

Open Letter To All Addressing The Recent ELCA Rulings

My issues with the recent ELCA rulings are not all about the human sexuality resolutions; those are just a by-product.

After a lot of scripture reading and soul searching and praying and even tears, something was suddenly clear to me. What is REALLY behind all of this?? It seems like it all points to satan, it is he that would like to cloud our discernment and make this division all about the human sexuality resolutions. Because, isn't he the master of deception and chaos? Isn't the real issue just about following our belief in the Bible, which is God's Holy Word. And isn't that the very foundation that satan wants to fracture and crumble?

So, according to my Lutheran upbringing, I turned to the Bible as a source of God's wisdom and guidance. Our faith and God's Scriptures are the only ways to make sure satan doesn't win over our church as he has the ELCA. I love LCR (I have been a member for over 30 years). Would I like everyone to all "just get along"? Sure, it's human nature! And the devil appeals to our natural human desires. But I can't find anywhere in the Bible where God says it's ok to disagree with Him over one of His precepts. As difficult as it is, we are called to put aside our sinful human nature and turn to Him in all things.

It is our responsibility as Christians to love each other. I feel one of God's most important commandments is 'love thy neighbor'. I'm trying to instill that in my son. In God's love, we need to be accountable to God, ourselves and others for our actions. As sinners we need to confess and live in Christ. As one of the ELCA statements says, "we must carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2. (I am just a lay person, so I have learned I need to look at a full passage and/or chapter for a more complete meaning/understanding of a verse.)

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become

weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6:1-10

This is actually a powerful passage in its entirety. This passage is clear that if someone is sinning, we need to lovingly help them realize the sin and restore them to Christ. But not be tempted to engage in that sin nor condone it. Also if anyone thinks he is something, perhaps more knowledgeable than he (man) really is, he deceives himself. We are not to mock God and His teachings with our foolish pride of our own pretense of knowledge. God has given us guidance and rules, it's not for man to change or re-write them as our nature desires. It is our Christian duty to be loving disciples of Christ and spread His teachings:

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.”
Proverbs 3: 1-7

We are all sinners and we are called by God to declare our sin, ask for forgiveness and live in Christ. We don't say it's acceptable to be deceitful, commit adultery, covet...and the list goes on. The Bible tells us how to live our lives and through it, God gives us standards. The Bible tells us in several passages that homosexuality is a sin (along with many other behaviors/desires). So when a group of men decides that homosexuality is 'not a sin in every case', I just do not understand. My question of "Is homosexual behavior no longer considered a sin?" was answered by Bishop Martin Wells:

“Many believe that what we know today as a naturally-occurring, same-gendered “orientation,” is something that was not known and something not addressed by the classic biblical texts condemning homosexual behavior. The term “homosexual” wasn't invented until the late 1800's. The question is whether two mature, fully functioning gay persons should be allowed to put their relationship under life-long promises and be received by the church as sinners with us. We have invited such people with explicit resolutions of welcome for many years. We believe the law and gospel are for them just as they are for the rest of us. If we believe that the context of life-long promises of faithfulness and monogamy is an appropriate action for ELCA members, why shouldn't otherwise qualified persons preparing for ministry be able to enter into such relationships? Is homosexual conduct a sin? The answer is “not in every case.””

So again I turn to the Bible, choosing to rely on God and not man. I find, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” Leviticus 18:22. While the term ‘homosexual’ may not have been invented until the 1800’s, I feel the biblical passage is very clear. There are several passages in the Bible that address men engaging in sexual relations with another man, such as Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and so on, I’m unclear as to how these passages were missed or overlooked by the ELAC and the bishop. But again, as God tells us so many times in the Bible, man is fallible and can be swayed by their own desires.

I feel that we are being told to listen to men not the Word of God. It seems like the ELCA’s above statement is implying that God did not know what he was doing when he put His Word’s into the biblical writers’ hands and is not all-knowing.

Jesus welcomed all sinners to Him (and good thing because we ALL are sinners), as we should do as Christians (love thy neighbor). But welcoming doesn’t mean condoning nor conversely does it mean condemning.

“But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” John 8:1-12

If we continue to sin and it’s ‘acceptable’ we are not following Jesus when he said ‘go and sin no more.’ And consequently, we will not have the “light of life’.

I realize that accepting homosexuality is politically correct in our society. Just look at prime time TV, movies, etc. And perhaps with the desire to reach the world with the message of salvation (and perhaps donations), some have tried to increase their popularity in the world by adopting popular philosophy. But I don’t believe we should let

political correctness (that is Biblically incorrect) guide our lives instead of God's Word. Jesus said that before His return, conditions in the world at large would resemble conditions in Sodom (Luke 17).

I also believe that people want smooth answers to difficult issues. They want to shape their surroundings to their desires. Again, it's our human nature. In Paul's charge to Timothy, he states,

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." 2 Timothy 4: 1-5

At the end of the bishop's letter, he states he "yearn(s) for that day when our Lord returns and explains why this life has to be so hard and so full of difficult decisions." While I don't know if the Lord will need to explain that to us, but I know I have questioned (lamented) Him why I have suffered certain troubles. I believe that God gives us challenges, obstacles, tests and trials. The story of Abraham and his only son come to mind. If life were easy, the devil couldn't tempt us, just as he tried with Jesus in the desert. But if we submit ourselves, not to man, but, to God, then we will be saved. In Mark 7: 20-23, Jesus

"went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "

But as in Romans 8: 1-11, if we submit to God and live life through the Spirit;

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind

controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

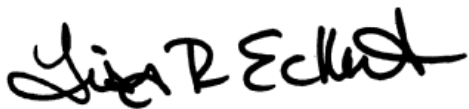
You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

I realize that my thoughts of the ELCA's rulings come from the Bible, not from man nor science.

I know some passages in the Bible carry more weight or meaning than others, but I feel that as Christians we are charged with accepting the Bible as a whole. I'm reminded of my son's Sunday School's Akaloo cd..."66 books all breathe as one." It's not always easy but the older I become, the more I realize that God gave us rules and guidance for a reason. Sometimes I open up to certain passages and oh yes...I'm convicted. But with God's love, and my repentance, and His everpresent forgiveness, he is my Shepard...always.

Also in turning to the Bible, I notice that when marriage is addressed, and gender is mentioned, it always says 'man' and 'woman.' And after God created Adam, he then created Eve. Perhaps this is just the basic thoughts of a lay person, a sheep in His pasture, but this seems pretty clear to me. Someone asked me if I really believed the world was created in just seven, twenty-four hour days. I really don't know. And I don't know if I need to know. All I really need is my faith to believe that God created the world and it was good. Isn't that what this issue all boils down to...your faith in God, through the Bible, His inspired Word, which he left to man so we would know His teachings and instructions for our lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa R Eckert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Eckert

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3: 16-17