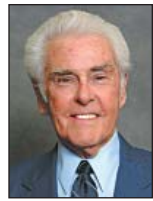


Confront sin

Ancient kings were quite adept at planning large banquets for a great host of people in order to gain support from these guests. King Belshazzar invited a



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thousand of his nobles together with wives and concubines to a party where wine flowed freely. He remembered that his father, King Nebuchadnezzar, had taken gold and silver goblets from the Jewish Temple when he besieged Jerusalem. He had servants bring them in so his guests could drink wine from them. While they did so, they praised the gods of gold and silver, or bronze, iron, wood and stone (5:1-4).

In the midst of all this revelry, the fingers of a hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall *mene, mene, tekel, pharsin* (or *upharsin*). “The king watched the hand as it wrote [and] his face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way” (5:5-6).

So Belshazzar did as his father had done when experiencing similar need for understanding a dream that frightened him — he called in his interpreters of visions and dreams but they could not interpret his dream at that time (Daniel 2:1-13). When Belshazzar brought in his interpreters, they also could not interpret what the hand was or what it had written. He became “even more terrified and his face grew more pale” (5:9).

When his queen, or as some translators indicate, the queen mother, discovered what was happening, she offered the same person to interpret the vision that had his father had used in his dream — Daniel, the exile brought to Babylon from Judah years ago. He accepted her suggestion and brought Daniel to the court (5:10-16).

Confronting sin of the king (5:17-21). In spite of the risk that he took in confronting the king who had power to take his life, Daniel identified God’s displeasure with the flagrant misuse of the gold and silver goblets from the Jewish Temple. He declared, “You have set yourself up against the Lord of

heaven.” As we discovered in a previous lesson, the king committed the basic sin of pride leading to his actions. Daniel pointed out to him, “You have not humbled yourself.” This leads us to consider how we must deal with sin in the people we meet.

Confronting sin in local situations (5:22-23). It is one thing to deal with a king’s sinful behavior when you are called in to do so, but how do we confront persons in local situations about sin in their lives? Some situations do open a door to identifying and rebuking sinful behavior.

A teacher could confront a child abuser when sure of the facts in the case. A wife could get help to confront a husband for his abusive treatment of her. A business superior could confront embezzlement or stealing by an employee. A church member or committee could confront a staff member for failure to fulfill assigned tasks. A wife or a husband could confront a mate’s adultery. A reader of written material could identify plagiarism by an author. Each of these statements are based on actual situations.

For the king and for all of us, sin brings judgment (5:24-28). As Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall, he explained that it symbolized the judgment of God on Belshazzar that would lead to the coming failure of the king’s reign, which would be consummated by his death (5:30-31).

When we discuss the consequences of sin, we must distinguish between behavior that is socially or religiously unacceptable because we do not like it or believe that it has damaging effects on other persons or even on our own lives. R. Lofton Hudson, in his book *Grace Is Not a Blue-eyed Blond*, has writes, “To [Jesus], sin was a breach of fellowship, a turning of good talent into bad channels, a failure to become — an attempt to be somebody we aren’t, such as trying to be God, or an attempt to play God” (p. 27). He utilizes portions of Luke’s gospel, chapters 10, 12 and 18, as examples of Jesus’ interpretations of sin.

As we consider the Christian response to sin, we recognize that God’s answer to our sin is twofold: (1)

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Freedom and forgiveness are available since God has dealt with our sin through the cross of Christ, but (2) judgment awaits those who do not acknowledge and trust in the saving work of Christ. The Bible has many examples of persons who had to confess sin in their lives in order to become acceptable to the Father.

Hudson summarizes these experiences in a later chapter. “Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden had to be flushed out of their hidings. David had to be told by Nathan after his affair with Bathsheba, ‘Thou art the man’ (2 Samuel 12:7). John the Baptist refused baptism to those who had not produced some evidence of genuine repentance (Luke 3:7-15). The prodigal son came to himself and then he came clean with his father (Luke 15:17-18)” (p. 48).

One of Christendom’s most beloved hymns was written by John Newton, who had endured a very troubled youth and became the captain of a slave ship when the moral iniquity of the slave business had not impressed itself upon the public conscience. He later became a minister in Olney, England, and began teaching the children about Christ. He used hymns rather than the commonly used Psalms and began writing some himself. Out of these experiences, the former slave trader wrote “Amazing Grace.”

Newton’s tombstone reads: John Newton, Clerk / Once an infidel and libertine / A servant of slaves in Africa / Was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ / Preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to / Preach the faith he had long labored to destroy. (Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, 1950, pp. 125-127).

This is our option as well, when we offer our self to God through forgiveness and faith in God’s plan.

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