinful lifestyle (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

We should be hurt and offended when fellow Christians support and engage in homosexual actions, drink alcohol recreationally, commit adultery, steal, view pornography, and lie. **They know better.** We do not tolerate sin in a Christian’s life, and we lovingly teach and convince them to repent of that sin (Jude 22-23). Sin is not only deadly to the Christian, but it is also poisonous to the church (1 Cor. 5:6).

But when we find a non-Christian who guilty of homosexuality, greed, fornication, dishonesty, drunkenness, etc., we do not need to merely write them a parking ticket. We need to patiently teach them about the glory of God. We need to teach them about the authority of His Word. We need to teach them about Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for sin. And we need to teach them how to be changed by God’s grace – namely by repenting and being baptized (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). Then, not only will they stop sinning, but they will learn to “walk in the light” of Jesus (1 John 1:7).

Conclusion

Why should a homosexual stop practicing homosexuality? Why should a drunkard stop drinking? Why should an adulterer stop committing adultery? Why should a liar stop lying? There is no reason – except for the glory of God.

It is a shame that many in our secular, post-modern society see the church of Christ for what it is *against*, rather than what it is *for*. In reality, we simply want to glorify God. We are all about Jesus. Our opposition to sin is a result of our underlying love. In a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to Christians, we can no longer afford to be

lazy in how we distinguish sin in the Christian life from sin in the non-Christian's life. The non-Christian simply does not know any better, and we must diagnose the real issue before treating the symptom.

Let's stop writing parking tickets, and start showing the world Jesus and His New Testament. Not only will people to stop sinning, but they will repent and turn to God.

Your comments are welcome and encouraged, even if they are in disagreement. However, please keep your comments relevant to the article. For my full comment policy, [click here](#).

Endnotes

[1] "Parking-Ticket Writer Overlooks Body of Evidence." Los Angeles Times. 12 Sept 1992. <http://articles.latimes.com/1992-09-12/news/mn-253_1_parking-officer>. Accessed 7 May 2015.