

The Gospel

The Heart of

Transgression

Anthropology

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We have a need to be accepted.

In June, 2006, while attending a White House staff function in the Treaty Room of the Old Executive Building, I quickly observed in a group of some 100 people that I knew only one person, my friend. He was the reason for the event and busy greeting his guests. For a while I was able to meet and make small talk with a few. Some worked in White House Legislative Affairs, others were speechwriters for the president and some had moved into the lobbying side of Washington. After awhile it became evident that everyone else knew others and engaged in lengthy conversations. All I could do was stand there alone watching the interaction of others. It felt like attending the junior high school dance without a partner or friends, standing alone, listening to the band. I would have felt more comfortable knowing others and feeling accepted. Acceptance is something I desire.

The real question, however, is not my acceptance by others, but by God.

That desire for acceptance by others should pale in comparison to my longing

to be received by God. At the heart of the gospel is the issue that I am unacceptable to Him. Such a truth is hard to face. Yet there is no need for the gospel if I am, on my own, right with God.

What exactly is it that makes me unacceptable to God?

Jesus addressed the issue of acceptance as He addressed the concerns of religious leaders about cleanliness.

Mark 7:14-23

“ 14Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean'.”¹

17After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18‘Are you so dull?’ he asked. ‘Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

20He went on: ‘What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 21For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'.”

The Jewish establishment in Christ's day lived by a system of traditions that, although appearing to be supportive of the truth of Scripture, were not. There was concern about ceremonial washing. If a Jew had been around others considered unclean (such as Gentiles) at the market place, he was required to wash by sprinkling water on his hands in a manner prescribed to make him ceremonially clean. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were offended that Christ's disciples did not observe this tradition. They, however, were the ones found to be unacceptable. Christ's words in response were very direct and forceful:

“... you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.”

He then addressed the real issue:

“14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.
15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean'.”

It is our lack of cleanness that makes us unacceptable to God. However the issue is not what we eat or do outwardly that is the problem. If we are to understand what makes us unacceptable to God, then we need to look inside.

Consider the view of Christ:

No longer wonder whether or not you are unacceptable

In a sense Christ is in agreement with the Scribes and Pharisees. They find the disciples unacceptable, and so does He. The difference is that the Jewish leaders don't find themselves to be unacceptable. The real question is what makes a person offensive. These men have distorted the truth. They have believed the lie that filth comes from outside--from other people or circumstances or environment. They believe that they have come up with a system that will enable them to deal effectively with their sin. Christ corrects the misunderstanding. The filth comes from inside. One cannot escape it.

As a boy growing up in the family of a plumber, I found myself installing and cleaning out sewer pipes. Sometimes my Saturday job was to pump out the septic tank of our home. I would not call it a pleasant job. Everything put down the sink or flushed down the toilet was in there. Christ helps us to look at the septic tank of each of our lives. It is properly called the “καρδιασ,” the heart, or the inner man. He does not leave it up to our imaginations to figure out what is found in the heart of each citizen of the world.

“20 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.'

21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts,....”

Sexual immorality - what in our world today is used as an expression of affection or love between two unmarried people that develops into a sexual

relationship and is called fornication, from the Greek “porneiai.” The word here in Mark covers a wide range of sinful activities that would include rape, lust, and pornography. Any deviation from the biblical definition of marriage, a union between one man and woman is understood by Christ to be sexual immorality. The pressure today to accept all forms of sexual relationships is significant.

On June 26, 2006, the Washington Post published an article entitled, “After 25 Years, Gay Men’s Chorus Affirms Its Name.” Covering the development of the Washington gay choral group, Post staff writer Adriane Quinlan noted that the group performed such pieces as “Til There Was You,” from “The Music Man,” “Will He Like Me?” and a spiritual, “There’s a Man Goin’ Round,” commemorating the 85 members who have died of AIDS. Later in the article the director was quoted: “ Artistic Director Jeff Buhrman made clear that the chorus, whose official mission is to sing and ‘to affirm the place of the gay people in society,’ still has far to go in promoting social acceptance.”

The concert and article that followed express what many in the world would like to see take place--full acceptance of gay and lesbian life styles.

The debate often centers on personal opinion that has been shaped by any number of factors. The Scriptures that reveal the mind of God are for many unacceptable, not only on this issue, but many others. For a large segment of the world’s citizens, one’s thoughts and actions are not to be scrutinized by anyone.

Even though many would say that Christ was a great teacher, few are interested in His discerning acceptance. He is just another voice that today seems a bit antiquated.

Theft - taking what does not belong to you. This can be accomplished in many creative ways. For some it might be shoplifting or loafing on the job; intentionally withholding taxes; or abusing one’s government position as a public servant responsible for its money; or, withholding from God what is due Him.

Murder - premeditated taking of the life of another. This can take place in one’s heart as hate works itself out. It also takes place when a mother submits herself to an abortion.

Adultery - violation of the marriage bond. This can take place when there are lustful thoughts or the actual act of falling into a physical or emotional relationship with one who is not your spouse.

Greed – uncontentedly coveting what others have. This shows itself in many forms. We seem to be always looking at the world and attracted by what is not ours. The marketplace is set up in such a way as to cause us to seek to own what we do not have and don’t necessarily need. The concept of being content is foreign to us. So much of our unhappiness is centered on the uncontrollable inner desire to have what others own.

Malice - wicked acts against others that would include the following:

deceit - Giving the appearance that one thing is true when it is not; creating a snare. In a sense this is part of self-preservation. People do not deceive except to further themselves. Yet they never like being the recipient of a lie.

lewdness - The lack of sexual self-control.

envy - Jealousy of what others have. This may take the form of another's possessions, such as home, car, spouse or looks. It may include position in the workplace or reputation. Jealousy is well-established in the heart.

slander- Blasphemy, defamation of character; speaking about another with the intent of harming his or her character or motives. Sometimes this is called "character assassination." This offense is common in a community such as Washington. The political tool is often used to achieve the furthering of one's own position.

arrogance - Acting as though you are better or greater than others. It often shows itself in conversation or speech. The prideful person will speak of how much superior he (and everything associated with him) is.

folly - A life oriented to all the above.

Our hearts are swollen with folly. The person who sees his or her heart for what it is, and for the offense that it causes, will feel the need to turn to the Savior. We cannot rid ourselves of such desires and habits.

So what do we do?

The Heart Uncontaminated

The passage presents a contrast in the two forms of dealing with the contaminated heart.

Scribes and Pharisees

The Jews dealt with evil by instituting a system. They focused not upon the heart, but upon being outwardly clean. Second, they developed a system that addressed their defiled lives, which Christ refers to as "traditions." In doing so they belittled sin. They reduced it to something that they could address and resolve. The system did not work. It was a weak self-remedy.

Christ's view of this is that it is nothing more than hypocrisy, deception and vain worship. In fact, it is trading truth for a lie and living one's life based upon the lie. These men seemed to believe that they could do what only God can do. There are many ways that we deal with sin. If we are honest, we are not much different than the Jews of Christ's day.

Christ

Christ makes a number of points that need to be considered. First He instructs those who are with Him to be attentive to what He says: "v 14, Listen to me." Accept His word as truth and His assessment of your life and heart. That was a tall order then, and still is today. Be depressed and grieve. Why act like you are something you are not?

In Matthew 8:1 we are told of a man who knew all too well that he was in need.

“When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.

2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy." -- Matthew 8:1

The consequences of seeing one's sin and turning to Jesus are very different than turning to a self-remedy. There is no one who can deal with the problems of the heart filled with every form of wickedness and deception except the Savior.

If Christ is working in a person's life, the following will be true: He will see his heart for what it is. Second, he will be despairing and hopeless, since there is nothing he can do. And last of all he will find himself drawn to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Matt 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Heb 9:13 "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean

sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

There is one Savior--that is Jesus Christ. He lives today and will receive all who turn to Him in repentance and faith. There is nothing but joy and peace to those who experience His embrace of love extended to one who is found unacceptable.

-Reflections -

1. Do you believe that Christ's evaluation of the heart is relevant for today? To what extent would the world agree with Christ?

2. What are the common means of addressing the condition of the heart?

3. What are the most prominent expressions or displays of the heart in Washington?

4. Does government deal with outward or heart issues? Is this important?