



Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

The Whole Purpose of God

When I was younger, I worked in a grocery store deli. Then, as now, we made sandwiches to order for customers. Each sandwich was supposed to include a certain type of meat and cheese, and had a certain code to key in and print the correct price sticker.

One day, we were surprised to discover that a popular and friendly coworker had been threatened with arrest and fired! Our manager was happy to pass along the cautionary details of the story.

That morning, his friend had come in to order a sandwich. As the employee assembled the sandwich, the customer kept goading him on. “Come on, put a little more on there.” “Gimmie an extra layer of pepperoni.” “I like more cheese.” And since they were friends, he was happy to heap up everything, and send him on his way with a wink.

But when the customer checked out, a suspicious cashier hefted the massive sandwich, and called a manager to check the price. The customer was allowed to pay and leave with his sandwich, but the manager questioned the employee, and when he found out his generosity, accused him of theft!

Lake Wales
Church of Christ
463 N. Buck Moore Rd.
Lake Wales, FL 33898
www.lakewalescoc.com
(863) 676-4114

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While the young employee hadn't really thought about it, he had no authority to break the policies of his employer and give his friend a quintuple-decker sandwich, at least not without weighing out the extra meat and cheese and charging him for it. He was just trying to please someone he liked, but ended up losing his job!

Paul said, as he bid farewell to the Ephesians,

I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men.
For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of
God (Acts 20:26–27).

One of the most challenging moments in the life of any preacher, or really any concerned Christian, is having to speak the truth in love to a person who is walking contrary to God's word. It feels easier to simply avoid the subject. Or, worse, to rationalize that maybe it's not such a big deal after all, and that maybe God won't judge when it comes to such uncomfortable moral issues. Living in fornication or homosexuality? Let's just smile and not talk about it. If I mention modesty, might it not offend a few families? Let's just push that to the back burner.

Paul faced that challenge too. But he realized that, as a steward of God's word, he had no right to ignore any part of God's will for man, no right to hide it, no right to dismiss it, no right to declare it unimportant. We who speak God's word are the point of contact for the sinner who hears the gospel—the clerk behind the counter facing the customer—but we must be faithful in communicating the full doctrine of God without cutting corners or playing favorites. If not, we give them less than the soul-saving message of Christ. Even more, Ezekiel 33:1–9 warns that we then share in the guilt when they lose their soul!

Does a prison guard have the authority to let a prisoner go free before his sentence is complete? Maybe, as he gets to know the prisoner, he likes his personality, and he even becomes absolutely convinced that he does not deserve to be behind bars. And, after all, the prison guard carries on his belt the very keys that open the doors! But he does not

have the authority to change the sentence that has been handed down by a higher power. He must use the keys in accordance with the governor's rules. In fact, if the officer decided to release the prisoner on his own, he would soon find himself behind bars!

Does a kindly motorist have the authority to stop his car and wave opposing traffic through a red light? No, and the cop who caught someone running the red light would not likely accept the excuse that another driver told him it was ok.

Can a progressively-minded husband give his wife permission to sleep around? As long as it's okay with him, it should be ok, right? No! Because there is no person, no elder, no preacher, who can give another person permission to commit sin. It's true that oftentimes there are consequences of sin that hurt the people around us. But ultimately, all sin is committed against God (Psalm 51:4). Sin is an outrage against God's law, first and foremost. We can waive our right to be upset about another person's sin, but this does not change the nature of the sin, nor the need to get right with God. Your drug use may not bother me, but it bothers God. Your chronic tardiness may not bother me, but it bothers God. Your language may not bother me, but it bothers God.

As God said to Moses,

Stand here by Me, that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I give them to possess. So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you (Deut. 5:31–33).

Not even Moses had the right to soften God's commandments. God charged him to record them faithfully, communicate them faithfully, and observe them faithfully, deviating from them in no direction—not to the right, and not to the left.

There may have been some who responded poorly to Paul's preaching and Moses' commandments, but at least they discharged their duty faithfully to declare the whole purpose of God. Paul spent a long time revealing the wonderfully good news of the gospel. But God's word carries some negatives too, and Paul declared God's "whole purpose."

Here are two more passages, for emphasis,

You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you (Deut. 4:2).

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18–19).

Sometimes I look at certain aspects of God's message, and I consider certain people whom I personally like, and get upset that God's message demands repentance. But, I know that I must rearrange my own thinking, and remember that God's words are the words of eternal life. Rather than thinking of the gospel message as a horrible burden, I must think of it as that which provides fellowship with God! The "whole purpose" of God is often only half-preached. Let us confess that the "whole purpose" of God, both positives and negatives, is God's gracious word that brings eternal life.

God says clearly that "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9–11) and I do no one any favors to hide this fact! Let's not edit God's word to suit our prejudices or concerns. Let's faithfully declare "the whole purpose of God." —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

"A happy family is but an earlier heaven."

—*John Bowring*