

BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Wednesday Noon Bible Study

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SUPPORTING THE SINNER BUT NOT THE SIN

As I have served as pastor for 18 years I have constantly been asked the question by members of what to do when their family member is living or engaged in a lifestyle of sinful behavior. Many want to know how to minister to them without condemning them.

HOW TO HAVE COMPASSION AND CONVICTION AT THE SAME TIME

“Messy Grace”

“Messy Grace” is a term used to describe how God’s grace often operates in real, complicated, imperfect human situations—not in neat, idealized environments. It emphasizes that transformation rarely looks clean or immediate.

Messy Grace = Unconditional love + Uncompromising truth lived out in imperfect, real-life relationships. It holds two tensions at once:

Grace → Radical acceptance, compassion, patience

Truth → Clear moral conviction, biblical standards, call to repentance

Those who are Christians and know the Word of God are convicted when someone they love is living outside of the will of God. The struggle is how do I support them as family but not support their lifestyle? Let’s examine how we can support the sinner but not the sin.

First off...What does “all have sinned” mean?

Basically, it means that we’re all lawbreakers, because sin is the violation of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Sinfulness is the general characteristic of all mankind; we are all guilty before God. We are sinners by nature and by our own acts of transgression.

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 3:4

You can get in trouble by downplaying the dangers of sin

Christians encourage unbelievers and believers in sin alike to keep sinning by downplaying or ignoring the dangerous effects of sin in our lives.

Sin affects our relationship with God in a bad way. Sin destroys what testimony we have. Sin destroys our lives, not to mention steals our resources and robs us of our peace. People in sin need to be told and reminded of this.

We can't turn a blind eye to the dangers of sin and expect not to fall into a ditch. If we, however, see the dangers of sin but fail to warn others about it, we are to be blamed for their fall as well.

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:17)

How do you support the sinner without compromising your faith?

"Sometimes the most loving thing to do is not the thing that on the surface looks most loving. I don't want to do something in order to make someone else feel more positive about me if by doing it I am in effect encouraging them to do something harmful." - SEPTEMBER 3, 2014 | MATTHEW HOSIER

What Do You Do When Family Members Persist in Sin?

by Wes Adams | Nov 29, 2017 | Church, Marriage, Parenting

To be honest, I would rather not write this post, but it needs to be written. It needs to be written because this problem plagues nearly every Christian family in the world. In nearly every one of our families there is someone who at one point pledged his or her allegiance to King Jesus by being baptized, but is now living in shameless rebellion to Christ. Should we just mind our own business? Should we rebuke them? Should we shun them? How would Jesus want us to handle these situations?

Supporting someone in sin without compromising your faith is a matter of theological balance: **grace without approval, truth without condemnation, and presence without participation.** It requires both spiritual maturity and relational wisdom.

Pray without Ceasing

Before we say or do anything, we need to pray. We need to be like Epaphras, who "struggled" in prayer on behalf of those he loved (Colossians 4:12). Are your prayers for your family members like wrestling matches with God? Do you plead with God in tears that He "may perhaps grant them repentance" (2 Timothy 2:25)?

Commit to Intercession, Not Just Interaction

Support is not only relational—it's spiritual.

- Pray consistently for conviction, clarity, and transformation
- Ask God to use you as a vessel, not a validator of sin

Pray for them, pray for yourself to know how to respond, ask others to pray for them, and ask others to pray for you. Saturate the situation in prayer.

Love Them Unconditionally

Many of us have a skewed view of what love looks like. Some people think love looks like enabling people or celebrating their behavior. Others think they are being loving when they are verbally “putting someone in their place.” Listen very carefully to the words of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love is unconditional, but it does not rejoice at wrongdoing. Love tells people the truth, but it is never arrogant or rude. Love is always patient and kind. No matter how angry or sad your family member’s sin makes you, be committed to loving them.

Ask lots of questions. Don’t assume you have everything figured out. Speak kindly. Be patient. Give the benefit of the doubt. This is what love looks like. Remember that loving someone is less about how you feel and more about what you do and say.

Choose Your Battles Wisely

It is also incredibly important to define what it means to persist in sin. There will always be personal convictions about which you disagree; things you think your family members are doing wrong, because their behavior clashes with your culture, traditions, or inferences. Romans 14 and 15 teaches us how to handle these kind of disagreements.

Furthermore, your family members will make mistakes along the way, just like you make mistakes. It is loving, and to your glory, to overlook people’s offenses (Proverbs 19:11). You don’t have to “make a federal case” out of every little thing someone does wrong.

What we are talking about here is when a family member is unashamedly engaging in things like sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexual behavior, theft, greed, drunkenness, abusive behavior, or extortion (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). In other words, when a family member is on a path of spiritual self-destruction, that’s when something needs to be said and done.

Families Need Strong Fathers and Mothers

American culture has really distorted our view of the way families are supposed to work. We have almost completely abandoned the idea of patriarchs and matriarchs. We tend to believe that once a son or daughter reaches adulthood, they should be free to make their own decisions without interference. My question would be, where did we get that idea?

In the biblical culture, the head of the household exercised a great deal of influence over adult family members (Acts 10:2; 16:15; 16:34; 18:8). Furthermore, adult children were expected to honor and even obey their parents (Romans 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:2). As far as God is concerned, parenting should not stop when a child becomes an adult. It changes, but it must not stop.

Joshua was an old man when he declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). We need patriarchs and matriarchs who will have the boldness to spiritually lead their families,

who will admonish their children, who will exercise godly family discipline when their children are living unruly lives, who will love their children enough to say, “If you’re going to choose that lifestyle then you’re choosing to separate yourself from this family.”

Take it to the Elders

At some point, parents – who have done everything within their power to correct their children – may have to take the matter to the elders of the church. Under the Old Testament, God’s covenant people had to do the same (see Deuteronomy 21:18-21). In that case, the discipline was far more severe; but for our children’s own sake, we need to allow the community of Jesus to hold them accountable.

What an absolutely heartbreaking situation it would be to have to go to the elders of the church and say, “I cannot correct my son’s behavior. I need the church to join me in disciplining him.” But we must do this when necessary “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

But remember, whether the family member is being disciplined by the family or by the church, we must never “regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (2 Thessalonians 3:15). **The goal is NOT punishment, but repentance.**

Practice Redemptive Presence, Not Passive Approval

There’s a difference between **being present** and **being permissive**.

- Be available, listen, and walk alongside them
- Avoid environments or actions that require you to participate in sin
- Set clear internal boundaries

Rejoice at the First Sign of Repentance

Jesus’ story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is one of Jesus’ most referenced – and most misunderstood – parables. The father in the story isn’t just a picture of God, but a picture of how God’s people ought to respond when family members repent.

The father didn’t wait until the son had made his way all the way home. He didn’t wait until the son had cleaned himself up. He didn’t make his son prove his sincerity or go through a probationary period. No, when the father saw the son taking even the smallest steps of repentance, he ran to meet him and threw a party!

That’s how we have to treat our family members. We have to be loving enough to let them walk away in sin, if that’s what they choose to do. But as soon as they take even the smallest step of repentance, we must run to meet them in forgiveness and reconciliation.

References:

The Bible, King James Version

<https://radicallychristian.com/what-do-you-do-when-family-members-persist-in-sin>