

PASTORALLY SPEAKING

by Jackson Morro

To say that we are living in challenging times would be an understatement. We are living in a world and in a nation enjoying advanced technology and unparalleled prosperity. We see, however, a major crisis of the human spirit on every hand. Human problems increase and amplify every day. It is all too evident that our flawed, sinful nature needs redemption if we are to ever really solve the problems that face our world today. Fortunately, there is an answer for those who want it:

You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. (Acts 10:38)

That's the answer for today. It would be so easy to just give up and say, "Let the world self-destruct – the righteous will go to heaven and the evil will go to hell." But I believe Our Lord Jesus would have us go on right to the very last moment eagerly proclaiming His Gospel of the kingdom, tackling the problems of this generation head on with the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Word of God.

Today I want to deal with what I feel are the three greatest pastoral problems ahead for those who minister for at least the next 10 years. Problems exist because we live in a sinful, fallen world. But glory to God, there are powerful, effective answers for these problems and the answer to each is rooted in the resurrection power available to us in the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Every problem a pastor or ministering Christian encounters is not a cause for defeat and despair, but rather an opportunity for healing, redemption, and victory in Jesus Christ.

I want to look at these three pastoral problems in the following manner: 1) Name the specific problem; 2) point out the specific cause and consequences of the problem; and 3) point out the specific answer and remedy from God's Word.

1) The first major pastoral problem we face is the existence of an epidemic of drug abuse and addiction, alcohol addiction and substance abuse. Substance abuse has invaded all levels and classes of our society. It seems we all know someone who is or has been addicted to a substance, be it

heroin, cocaine, alcohol, prescription drugs or something else. We even see celebrities with “fame and fortune” entering drug rehabilitation clinics. The problem is here – to deny it is foolishness.

How did we get here? I propose to you today that our current drug epidemic is the result of our diminished respect and belief in the power of the Holy Spirit in our pulpits and society. It’s no accident that as liberal theology (i.e., the “theology of unbelief”) started hitting our seminaries and pulpits in the late 1960s and early 1970s that drug experimentation began and has grown. “Dead theology” has opened the door for people to seek a counterfeit religious experience in the “high” of drug use. Most of society has missed that the real root of drug use and addiction is spiritual – it is satanic and demonic in its origins. While creating an illusion of power and ecstasy, it results in physical, psychological and spiritual slavery to a created substance, with the end result of wasted human potential, mental illness, physical illness, demonic possession, and even death.

Let me repeat – the source of drug addiction is spiritual – it is a condition of spiritual rebellion against God and not a psychological coping mechanism. God’s pastoral remedy is 1) we have to restore the power of the Holy Spirit in churches, especially the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, 2) we must boldly, clearly expose the root of drug use as spiritual and demonic, and 3) we must confront drug users with the hard facts of how it is destroying their lives.

2) The second major pastoral problem in the coming years will involve issues of marriage and the family. Marriage and the family are the most basic institutions in human life. Before there were any churches, temples or synagogues, God had established marriage and the family. To weaken these is to weaken civilized society itself. Today, we see a high divorce rate, as much as 50%. We see people in unstable relationships that bypass the covenant of marriage. We even see those who are trying to redefine the nature of marriage by trying to sanctify so-called “alternate lifestyles” (homosexual unions) which are really behaviors the Word of God calls sin and abomination.

Again, how did we get here? Hebrews 13:4 states a godly principle that the marriage bed is to be undefiled and marriage is to be held in honor by all, for God Himself will judge adulterers and fornicators. Again, we have undergone a gradual process, probably since the late 1960s and early 1970s down to today where marriage has been devalued. It hasn’t happened overnight, but again the problem is here – to deny it is foolishness.

With the “sexual revolution” we began a process of honoring sin and fornication rather than marriage. We honor divorce and adultery rather than

the marriage covenant and commitment. Living together without marriage has become as acceptable as marriage. Many call the marriage certificate “only a piece of paper.” As a result, we are reaping severe consequences in our personal lives. Instead of marriages that would produce emotional security and the mutual fulfillment of spouses, we have created relationships that result in 1) insecurity because of lack of covenant commitment, 2) a sense of personal violation because of adultery, and 3) a general devaluation of the individual human person.

We are producing children that are spiritually and emotionally dysfunctional because they are not receiving the love, security and discipline that a healthy family provides. For the most part, we have lost the truth definition of marriage and the family.

Let me say forthrightly that the whole attempt to redefine marriage to include same-sex couples is only being discussed because of a prior long-term erosion of the definition of true marriage. Some of the things being discussed today wouldn't even be mentioned if we had honored true marriage. What is the pastoral remedy? 1) We must boldly preach that marriage be held in honor by ALL (not just Christians, but ALL) 2) Christians themselves must live by the Word of God concerning marriage and 3) we must support and nurture healthy family life.

3) The third major pastoral issue we face is increasing violence. Watching the news, reading the newspapers, experiencing everyday life, we see an increasingly violent world. Murder, assault, gang violence, the physical abuse of women and children which we see at times ending in death, are increasing. These severe cases are really only the tip of the iceberg of a more extensive problem. The problem of increased criminal violence is here – to deny it is foolishness.

Again, how did we get here? There is one simple answer that too many people don't want to admit. The practice of shedding the blood of innocent human beings through abortion has turned loose a spirit of violence in our nation and in our world. The Word of God uses the word “innocent” in 40 places. Of those, 25 references (60%) are warnings from God not to shed innocent blood. God warns there will be severe consequences for shedding innocent blood: 1) We'll reap a harvest of violence; 2) our homes will become desolate; 3) we'll lose our children to evil; and 4) we'll be vulnerable to attacks from foreign nations.

The root cause of our violence today is that we approve the shedding of innocent blood of helpless human babies in the womb. A popular current phrase is “connecting the dots,” which describes accurately diagnosing a problem by identifying its causes. Unfortunately, the United States is better

at formulating catchy phrases than following the wisdom in those phrases. We're not "connecting the dots" of abortion and increased violence. What is the pastoral answer? 1) An uncompromising pro-life stand in the pulpit and public forum, 2) pursuing of every voluntary means through education and counseling to prevent abortion, and 3) pursuing of every legal means to stop abortion permanently. Then peace will return to our land.

Pastorally speaking, there's a lot of work ahead. Yes, there are severe problems, but yes, there are answers. There is THE ANSWER – the person of Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord.

Jesus is the Source of forgiveness and eternal life, and whatever situation of need you're in, He has the answer and IS the answer.

Our generation is a "morally challenged" generation. Pastorally speaking, when the history of our generation is written, may we be found faithful – that in the midst of these challenges, we stood for godly goodness – the only real answer for a suffering world.