

## Letting go of contempt

A former presidential candidate confesses to adultery. A big city mayor violates his parole. A suspect in the anthrax investigation commits suicide. What is your reaction? It will say a lot about the extent to which you have been transformed by the kingdom of God.

“You @#\$\*&! Why don’t you watch where you are going?” or “She really is not sorority material,” or “He is such a loser!” or words Jesus Himself condemned, “Thou fool!” Expressions of contempt explode, snarl, and drip almost everywhere we turn. Together with anger, contempt is the most destructive force in our world today. How much harm would be generated if we let go of anger and contempt? Almost none.

Jesus spoke firmly about contempt. “Whosoever shall say, ‘Thou fool,’ shall be in danger of the hell of fire.” (Mt 5:22) Our legalistic tendencies focus on the words Jesus condemned, but He is speaking against the spirit of contempt that erupts in words such as “Thou fool.” In danger of the hell of fire, huh? Pretty serious stuff to Jesus.

Jesus Christ does not have a contemptuous bone in His body. When the Bible assures us that there is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, we not only breathe a sigh of relief, but we understand that God insists that it be so. In a seminar on family issues some years ago, Gary Smalley showed a beat-up violin to his TV audience. “It’s not in very good shape, is it?” he said, holding up the violin. He continued, “But this violin is a Stradivarius.” The viewer could hear the surprised gasps from some in the TV audience. What made the difference? The intrinsic value of that violin, even in its damaged condition. That is also the case with us.

We are made just a little lower than angels, according to the Bible. True, many follow evil and live blinded by the darkness. But evil does not remove our intrinsic value—we are made in the image of God Himself. We are god-like creatures, which not only explains the devil’s fear and hatred of us, but also explains that mystifying inner longing for meaning and purpose and creativity we all experience. “Little Christs,” was C.S. Lewis’ description of who God intends us to become.

Contempt comes right from Hell. It is the frightful under-belly of Pride. When we view others with contempt, no harm towards them is rarely enough. Ask the Hutu’s and the Tutsi’s of Rwanda. Rwanda national radio broadcast the declaration that Tutsi’s were “cockroaches,” and efforts to stomp them out of existence soon followed. 500,000 Tutsi’s, most of them Christians, were hacked to death.



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While we cannot control this world, we can control ourselves. We simply must decide that we will become the kind of persons for whom contempt has no place. We must begin there. Are we willing to let contempt go from our thinking, feeling, and speaking?

God Himself is at work freeing us from contempt. Sometimes He uses our pride to provoke a fall into humiliation. This is always painful, but useful for His purposes—and ultimately, good for us. It is hard to view others with contempt when we ourselves have fallen to a low place. As the old Quakers used to say, “It is good to be low before God.” A new vision of reality of life in the kingdom of God will then breathe the fresh air of “valuing” human beings, no matter who they are or what they have done. This does not occur overnight, but to the extent we live lives surrendered to the voice and leading of the Holy Spirit, the preciousness and nobility of the human being will grow more and more evident. Sorrow, not contempt, will be our response as we view human evil and destruction. Believers have been given the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). As we allow our thoughts to be increasingly governed by Jesus Christ, we will simply begin to see people differently.

The Bible says that Jesus is “the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of THE WHOLE WORLD.” (1 Jn 2:2) The Bible says about Jesus Christ that “He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows... He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.” (Isa 53:4-5) On a personal level, I cannot “feel” what it was like for Jesus to receive my sins and blasphemies. But I can remember what sickness and pain feels like. Jesus bore not only my sins, but my sicknesses, and my sorrows IN HIS OWN BODY on the cross. Can you imagine that? Every vile deed, every cancer, every heartache, for everyone, throughout this world and throughout all time. Except that it is true, it

would be unbelievable. The sum total of all sin, all sickness, all sorrow. Jesus absorbed it all. No wonder He cried out, “My God, my God—why have you forsaken me?”

Here is the point in terms of contempt: If Jesus thought enough of us to go through such unbelievable suffering, how dare we view with contempt any for whom He died?

Our four most powerful “weapons” in letting go of contempt are repentance, faith, the Word of God, and prayer. We accept what the Word of God teaches about contempt. We repent of our giving way to contempt and forcefully decide to let it go—forever. And we have faith in Jesus’ indwelling presence and power. We then pray, believing, using the promises and exhortations of Scripture: “Thank you Father, that I am a new person in Christ Jesus. In Christ, I choose to speak and treat others with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience.” (1 Pe 3:15) Steadfast and steady discipleship will bring about the desired inner changes.

I want to close this article with an observation. Listening to conservative talk radio is a favorite pastime with some of my friends. If they are reading this, I hope they will think about the amount of contempt they are letting fill their minds. OK, so it is informative, even funny. But since when does funny make something right? Jesus Christ is our Lord, is He not?

The Bible assures us that what we allow into our minds will change us, for good or ill. Jesus doesn’t mince words about those who imbibe the spirit of contempt. Clearly, His disciples, living under kingdom power and authority, let go of contempt and choose to live out of a different Spirit. We choose a Spirit of gentleness and peace, a Spirit of goodness and joy, a Spirit of gladness and song. This world will do what it wants. It is not our place to judge this world. It is our place to judge ourselves. Are we ready to let go of contempt?

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