

Three Traps to Avoid as You Labor to Love Others

Another labor day is upon us. I'll be honest, I don't think much about labor on this day, but in the spirit of what this day is about I tried to reflect upon its purpose. In my mind, labor day is an opportunity for people to thank God for the ability to work. Work is a good thing for two reasons. One, it is the main way in which God provides daily bread for individuals and families. Two, work gives people a purpose for existing, helping others, which keeps them from becoming bored and getting into trouble. Even in the perfect world, God gave Adam and Eve work to do. And in the perfect world, Adam and Eve would have had no need for a labor day holiday. Yet, in the sin tainted world we do. While labor/work is a good thing, we also need a break from it because work tires us out. You know what else is tiring and can seem like work sometimes? Displaying love to other people. Isn't it true that at certain times and with certain people – displaying Christian love seems like work and leaves one feeling tired? Yet, God wants us to display Christian love towards all people. So as you strive to carry out God's commission, here are three traps to avoid as You labor to love others. Listen to John 8:1-11.

¹But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Trap #1. **"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him" (vs. 3-6).** The teachers of the law were right. According to the Old Testament Law, which in this case were God's civil laws governing Old Testament Israelite society which

God had Moses write down in Deuteronomy (22:13-30) and Leviticus (20:10), an adulterous woman is to be executed for her actions in order to **“purge the evil from Israel” (Deut. 22:22b)**. Here’s the problem. Notice they only bring the woman before Jesus. Where’s the man caught in adultery? Old Testament Law clearly states the man is to be stoned to death also. Plus, did you notice their motivation for dragging this adulterous woman before Jesus? **“They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him” (vs. 6a)**. The whole point of this exercise was to discredit Jesus. If Jesus said, “stone her to death” he would seem to lose his status as the champion for the unsavory people in society. Plus, he steps on the toes of the Roman government who had final say on Jewish executions. If Jesus says, “don’t stone her,” then it seems Jesus doesn’t care about following God’s Word. Jesus doesn’t fall for their trap, but instead he exposes their trap by saying, **“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”** In other words, Jesus is saying, “before you throw the stones of judgment at this woman, check your motives.” Jesus knew that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law thought they were better than this woman with loose morals. Jesus also knew they had no concern for where this woman would spend eternity after they stoned her to death. Jesus isn’t teaching us here that it is wrong to judge someone as guilty of breaking the law and deserving of the death penalty. Jesus is teaching us to check our motives for pronouncing that judgment and carrying out that punishment. It seems that many in our world today, maybe even us, fall into that trap. We are against, as we should be, adultery, homosexuality, pornography, abortion and other immoral actions and attitudes that seem to be more and more prevalent today. Yet it seems the trap is to be against those things because we can’t stand to be around people who struggle with such sins. Or the trap is to be against those things because we need to protect moral values, or God’s law, or even God himself. With fire in their eyes people say, “We need to put the Ten Commandments back on display in public places, especially in our schools” as if that will magically make sin go away. God and his code of ethics certainly needs to be known and discussed, but it doesn’t need our protection. The people who need our help and protection are the ones who are caught in these immoral lifestyles, not because we simply would be happier if they were “more like us,” but because we would be happier if they didn’t go to Hell. As Paul says, **“if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore them gently” (Gal. 6:1)**. That is one of the main purposes for God giving us his moral code. In your labor of love for these individuals – talk to them personally and convict them with God’s Law in an effort to lead them to see the seriousness of their sin and to repent of that sin, so that you can also share the Gospel with them – that Jesus loves them anyway and forgives them of their sins and has purchased a place in heaven for them. In your labor of love for others – always make sure your motivation for pronouncing judgment upon a person’s actions/words and carrying out that punishment is because you care about where they and others will spend eternity.

Trap #2. **“At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said.**

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (vs. 9-11). The trap here is misunderstanding Jesus point when he says, **"then neither do I condemn you."** People think that Jesus words are teaching that God has softened his stance on certain sins. The trap is that God has lowered his standards and has become more tolerant of sin over the years. The trap people fall into is the thinking that God no longer condemns adultery, homosexuality, pornography, abortion and other immoral actions and attitudes. Instead they proclaim, even from the church pulpit sometimes, that Jesus now embraces such sins and so should you. Don't fall for the trap. Instead let's take a closer look at the context of Jesus words and let's look at them from the perspective of the adulterous woman. A group of men who have no concern for your personal, spiritual, or eternal well-being drag you kicking and screaming before a famous pastor named Jesus and now they are talking about stoning you to death to fulfill God's law. I suspect this adulterous woman's conscience along with the accusations of the men present and the threat of death had thoroughly convinced her that she was guilty. The law, no doubt, had done its job. She was sorry for her sins. She didn't need more law from Jesus. She needed the Gospel. So Jesus gave it to her by saying, **"then neither do I condemn you" (vs. 11a).** But don't think for a second that God is more tolerant of adultery because Jesus added the words, **"Go now and leave your life of sin" (vs. 11b).** Adultery, homosexuality, pornography, abortion, and all other immoral actions and attitudes are forgivable through Christ, but that forgiveness doesn't mean those sins are God pleasing. In fact, if you tell someone that certain sins are okay as you stand under the banner of tolerance, even though you think you are displaying love to that person you are really showing that you hate them because of your lack of concern for their eternal future. Jesus plainly tells this woman, I forgive you for your sin of adultery because you are repentant and you believe in me as your Savior, but don't do it again because it is wrong. As Paul said, **"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (Romans 6:1-2).**

Trap #3. Certain sins are really immoral, and other sins are less offensive to God. God doesn't feel that way though. **"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10).** In Romans chapter 1, God is pretty clear of what he thinks about homosexuality, but then he goes on to say this through the apostle Paul – **"They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;" (Romans 1:29-30).** It doesn't seem like the sins of greed, drinking too much sometimes, slander, gossip, arrogance, boastfulness, and disobedience of parents should be in the same list as adultery, homosexuality, pornography, and abortion, but God puts them there. All sin is equally offensive to God. That is why we daily need to drown our old Adam in contrition and repentance as we cling to our Savior Jesus for forgiveness and life eternal. Then in love, we need to show true love to those caught in impenitence and

unbelief by showing them their sin using the curb and mirror of God's law. God the Holy Spirit might lead them to repent and give you the chance to share the Gospel too – that Christ loved you so much that he gave his life for you so that you are forgiven of those sins. Through Jesus you are holy before God now and forever.

God's blessings to you as you labor to show His love to others. Amen.