

Dear Lutheran Watchman,

The youth leader of our church told us “The sin of homosexuality can be forgiven just like any other sin. But in order to be forgiven, Scripture says we need to recognize our sin and repent of it, because God says in 1 John 1:9, ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*** (NIV)”

This doesn't sound quite right to me. Can you tell me what you think about this?

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your letter. You are right to question the validity of your youth leader's statement.

I believe the root of the problem lies in your church's use of the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. (For more information on the dangers of using the NIV, please see: “Modern Bible Versions, and Westcott and Hort” by Pastor Tobin Pederson here: <http://lutheranwatchman.weebly.com/uploads/3/0/7/2/30723175/modernbibleversions.pdf> as well as “Why Sincere Christians Will Not Use the NIV For Anything Other Than Comparison” here: <http://lutheranwatchman.weebly.com/the-watchmans-blog/why-sincere-christians-will-not-use-the-niv-for-anything-other-than-comparison>)

Now, let's take a look at the King James translation of 1 John 1:9:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

In contrast, the NIV says God... ***“will forgive us our sins...”***

By using ... ***“will forgive us our sins...”*** this translation subtly changes the passage from being Gospel to one which makes a demand of sinful man, something only the Law of God does. The Gospel of Jesus Christ never makes ***any such demand*** of man ***“in order to be forgiven”***.

What your youth leader should have told you about the sin of homosexuality is that like all other sins, the sin of homosexuality ***IS*** forgiven, not ***“can be forgiven”***. Unfortunately, what your youth leader told you is a spiritually dangerous co-mingling of the two main teachings of the Bible, the Law and the Gospel. Sadly this is a common mistake in many churches today.

To say that the sin of homosexuality (or any other sin) ***“can be forgiven”*** is to suggest (or demand) something ***“can or must yet be done”*** to bring God's forgiveness to fruition. This would make receiving God's forgiveness subject to obedience to a Law. Demands are always (of the) ***Law***.

Furthermore, to make the statement: ***“But in order to be forgiven, Scripture says we need to recognize our sin and repent of it.”*** is to teach work-righteousness or that salvation can be earned by obeying the Law. Yet we know from Romans 3:20, ***“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*** Recognizing something we have done as being sinful and repenting of that sin does ***NOT*** bring about God's forgiveness. It does not “earn” or even “prompt” God's

forgiveness. Nor does it make a person any spiritually “better” or “more prepared” for God’s forgiveness than the most unrepentant sinner in the world. The Law has no power to do that and, again, the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes *no such demand* of man “*in order to be forgiven*”.

What is "required" after a person recognizes his sin and repents is **only belief**, or more specifically: *faith alone in the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. The Bible tells us that faith is *not* a “work” of man, but that it is a gift of God worked in man's heart by God the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the Gospel. “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

In addition, faith adds **absolutely nothing** to the vicarious atonement for our sins by Jesus Christ. Faith is nothing more (and nothing less) than the open hand which receives, lays hold of, and personally apprehends to and for the believer the free gift of the Forgiveness of Sins, Life and Salvation.

The Scripture passage your youth leader quoted, is **Gospel – not Law** – and it must be both understood *and applied* as Gospel.

Let’s take another look at the passage, shall we?

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9 (KJV)

The word “if” in this Gospel passage does not signify a *cause or reason* for God’s forgiveness of our sins, as it would if the passage was Law. Rather, it signifies a *consequence*; for it relates to the mode of application that God has appointed for these Gospel promises, and that is “faith alone”. God is “*faithful and just*” to forgive our sins, ***NOT because we confess our sins!!!*** (As though we could ever possibly merit His forgiveness!) But He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins ***ONLY because*** God has promised to accept – *and has indeed already accepted, (Praise God!)* – our reconciliation to Himself in the suffering and death of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In doing so, our heavenly Father is proving Himself “*faithful*” to His promises (Hebrews 10:23). And He is showing He is “*just*” in this manner too. For, to break His promise, a promise that has been ratified with the precious innocent blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, would be both an unfaithful and horribly unjust act.

Furthermore, we must understand this Gospel passage is meant for those who are already converted – and **not** for those yet unconverted – the unbeliever, who yet must first be struck by the full force of the Law ***before*** the healing balm of the Gospel may *rightly* be applied to their benefit.

This is evident by to whom the letter of the Apostle John is written. He is writing to a Christian congregation about how “*God is Light*” and that *as Christians* they should “*walk in the light*” and how this “*walking in the light*” includes *fellowship with God, daily consciousness of one's sinfulness, an abhorrence of sin, confession of sin, brotherly love, sanctification, excluding love of the world, and discipleship under false teachers, etc.* It

is the *Christian only* that exercises all these spiritual activities, and that, *by faith*. The unbeliever does not.

The Law ***does not and cannot*** draw man to God. Yes, the Law promises salvation, *but only to those that keep it perfectly in ALL its demands* – something natural man - the (unbelieving) person cannot do.

You see, the Law either drives man away from God and into greater sin, or it makes him despair of his sinful condition and look for an escape - a way out - from under the eternal condemnation and damnation that is his on account of his sin. The Law can only show man his sinfulness. It offers man no means truly *applicable* to himself by which he might escape God's anger, condemnation and eternal damnation.

The Gospel, on the other hand, makes ***absolutely no demands***. It simply offers to man the free gift of full forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. It invites the soul that is thirsty unto death, to drink of Living Water and that *freely*. And so it draws the individual terrified by his sins to his loving and merciful God. The Gospel shows the sinner the great love of God for all sinners and makes of him a new creature. By the Gospel alone, man is enabled to love God and *does* love God in return for being reconciled to God in Christ and the new man is then prompted by the love of God in Christ Jesus to keep the Law of God to the best of his ability. It is then not the Law, but the Gospel alone that procures and effects the right observance of the Law. It is the Gospel alone that brings forth fruits of faith – God-pleasing good works - including a turning away from sin and a striving to live one's life dedicated to Christ.

If I may recommend a thorough reading and study of Dr. C.F.W. Walther's The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, (A link to this book and a companion study guide are available on my website here: <http://lutheranwatchman.weebly.com/e-books.html>)

God bless you!

The Lutheran Watchman