In a recent survey of people who go to church regularly, a majority said that the church is very important. And of that majority, a majority said, and I quote, “the church should never try to influence my thought or behavior.”

That means most church goers want sermons that comfort, encourage, perhaps even entertain, but by no means confront you with how your life may be out of sync with God’s will for your life. That’s troubling. Most people don’t want preachers to talk about sin.

Many of us grew up in a time when guilt was the primary motivator in Christian behavior. Legalism was rampant and lingers today. I don’t want to go back to that. But truth be told, many lives today are being destroyed by reckless behavior, and no one, even the church, seems to care.

And then we come to Paul’s teachings about sin and grace. In Romans 6:2 he describes followers of Christ as “those who have died to sin.” Listen to the passage, Romans 6:12-23.

It reminds me of a classic cartoon in Leadership magazine where two couples are seated in a living room engaged in a study of this very teaching concerning dying to sin. One of the women is speaking. “Well,” she says, “I haven’t actually died to sin, but I did feel kind of faint once.”

That’s where many people are today. We’re not quite dead to sin; just feeling a little faint. Either way, many of us are hurting.

I read recently that twenty million people in this country deal with some sort of addiction. Twenty million. Could some of this addiction have anything at all to do with sin?

People who struggle with some form of addictions may lose their self-respect, their families, their freedom, even their lives. And if we, as the church, are silent about it, we are culpable in their loss. The church needs to wake up, and speak up.

A U.S. Surgeon General study found that our nation’s college students drink nearly four billion cans of beer and enough wine and liquor to bring their annual consumption of alcoholic beverages up to thirty-four gallons a person.1

Now some will say, “So college students drink. Big surprise there.” But high school are getting ahead of the curve, so to speak, and are drinking with the same frequency that used to be reserved for college. In a recent study by the National Institutes of Health it’s been determined that the younger a person starts drinking, the greater their chance of becoming an alcoholic later in life.

Of course, there are many other moral issues besides alcohol and drug addiction. One of the challenges faced by young people today is instability in the home and conflicting messages concerning sexuality in society.

Which isn’t surprising when you realize that our television “hero’s” are celebrities who hop from bed to bed. We need to be reminded that sex is a gift from God to be used within the guidelines God has provided.

Someday some of you will stand before God and commit yourself to one another in holy matrimony. Will promiscuity today hinder a fulfilling relationship tomorrow? The answer is, yes.

Of course talking about sin assumes from the beginning that there is a right and wrong. And this really is the rub in society today.

In the past fifty years the pendulum has swung so far toward tolerance of all behavior, even destructive behavior, that many people believe that there is no such thing as right and wrong. In our haste to be compassionate toward the sinner, we’ve deadened our sensitivity to the repulsiveness of sinful behavior.

Is there anyone here who cannot see that some things are always right and some things are always wrong? Right and wrong do exist. There’s such a thing as a Christian morality apart from legalism. Drawing a line may be difficult, but there is a line.

Sam Donaldson was the opinionated former newscaster with ABC news. He was asked this question about what he thought was wrong with America. “Sam, you were raised a Southern Baptist. Do you ever wonder if maybe some of the things we were taught in that old time religion might have been right . . . that we could use some of that old teaching?”

Donaldson responded with a characteristically sarcastic, “Praise the Lord,” but then got serious, “I don’t know about going back to all that old fashion morality . . . but I do think that this country is in deep trouble because we’ve come to believe that choices can be made without consequences! We’ve got to teach and practice the reality that the choices we make have real consequences to them . . . that we can’t just get ‘out of trouble’ that easily if we choose to ignore the possible consequences of choices made now!”


Most of you know that I am not a rigid person. My preaching would hardly qualify as fire and brimstone. And I have no desire to increase anyone’s guilt this morning. But I do believe there’s a moral law at work in this world and whenever we violate that law, there are consequences.

It is important for us to understand that there are absolutes in life. It’s wrong to steal. It’s wrong to kill. It’s wrong to commit adultery. But sin is sin, and sinful behavior has consequences. And for us to find peace in our hearts, we must live lives of integrity that are aligned with God’s moral law.

Why? Because we were created in the image of God. We were created for something great and beautiful. And it’s sad when we settle for squalid lives and wallow in sinful behavior.

A young student, fresh out of Princeton, penned these words in the midst of the temptations he was facing:

“I would be true, for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure, for there are those who care;
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.”
Those words may sound archaic but are an important reminder to know that, when confronted by many temptations, the choices we make affect us, and others.

The Apostle Paul said: “Do not let sin reign in your body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace . . .”

Amen.