

Facts vs. Feelings: Does God Care if His Laws Offend Us? (Mk 1:15)

Sunday Morning – August 18, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church](#), Olympia, WA

INTRODUCTION:

- In this series about sexual and gender confusion:
 - o (1) we've talked about what the Bible and culture say about self-identity
 - o (2) now, we'll see what the Bible and culture say about facts vs. feelings
- Matthew Vines says this about the "traditional" interpretation of the Bible's passages about homosexuality:
 - o "Jesus's test is simple: If something bears bad fruit, it cannot be a good tree. And if something bears good fruit, it cannot be a bad tree."¹
- Vines got this from an out-of-context citation from Jesus (Mt 7:15-20)
 - o He calls for an "experience-based" way to interpret the Scripture, and supports it with other out-of-context citations and bad examples from history
- Vines is basically saying: "if it makes me feel bad, it's wrong!"
 - o (1) this is a kindergarten way of thinking
 - o (2) this is a childish way of thinking
 - o (3) this is an immature way of thinking
 - o (4) this a very narcissistic, self-absorbed way of looking at the world and at yourself
 - o (5) this is an un-Christian way of thinking
- This sermon is not about tone, but about facts
 - o Vines isn't talking about tone, and neither am I
 - o He's talking about how to weigh truth = feelings-based
- The Gospel is a counter-cultural call to submit to the Lord of all creation:
 - o (1) if you admit your sin,
 - o (2) He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin,
 - o (3) and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness
- But, as it is:
 - o (1) you are unrighteous
 - o (2) we are unrighteous
 - o (3) all of us are unrighteous
- The only way to be made righteous is to pull a U-turn and come to God – and that means we have to tell people something they don't want to hear:

¹ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 14.

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- (1) “You’re going the wrong way!”
- (2) “You’re wrong!”
- (3) “You’re making a mistake!”
- (4) “You’re going to damn yourself to hell unless you pull that U-turn!”
- To sand the sharp edges off this message so you’re left with a syrupy Italian soda of a message is not the answer
- But, Matthew Vines’ approach is the dominant way Western society, particularly younger people, think about themselves – especially regarding sexuality and gender confusion (which is what this sermon is aiming at)

TEXT:

- Answer: no, God doesn’t care about your feelings
 - (1) God cares about facts
 - (2) God also cares about you and me and people all over this world, which is why He provided a way for us to be saved from ourselves
 - (3) the set of facts that comprise the Good News are going to hurt your feelings
 - (4) the implications of the Good News are also going to hurt your feelings
 - (5) but, ironically, God commissions the church and the people within it, to push this message out to the culture because He cares about you
 - (6) God tells us the truth about ourselves because He cares – He’s staging an intervention
- But:
 - (1) why does our culture elevate feelings over facts?
 - (2) why is this “if it hurts my feelings, it’s wrong” attitude so common?
- I’ll suggest three reasons, then we’ll see what the Scriptures say

Reason #1: a wrong view of the Gospel

- I think I’m on safe ground when I generalize and say that unbelievers or revisionists within apostate churches and denominations think religion is supposed to accomplish three things:
 - (1) teach us to be nice and kind to each other
 - (2) teach us to feel good about ourselves the way we are

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- (3) teach us that God is up there and is interested in us
- Christian Smith and MTD's tenets (ca. 2005):²
 - (1) A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth
 - (2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
 - (3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
 - (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
 - (5) Good people go to heaven when they die.
- The teenagers Smith surveyed are in their early 30s now – and things aren't any better!
 - (1) This isn't a Christian message (no sin, no separation, no atonement, no love, no grace, no mercy, no forgiveness, no redemption, no adoption, no demands and obligations)
 - (2) It's a generic, bland kind of narcissistic moralism with God playing Mr. Rogers
- To stand in the gap and declare:
 - (1) you are a sinner
 - (2) you are separated from God
 - (3) your crimes need atonement
 - (4) you need the love the Father has shown through Jesus Christ
 - (5) you need grace
 - (6) you need mercy
 - (7) God offers forgiveness that you need
 - (8) God offers freedom from spiritual slavery
 - (9) God offers to adopt you into His family
 - (10) and you can have it ... **if you make a U-turn, admit, believe and confess Jesus**
- ... is **not** something that fits this MTD mold
 - (1) it's not self-centered; it's Christ-centered

² See Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: OUP, 2005). See also the article by Albert Mohler, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—the New American Religion." Published 11 April 2005 at AlbertMohler.com. Retrieved from <https://albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2/>.

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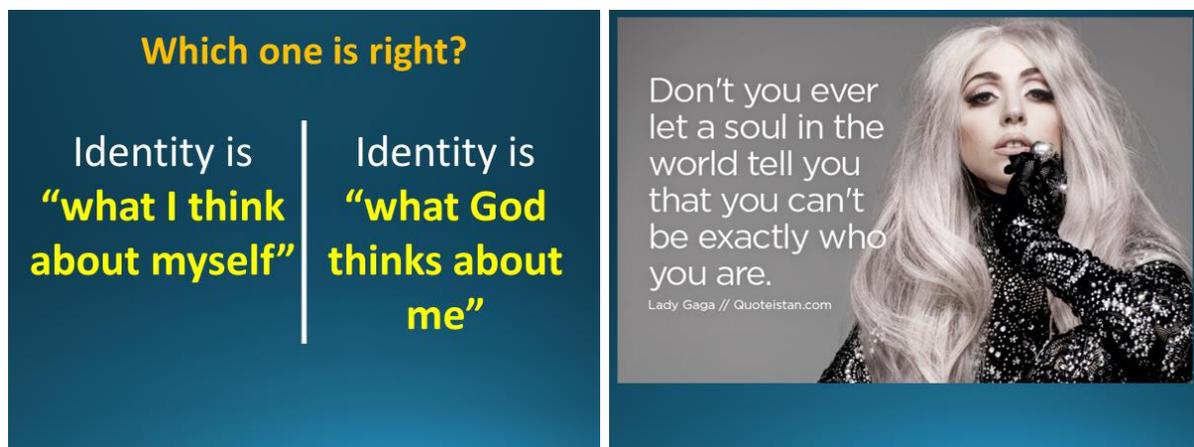
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- (2) it's not about moralism; it's about Christ's perfection and your total imperfections
- (3) it's not generically deistic; it's about Yahweh, who offers a covenant relationship with obligations and expectations
- The first reason why society has this feelings-based approach is because of a wrong view of what the Gospel is for

Reason #2: a wrong view of self-identity

- When you tell someone the Gospel, and when they really understand its implications, you're taking a sledgehammer to their worldview, to their self-centered idea of who they are
- This was why I spent a whole sermon preaching about "identity" last month:



- (1) identity is what you and others think about you:
 - an internal self-conception that exists in your mind
 - informed by our culture, the various roles³ we play in life, and character attributes or habits (good or bad)
 - it's not real; it's based on what you think about yourself, and what you think *other people* think about you

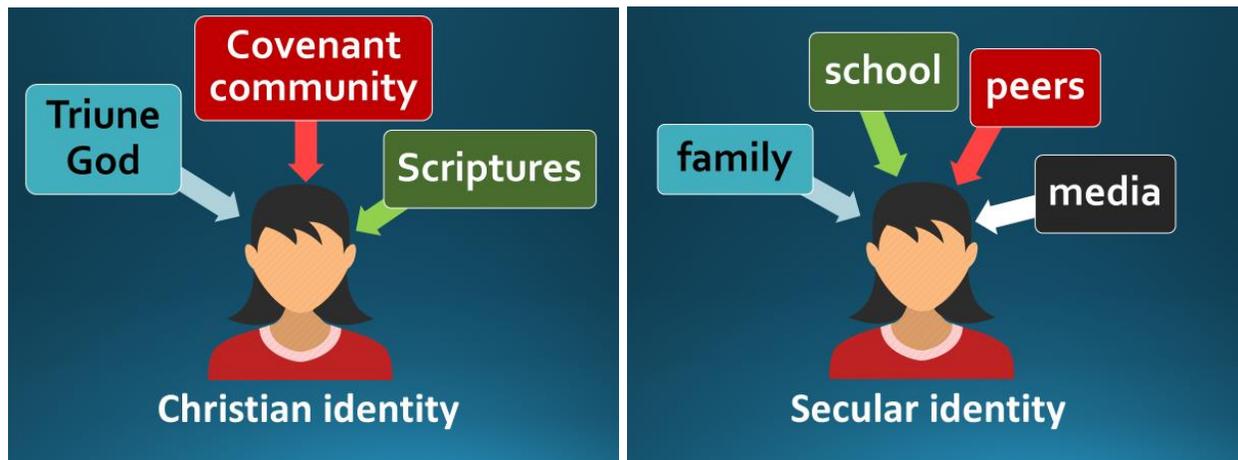
³ Kerry Ferris and Jill Stein (*The Real World: An Introduction to Sociology*, 6th ed. [New York: W.W. Norton, 2018]) use the word "status" here to mean "a position in a social hierarchy that carries a particular set of expectations" (115), which comports with *OED* "status, n," 3a. Because I use "status" in a different sense, I'll use the word "role" to get the same point across.

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- **EX:** Lady Gaga says “Don't you ever let a soul in the world tell you that you can't be exactly who you are.”
- **(2)** identity is a status;⁴ as “what does God think about me?”
 - your identity comes from something outside of you
 - it's a state or condition that's given to you
 - and it's not in your mind; it's a **real, concrete thing**
 - **EX:** you're either a child of God or a child of Satan (1 Jn 3:10)



- This looks very cut and dried, but too many Christians are buying into the secular identity categories – because the Christian agents of socialization aren't significant in their lives
 - **(1)** either the Christian community isn't maintaining a counter-cultural call to its members
 - **(2)** or Christians aren't connected with a covenant community
 - **(3)** or, both

⁴ Sociologists refer to this position as “religious essentialism.” It's the idea that identity is a concrete thing, an objective status (see *OED*, s.v. “essence, n.” 2a); “[t]he social world might impact upon it and shape it, but (it is generally assumed) it does not make it,” (Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. [Malden: Polity Press, 2014], 15). This is the Christian perspective; one shared by many other religious communities, too.

Lawler explained, “Essentialism has a long intellectual legacy in the West, such that it could be said to structure the ‘common sense’ of identity. It posits identity – or some part of identity – as stemming from some aspect of the person's nature rather than from social relations. That is, identity is understood as an essence. In this context, an essence refers to something fundamental and integral to the person, which is not alterable (it is not possible to ‘be’ contrary to one's essence) and is held to persist throughout time and despite other social changes. As I noted above, this essence may be understood either as coming from some aspect of the body (biological essentialism) or the mind (psychological essentialism) or as existing in a ‘soul’ (religious essentialism). Whatever the form, an essence of identity is understood as being ‘internal’ and as divided from the ‘external’ world of others (the social world),” (*Identity*, 17-18).

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- When you push a message that takes a sledgehammer to a person's selfish sense of self-identity, they get angry
 - o The sexual and gender confusion we see is an example – their sin is their identity = attacking “who they are”
- People get angry at the Gospel because it attacks their self-identity; and God intends it to do just that!

Reason #3: an evil worldview

- Our culture is consumed with sexual rebellion, gender confusion, and death
 - o These issues, homosexuality, transgenderism and abortion, are the sacraments of modern Western society
 - o They're the elements of the secular Lord's Supper
- To deny them:
 - o (1) to push back against them,
 - o (2) to stand in the gap and say to your friends, family members and the people in your life,
 - *“this is wrong, and you're wrong,*
 - *in fact, you're a criminal in God's eyes!*
 - *but even so, He made a way to forgive you and adopt you into His family ...”*
 - o (3) is to be a cultural heretic
 - You've gone beyond the bounds of secular orthodoxy, and you will be cast out into the wilderness as a heretic
- As our culture continues to shed all the moral restraints the Christian worldview used to put on it, the cries of outrage against the Gospel (“hurt,” “triggered,” bigoted,” etc.) will only grow louder
- So, these are the three reason why our culture takes a “if it hurts my feelings, it must be bad” approach:
 - o (1) a wrong view of what the Gospel is about
 - o (2) a wrong view about self-identity
 - o (3) an evil worldview

What the Bible says about facts and feelings

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- The Gospel is a call to shift your self-identity from narcissism to Jesus Christ
 - **1 Cor 6:9-11:** Or do you not know that **the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**
 - Unrighteous = identity umbrella with many flavors
 - Salvation = status change (“washed ... sanctified ... justified”)
- I’m going to read several passages from the Gospels and the Book of Acts, and I want you to judge for yourselves whether God is concerned more with telling you the truth about yourself and the Gospel, or with your hurt feelings:
 - **(1) Mark 1:14-15:** *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.**”*
 - Repent = turn back (“confess and forsake,” Prov 28:13)
 - Believe = the Good News
 - Did Jesus worry about hurting feelings? What if He had?
 - “Born again” = spiritually dead
 - **(2) Luke 24:45-48:** *“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that **repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.**”*
 - Repentance necessary for forgiveness
 - Based on the facts of the Gospel
 - Witnesses = heralds
 - Did Jesus worry about hurt feelings? What if He had?
 - **(3) Acts 2:37-40:** *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “**Brothers, what shall we do?**” And Peter said to them, “**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your***

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children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

- Heard what? = the Gospel
 - Repent for what? ... for the forgiveness of sins
 - Save yourselves ...
 - What would have happened if Peter had been afraid to hurt their feelings?
- **(4) Acts 3:19-21, 26:** *“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago ... God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”*
- Repent = sins blotted out
 - Jesus came to turn you from your wickedness
 - Did Peter worry about hurting feelings? What if he had?
- **(5) Timothy 2:24-26:** *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*
- Repentance = turning back = escape from the devil

God judges you

- The Gospel is a counter-cultural message that commits the greatest heresy of all = it makes absolute truth claims and judges your behavior and your heart
 - **(1)** God judges you

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- He is judging you right now
- He'll judge you on judgment day
- (2) This means the Gospel of Jesus Christ also judges you:
 - It tells you you're wrong
 - It tells you you're going the wrong way
 - It tells you you're killing yourself
 - It calls you to turn around and save yourself from yourself
- (3) But, it doesn't judge you with a sneer, a curled lip or a cold shoulder:
 - It offers hope through Jesus Christ our Lord
 - It offers peace through Jesus Christ
 - It offers forgiveness through Jesus Christ
 - It offers reconciliation through Jesus Christ
 - It offers freedom through Jesus Christ
 - It judges you, then shows you the way out with love and compassion
- Ironically, the only way you'll fulfill your role as one of God's creatures ("be all you can be") is to:
 - (1) deny yourself by admitting your crimes,
 - (2) believe in Christ's work and His message,
 - (3) and choose to trust and obey that message
- What does this have to do with the homosexuality? What does it have to do with transgenderism? What does it have to do with the sexual revolution that's captured our culture?
 - It means you have to tell the truth
 - I'm not talking about *tone*; anybody who's married knows all about *tone* and how important it is
 - Evangelicals have a lot of work to do about the tone they use to discuss sexual and gender confusion – and a lot to repent for, too
- But, Matthew Vines and the culture he represents aren't talking about tone; they're literally saying, "if something hurts my feelings, it's bad!"
 - The very moment you buy into this mindset, you're finished as an ambassador for Jesus Christ

CONCLUSION

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- You should leave here today knowing this:
 - (1) The Gospel judges you, and calls you to deny yourself and submit to Christ as Lord and King – period
 - (2) A Christian’s job is to represent that message faithfully, winsomely, and fervently
 - (3) Christ is building His church, and our culture’s reaction isn’t a surprise to Him
 - (4) Stay faithful, and realize that you’re not alone – the church has been in this position before, and it will be again
 - (5) God tells us the truth about ourselves because He loves us
- Christ is the answer, and His Good News is the only hope for you *and* your neighbor:
 - (1) admit your crimes
 - (2) believe in Him and His message, and
 - (3) choose to trust and obey that message today
 - *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel,”* (Mk 1:15)

PASTORAL PRAYER

- Lord:
 - We pray you’d allow us to not look for favor from our culture, for applause from the world, or for approval from the moral revolutionaries who set the terms of the discourse in the public square in our country today
 - Help us to remember that your Good News isn’t a political movement built on public opinion or by giving in to the values of this corrupted world
 - Help us to remember that the very heart of the Gospel, “repent and believe,” is a counter-cultural call to confession of sins, forsaking of a terrorist mindset against you, and submission to your eternal Son Jesus Christ, our Lord
 - Help us to not let a right desire for a winsome tone degenerate to the wish-washy, blandness of feel-good moralism – which is another Gospel

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- Help us to realize, deep within our hearts and minds, that the Gospel can't be "good news" until people understand the "bad news," first
 - Give us, we pray, the boldness to speak truth to our neighbors, friends and co-workers as we have opportunity – especially about sexual and gender confusion
 - Don't let us shrink back, like frightened turtles, and tuck into the shells of our covenant communities like so many frightened kittens
 - Work in our hearts and minds, and let the prayer of the first disciples be our own; that you would look upon the threats and condemnation of our society against the truth of the Gospel, and grant that we your servants would continue to speak your word with all boldness⁵
- We ask this in the name of your eternal Son, Jesus Christ
 - Amen.

⁵ Acts 4:29.