

Weekly Bible Study Series, Vol. 8, No. 10: 1 April 2007

© I. Chris Imoisili, E-mail: imoisilic@hotmail.com; imoisilic@gmail.com

For past issues and more, visit our Web Site: www.bibleresourcecentre.com

IS SIN A CIVIL OR AN EVIL RIGHT?

Today's Text: Ezekiel Chap. 23

Extracts:

The Lord also said to me; “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For *they have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to Me, passing them through the fire to devour them. Moreover they have done this to Me. They have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and profaned My Sabbaths. For after they had slain their children for their idols, on the same day they came into My sanctuary to profane it; and indeed thus they have done in the midst of My house*” [Ezek. 23: 36-39]

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual preference.¹ So, when gay rights activists took a case of discrimination against them to the Constitutional Court, it ruled in their favour and gave the government until 1 December 2006 to legalise same-sex weddings. On 30 November 2006, the South African parliament passed “The Civil Union Bill” into law. It provides for the “voluntary union of two persons, which is solemnized and registered by either a marriage or civil union.” However, the law also gives officials the right not to perform same-sex wedding ceremonies if that would be in conflict with their “conscience, religion and belief.” Religious groups have strongly condemned the law which they claim has legitimized evil. Gay rights activists, on the other hand, have criticized the law for subjecting its enforcement to the discretion of officials and, thus limiting their civil rights.

There is a growing number of civil rights issues over which there is public debate. In addition to same-sex marriage, there are abortion, stem cell research and banning of the Bible from public schools. Activists have compared their causes to past civil rights movements, such as women’s right to vote and equal rights for African-Americans. What is a civil right? Does it apply to every minority movement? Is the right to break God’s moral code a civil or an evil right? How can we differentiate a civil right from an evil right? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today’s lesson.

¹ Story based on: “S Africa approves same-sex unions,” www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6147010.stm and “African Christians Protest Gay ‘Marriage’ Law,” www.christianpost.com/article/20061204/23850.htm of Mon., Dec. 04, 2006

1. Everyone should have the freedom to choose evil or good!

In the text of today's lesson, God used the allegory of two immorally depraved sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, who preferred harlotry to righteous living. Oholah stood for Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, while Oholibah stood for Jerusalem, the seat of Judah [Ezek. 23: 4]. When you use the name of a capital city (such as Moscow or Abuja or New Delhi) or a specific location in such cities (such as The White House in Washington, D.C. or Number 10 Downing Street, the home of the British Prime Minister in London), we know that you are referring to the *seat of power*. If God specifically uses the seat of power to address the issues in Israel and Judah, that suggests that the evil things that were going on had the "blessings" (by design or default) of the ruling authorities.

In today's text, God raised the following issues against Israel and Judah:

a) *They were unfaithful to God*

They practised idolatry and adultery [Ezek. 23: 5-8, 37]. Just as their ancestors did in Egypt, the then generation of the children of Israel worshipped man-made gods and practised lewdness both among themselves and with strangers, such as the Assyrians and Babylonians [vv. 11-18]. Are we any different today?

Unfaithfulness to God means placing anything else before God in our lives. Whatever keeps you away from praying or reading the Bible daily or going to church must be more important to you than God. Whatever relationship that you are into which prevents you from living a holy life is your idol. When you take morality out of sex, you are serving another god. That state authorities do not sanction you does not mean that your conduct is acceptable to God.

b) *They sacrificed their children to idols*

God told the prophet Ezekiel that, in addition to idolatry and adultery, the people "sacrificed their sons whom they bore to (Him), passing them through the fire, to devour them" [v. 38]. Having copied the evil practices of their neighbouring Gentile states, the so-called people of God were now offering their children as sacrifices to idols. That was supposedly a mark of love and reverence for their idols, just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to God as a mark of love and obedience. The difference here, however, is that God called the children being offered to idols His.

Again, we are not any better today. When you offer to your idols what belongs to God, you are provoking Him to jealousy. Some people belong to cults and satanic groups where they offer their children to obtain higher

ranks and more occult powers. Some people give birth to babies and abandon them in garbage dumps, thereby sacrificing them to their gods of sexual immorality and callousness. Can you imagine such children being picked up by state authorities and given for adoption to atheists or gay couples? You have sacrificed such of God's children to your idols. When you neglect to train your children in the word of God but allow them to watch pornography or listen to obscene music, you have sacrificed them to your idols of material pursuits or culpable negligence.

c) *They profaned God's sanctuary*

On the same day that they did the other evil things mentioned above, they came into the Lord's sanctuary to defile it and profane His Sabbaths [Ezek. 23: 38]. They "sat on a stately couch, with a table prepared before it, on which (they) had set (His) incense and (His) oil" [v. 41]. They did all these without any remorse, confession or repentance. They did not see anything wrong with what they were doing!

That rings quite familiar to us. We have openly gay clergy and laity who come to church to administer or receive Holy Communion without any aim to give up their life styles. We have priests who defile altar boys and girls and remain in service without any qualms of conscience! Sexual immorality is a major crisis in virtually every church and it is better swept under the carpet by the church leaders than dealt with. Do you expect God to congratulate us for all those things?

Right from the Garden of Eden, God gave man the *freedom to choose* between good and evil when He commanded him, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, *for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" [Gen. 2: 16-17]. So, when Adam and Eve *chose* to eat the forbidden fruit, God flushed them out of the Garden and left them to the painful consequences of their choice [Gen. 3: 23-24]. Clearly, there is an umbilical cord between obedience and blessings on one hand and disobedience and curses/punishment on the other [Deut. Chap. 28]. It is an iron law!

God said to Israel and Judah, "Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, therefore you shall bear the *penalty* of your lewdness and harlotry" [Ezek. 23: 35]. They would be repaid in their own coins when God would stir up lovers (fellow idol worshippers) against them that would trouble and plunder them [vv. 22-27; 46, 49]. In other words, you have the *choice* to do whatever you like but you must be ready to bear the consequences. As they say, "if you do the crime, you will do the time!" This point is made more forcefully elsewhere in Scriptures, as follows [Rom. 1: 20-32]:

For since the creation of the world (God's) invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ... For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the women, burned in their lust for one another, men with men, committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due..._who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practise such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practise them.

Judgment lies with God, not with us. Since He gave man the freedom to choose, He alone has the authority to judge misconduct. But what do believers do when misconduct against God is elevated to the level of a civil right?

2. But should the freedom to choose evil translate into a civil right?

The United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (10 December 1948) is a statement of human rights *that cannot be awarded by human powers nor can they be surrendered*. The document has been translated into 321 languages (as of 2004), only less than the Bible that has been translated into 2,233 languages.² The *American Declaration of Independence* (July 4, 1776) opens emphatically with, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain *unalienable rights*, that *among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*." It follows that a human right becomes a civil right when it is protected by legislation.

If a human right cannot be granted or withdrawn by human powers, then it must come from a higher source. The American Declaration calls such a higher source "Creator." According to the Bible, our Creator is God, the Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Therefore, His word, as recorded in Scriptures, is our universal declaration of human rights. His word says that as many as are baptized into Christ have put on Christ and "there is *neither Jew nor Greek* (or Gentiles), there is *neither slave nor free*, there is *neither male nor female*" for we "are *all one in Christ*" [Gal. 3: 27-28]. Clearly, discrimination on grounds of ethnicity or nationality or religion or gender is a violation of our human rights. That is why over history, civil rights movements developed around equality for men and women, white and black, and among nationalists for political independence, for example. Appropriately, laws and practices have been put in place to protect such human rights as civil rights.

² Guinness Book of Records, now *Guinness World Records*, www.guinnessworldrecords.com

In recent times, however, we are being confronted with a new set of agitations that have nothing to do with inalienable rights mentioned above. Examples are a woman's right to abortion, and marriage rights for same-sex unions, among others. Are these civil or evil rights movements?

To adequately answer that question, let us examine the following situations:

a) *When an agitation is in line with God's word*

In this case, it is a fundamental human right which should not be denied by law or national practice. For example, equal treatment under the law irrespective of ethnicity, nationality, religion or gender would fall into this category. Where necessary, laws could be enacted to reinforce everybody's protection. Then they become *civil rights*. However, if law is enacted to force everybody to worship the same God as in *Shar'ia* law, or to conform to the same social norms, such as to penalize adultery or homosexuality, that is persecution or violation of people's God-given freedom of choice.

b) *When there is agitation for civil protection to stop Christian evangelism*

There are some practices which offend God, such as fornication, atheism and idol worship. In most cases, there are no laws to penalize those who do such things. As long as they keep them to themselves, they enjoy their fundamental human rights of freedom of choice. In due course, they will face God individually for their sins! But churches do preach against such misconduct as they do against all unrighteousness. Now, agitators are seeking legal protection to stop Christian evangelism. For example, in a Caribbean country with a large Hindu population, there was an attempt to amend the 'Freedom of Information Act' to make it an offence for one religion to preach against others. In the US, some atheists have gone to court to ban the use of Bibles and prayers in public schools or Christian religious symbols in public places, under the guise of separation of church and state. Since such agitators are not against the teaching of witchcraft, evolution theory or Islam in public schools, we can sense that Satan is behind their movement. That would easily be classified as an *evil rights* movement! It is an attempt to prevent divine truth from being told or spread.

c) *When an agitation clearly violates God's word*

People are free to obey or to disobey God. People are free to worship or not to worship Him. People are free to believe that He does not exist. People are free to practise fornication, adultery, abortion, bestiality or homosexuality. Even God cannot stop those who are hell-bent on doing such things. However, it becomes another matter when they now insist

that national law and practice must recognise and accept such aberrations as normal.

First and foremost, none of them is a fundamental human right. For example, on the day that we were born, the doctors knew our skin colour and gender without asking any questions. To know people's sexual orientation, for example, they have to tell you! The abortion activist is the surviving child of a pro-life mother. The same-sex marriage activist is the child of the union of a man and a woman, of Adam and Eve, and not of Adam and Steve or Adah and Eve! Therefore, when their union is legally recognized as a marriage and they then have the right to adopt children, whose children are those? They are certainly not the products of same-sex unions. Moreover, where are the rights of the children who are exposed to parents of the same sex that are not necessarily of their own making? Do they have the right to sue such parents for their freedom in the future? Clearly, agitators for issues that contradict the word of God are overstressing their freedom to choose to make their conduct morally acceptable. It is the devil's agenda. That makes it an evil rights movement.

3. Summary: Jesus loves sinners but not their sins!

Look at the people who were around Jesus. Among the twelve apostles was Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew that he would betray Him. Yet, He made Him the treasurer, and "he used to take what was in the (money box)" [Jn 12: 4-6]. Some of the women who served Him were those that He "had healed of evil spirits and infirmities." For example, out of Mary Magdalene, He had cast out seven demons [Lk 8: 2]. Each time He sat to eat with tax collectors and sinners who milled around Him, the Pharisees were unhappy with Him. His typical answer to critics was, "I did not come to call the righteous, *but sinners to repentance*" [Matt. 9: 10-13]. He did not condemn the adulteress that He had saved from death by stoning but, instead, He told her, "Go and sin no more" [Jn 8: 11]. Therefore, Jesus loved sinners (and still does) but He *expects* them to repent and change.

As a true believer, you are to love all- friends and enemies, sinners and the self-righteous, etc. You are to preach Christ and salvation to all. If they receive you, there will be joy in heaven. However, if they reject you and call you an extremist or a bigot for daring to ask them to change from their wicked ways, depart from them and "shake off the dust from your feet... and it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment " than for those people [Matt. 10: 14-15].

An evil right *can never* be a civil right.