

The Vine Committee

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**Brother
Martin
Writes**

At the peak of our Fund Raising drive for the Church Rebuilding, I considered seriously whether it was right to buy TOTO so that we can contribute significantly to the shortfall of funds. I am sure that thought might have passed through some of your minds. Maybe some even did it in desperation to raise funds. Rev Anthony also mentioned it in one of his sermons. Yet I can confidently say that if I had sought your advice whether that was the right thing to do, most if not all of us would say that it was the wrong means to raise funds for church because it goes against the principle of “In God we Trust”. God will provide. Indeed He did, praise the Lord.

Non-Christians cannot understand why we think it is wrong to play TOTO or 4D. After all it is only a mere \$1 to win \$2 million or more. We probably drop a \$1 coin and never bother to pick it up. They cannot understand the principle that it is not the amount that counts but the lack of trust in

God. Recently, my boss told me that she is going to quit betting on 4D. That is after more than 15 years that I had known her. I can only guess how much she has donated to the pools.

Palm Sunday, Egypt, bombs went off in two churches killing 44 people. World leaders, including the Pope and President Trump, condemned the attacks but the perpetrators probably felt that they had done the right thing and were deserving of eternal rewards. What do you think? Do you defend their actions or do you keep silence? Does silence mean consent? In fact, everybody may be bothered by it; they're just being silent. You can't be sure that their silence truly means they are consenting to it.

On the other side of the coin, if you are being silent about an issue, be aware that others may very well be interpreting that as consent.

When things go wrong, are Christians to take the defensive mode and say that it was the right thing to do? We do not condemn but should we defend? Do we have a position to take? Can we take the “no comment” route and leave the world thinking that we cannot differentiate right from wrong, that silence means consent?

Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent. Proverbs 17:28

The world has changed much. As Samuel Tan mentioned, we now live in an "i" world. It is all about me. There is no absolute rights or wrongs and those who are for the right dare not speak up and those who are for the wrongs are very vocal.

Oct. 29, 80 thousand people had taken part in a "gay pride" in Taipei to seek the approval of the law for same sex marriages.

Apr. 5, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte faced criticism for defending adultery saying, "This is a world of hypocrisy. Who among you here does not have a mistress? But really there are so many women and you (have) so short a time in this world. My God!" that drew laughter from the crowd.

My guess is that if men were to marry men, then there would be many women left behind for President Duterte.

We do not condemn because we ourselves are sinners, ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God Romans 3:23.

Excerpt From Martin Luther's Bible Commentary on Romans 2:

We are unable to keep the law for to fulfill the law means to do its work eagerly, lovingly and freely, without the constraint of the law; it means to live well and in a manner pleasing to God, as though there were no law or punishment. It is the Holy Spirit, however, who puts such eagerness of unconstrained love into the heart and the Spirit is given only in, with, and through faith in Jesus Christ.

That is why faith alone makes someone just and fulfills the law; faith it is that brings the Holy Spirit through the merits of Christ. The Spirit, in turn, renders the heart glad and free, as the law demands.

Sin in the Scriptures means not only external works of the body but also all those movements within us which bestir themselves and move us to do the external works, namely, the depth of the heart with all its powers. No external work of sin happens, after all, unless a person commit himself to it completely, body and soul. In particular, the Scriptures see into the heart, to the root and main source of all sin: unbelief in the depth of the heart. Thus, even as faith alone makes just and brings the Spirit and the desire to do good external works, so it is only unbelief which sins and exalts the flesh and brings desire to do evil external works.

That is why only unbelief is called sin by Christ, as he says in John, chapter 16, "The Spirit will punish the world because of sin, because it does not believe in me."

Because our flesh has not been killed, we are still sinners, but because we believe in Christ and have the beginnings of the Spirit, God shows us his favor and mercy, that he neither notices nor judges such sins. Rather he deals with us according to our belief in Christ until sin is killed.

Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith. Through faith, a person will do good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of God, who has shown him such grace. It is as impossible to separate works from faith. Therefore be on guard against your own false ideas and against the chatterers who think they are clever enough to make judgements about faith and good works but who are in reality the biggest fools. Ask God to work faith in you; otherwise you will remain eternally without faith, no matter what you try to do or fabricate.

Extract from an Internet site:

When a Christian says, for example, that homosexual behavior is a sin and that same-sex marriage is wrong, he or she is often met with objections like the "Who do you think you are, telling someone who they can and cannot love? You're a sinner, too!" Some people will even quote Matthew 7:1, where Christ said during the Sermon on the Mount, "Judge not, that you be not judged." When we consider the concept of judging, especially as it relates to the Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells us to be discerning, not condemning.

There are significant logical problems with the claim that believers should not make judgments. The first becomes evident when we read the context of Matthew 7:1-5. Here, Christ is warning believers against making judgments in a hypocritical or condemning manner. That type of judging is a characteristic often associated with the Pharisees during the ministry of Jesus. Matthew 7:5, "Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." The point Jesus emphasizes here is to judge yourself first before you make judgments about others. Jesus is telling believers to be discerning when it comes to false teaching and false prophets because they "look" Christian, but their goal is to lead the flock astray.

What Christ teaches His believers is that if we ourselves are not personally repenting of our sins, we are in no place to tell others how sinful they are acting.

Perhaps we do not condemn because we are all hypocrites, constrained by the law and society. If the law breaks down and what is sinful is socially acceptable, we would probably join in the fun. That's what hypocrites are, not super good but superficially good.

Martin Cheah