

A New Covenant:

Biblical Singleness, Marriage, Divorce, and Sexual Purity

Presentation 1: We

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

2010-02-06

[http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/2010/kirl-anc1 .pdf](http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/2010/kirl-anc1.pdf)

<http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/rar/kirl-anc1.php>

The Most Fundamental Argument Against Christianity	2
A Study in Corporate Connectivity: Achan	5
Modes of Corporate Continuity	8
A Study in Hypocrisy: The Woman Caught in Adultery	10
Conclusion	13

Presenter: Larry Kirkpatrick  
Location: Bonners Ferry Seventh-day Adventist Church, ID, USA  
Delivery: 2010-02-06  
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2010-02-26 23:45Z  
Type: Sermon

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: Larry Kirkpatrick, "We," ONLINE AT: <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/2010/kirl-anc1.pdf>. THIS ARTICLE IS subject to a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses>).

## **The Most Fundamental Argument Against Christianity**

The most fundamental argument against Christianity offered by the unbeliever is:

I do not claim to believe in Jesus, and I do A. You claim to believe in Jesus, and you do A. Our behavior is the same. If what you teach is true, your life fails to give evidence that it is. The Christian witness is not credible.

When Christians and non-Christians are compared, rates of marital success show only negligible differences. If there is anywhere, empirically, where the church of the living God appears to have failed, it is in what has frequently happened when two supposedly converted people have lived together in marriage. God says that He joins two together, that the two become one flesh. Too often, the “Christian” marriage glorifies only the enemy of God.

Today, we embark on a series of biblical studies that will touch every life in the hearing of this voice. Some complain that only rarely does the church “get relevant.” We will see about that. For, in the next several messages, we address, in a family-appropriate way, topics including biblical singleness, marriage, divorce, and sexual purity. And in the end, I pray without ceasing, that most, or perhaps all of the members of this congregation, will be ready to enter afresh into a covenant in these areas to live by every revealed truth that proceeds from the mouth of God—particularly in the area of marriage.

These are hard topics. Today, we will look at two major passages, two that at first glance would not seem to go together. The beginning of the message may be somber, but look for light at the end of today’s tunnel too.

Let’s face it Bonners Ferry Seventh-day Adventist church; Our Christian witness in this community is damaged. Why are we here? To live and give the Third Angel’s Message; that is, to win souls to Jesus and to facilitate the preparation of those souls for heaven. But, if, because

there is sin in the camp, our witness becomes non-credible, we will fail. Hearts will be lost to Jesus because we were neither hot nor cold, and because we contaminated the world with a slimy and tepid witness.

This will not be a witch-hunt. We are not going backwards. Many of us, in the frailty of our humanity, have made mistakes—huge mistakes. There is no replay button. We can change neither past nor future, only the present. That is where the axe must fall; if there are changes to be made, they can only be made in the present.

So, we are not here to point fingers, or to become pharisees standing stupidly in God's radiation and blindly intoning, "I thank you God that I am not like other men." It is just exactly the opposite. All of us have feet of clay, all of us, but for the grace of God, would fail. Many are haunted by doubts. A mist separates between us and our God. We are not sure where we stand with Him. How then can we endure the times of intensity before us? We have to get completely clear with Him. We need to know exactly where we stand.

Join me between the porch and the altar. We have only two potential outcomes here: blessing or cursing. That is where we are already. We are already under either His blessing or a curse. We live in the time of the outpouring of the latter rain.

Where is it?

Isaiah may know (Isaiah 59:1-3 ESV) (Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are to the English Standard Version):

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness.

Encouragement: God is listening! And He is as ready to save as ever He has been. But if we are anything like His people in Isaiah's day, we must face the likelihood that our sins have made a separation between us and Him.

There is a principle that we will return to throughout this series, and so let's touch it right here. Open to 2 Samuel 24:24 and let's let it sink down into our ears. David said:

I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.

We are not saved by our works. But if there is a living connection between the human branch and the divine Vine, then we will not be satisfied, not for a moment, to give to God anything but a committed life. And we will not be content to give to Him the leftovers of our lives, but we will count the cost of being Jesus' disciples and what we do give to Him will cost us something. If Christianity is going to matter on planet earth in 2010, it is going to have to cost us something.

One more thing. There is a blindness that afflicts us. There is a dodge all are prone to indulge. When God's finger begins writing on the wall, and judgment comes down upon our deeds, we immediately define ourselves separate of those condemned; we think of ourselves as being the righteous ones, and insist that the judgment that has come is for those sinners over there. But *we* are in all of this together. *We* are God's church together. *We* stand or *we* fall as a congregation together.

*We.*

We are part of something larger than ourselves. God is the Maker, not just of you and of me, but everyone. When we began to understand who He is and determined to shape our lives

according to His values, we sought to become part of His community seeking that same goal. We became His representatives. We entered His covenant. We joined ourselves to His community.

But in 2010 we live lives quite separated from each other. We tend to emphasize differences between each other, even within the believing community. We don't feel ourselves especially connected to others. Yet we are part of a larger whole.

### **A Study in Corporate Connectivity: Achan**

Turn to Joshua six. Israel is camped at Jericho. The city is closed up. God gives instructions to Joshua. God's people are to march round the city seven days, seven times. On the last day they are to march seven times and then shout, and the walls would fall down. We fast forward to that moment and listen in to Joshua's instructions (Joshua 6:16-24):

And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout, for the Lord has given you the city. And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord.' So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city. Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, 'Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.' So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.

All of this is in accordance with instructions that decades before God had given through Moses in Leviticus 27:28, 29:

But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the Lord, of anything that he has, whether man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord. No one devoted who is to be devoted for destruction from mankind, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.

Everything in the city, except Rahab and her close relatives, and except the silver and gold, was devoted to destruction. Notice carefully that the spoil in particular is mentioned, and that if these things are not treated as God has specified, if they are taken as plunder, Israel as a people would become devoted to destruction with them.

Jericho was taken. But unknown to the nation, disaster was also near.

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel (Joshua 7:1).

After destroying Jericho, Joshua sends a small force, only about 3,000 men, to take the city Ai. The soldiers are repelled, with three dozen killed. Joshua can hardly believe it. He pleads with God in prayer, but He cuts him short.

Notice, only one man was unfaithful, but only one man caused all Israel to experience the divine anger. Achan did this, but listen closely for the word “*they*” (Joshua 7:10-12):

The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.’

God’s instructions to Joshua continue (13-15). Everything gathers around this fact (v. 13):

There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.

Tomorrow the nation will be brought near, first by tribes, then by clans, then by households, then by individuals. The guilty will be destroyed. God could have executed judgment on Achan immediately. A puff of smoke and a crater where his tent had been, and all Israel would have known what God knew: the guilty party was Achan. So, why wait, why go through the process of sorting, group-by-group and family-by-family, who was guilty? What is God doing here?

God is doing two things. He is demonstrating the interconnectedness of the community. And He is also giving Achan space to repent and turn himself in. There is mercy with God.

Sin must be addressed. Sin cannot continue. God endures it but temporarily. It is destructive. It must be placed in quarantine and then eliminated from the camp. Did you hear what God said?

He who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel (v. 15).

One member of the collective transgresses the covenant; all Israel becomes responsible. One man steals from God that which had been devoted to destruction; the whole nation becomes devoted to destruction. But if all the nation participates in the corrective process, and then faithfully follows God's command, then the devoted things are taken away from Israel and God's wrath is removed. Insurance companies work in a similar way. They call it "ascending liability."

Alas, although granted time to repent, Achan did nothing. The process was gone through, Achan was found out, the devoted things recovered. Achan was stoned to death by Israel, his

remains burned. Let us be clear. When God has, in His Word, revealed and made clear His moral boundaries, our part is to affirm or deny them. Righteousness is righteousness, and sin is sin. We may agree with God who is love, or agree with Satan who is selfishness. In the case of Achan, Israel did the right thing. God's blessing was restored to His people. And by the way, was this grace? Israel was saved, wasn't it? This was a great deal of grace.

### **Modes of Corporate Continuity**

That was national Israel, Israel under the Theocracy. But there is more than one mode of corporate continuity.

1. Genetic — E.g., One who is born Jewish.
2. Ethnic — E.g., one who converts to Judaism.
3. Unilateral declaration — E.g., one who is “baptized” as an infant into the Roman Catholic church, or, the Calvinist teaching of Double-predestination, which that says that God declares that certain are on His list of “the elect” (the pre-saved) and certain are on His list of the doomed (the pre-condemned).
4. Contractual / covenantal — E.g., one who chooses to enter into church membership.

Some of these modes offer a high degree of corporate connectivity, others, less.

Connectivity between different levels of a structure may at times seem tenuous, but when it comes to connectivity within a unit, for example, a congregation, the connectivity is great. And the implications are clear: If we are members of this congregation, then by covenant we are members one of another. Paul gets it in 1 Corinthians 12:14:

For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

We are one church; we are one congregation; we are one community of faith; we are one body. Like Israel in the valley of Achor, we are each part of a collective whole.

What are some beliefs we share in common with each other?

Jesus is returning visibly, physically, audibly at the Second Coming

Sin is destructive

God is love

The Bible is God's primary source of revelation to us

Baptism is important

Heaven desires us to covenant together in church fellowship and membership

A good witness by a member reflects well on God and on the church; a bad witness by a member reflects poorly on God and on the church

Humans are not naturally immortal

The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord our God

It is good that we are connected by these beliefs. Really, we have much more in common with each other than we are used to thinking about. We elect our officers together, and each member has a vote in a church business meeting together. We want to draw hearts to Jesus here in Northern Idaho. This is a part of our Father's vineyard. This church sanctuary is ground zero here. You want to be a part of it. And you are. Each one of you is an individual. But also, all of us, collectively, are the Bonners Ferry Seventh-day Adventist Church. We have chosen to belong to something larger than ourselves. We have chosen to join ourselves to God. We are connected with Him and with each other. We have left Egypt but have not arrived in the promised land yet. We had better not forget that we are a *we*.

## **A Study in Hypocrisy: The Woman Caught in Adultery**

When warped values surround us, we are affected. Many will accept nothing short of our endorsement for every kind of immoral practice. And we may, almost reflexively, find ourselves feeling that our affirming God's moral boundaries seems strangely "unloving." But we must not forget that the church, the community of faith, does not create truth; she only discovers it. She listens to God, looks in the mirror, recognizes an unlikeness to Christ in herself. She surrenders that which she has mistakenly valued, and trades it for that which God has shown is of eternal value.

The Achan incident is not everything that the Bible says about removing evil from the midst of Israel. Neither are the people of God to countenance the sin of hypocrisy. John 8:1-11 contains the last portion of our exploration today: The woman caught in adultery. We know the story. Jesus is in or near the temple, teaching. Suddenly, a party of scribes and pharisees bursts through the crowd dragging a woman with them. They announce to Jesus that she has been caught in the very act of adultery. They point out that Moses called for such to be killed by stoning. Then, before the onlooking crowd, they ask Jesus, So what do You say about it?

Their reasons are presented in John. They are testing Jesus, and they are anticipating that on the basis of His response, they will be able to generate destructive charges against him. If He lets the woman go, He is disagreeing with Moses; if He calls for her to be killed, He is setting Himself above Roman law. Jesus is cornered.

So Jesus—What do you say about it?

Jesus says nothing. He bends down and begins to write on the ground. Just here it is important to acquaint ourselves with some of the Scriptures that Jesus would be remembering.

For example, Deuteronomy 22:22:

If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Verse 24 says that this is effected by taking them both out of the gates of the city and stoning them to death with stones. Deuteronomy 17:5-7 outlines the precise process. Listen carefully:

You shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Remember, Jesus is writing something on the ground. We are not, in the Bible, told what it was, but we know this. They continued to ask Him what His response was and He continued to write. Then He stood up, and declared, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." Then He bent down and continued to write on the ground. And then, the accusers begin to go out, from the oldest to the youngest. Soon all of them are gone. Only the woman remains.

Jesus asks her where are her accusers? "Has no man condemned you?" He asks. "No man, Lord," she replies.

Think about this. Here is a question. Where is the man caught in adultery, in the very act? His absence signals that the motivation behind charging this woman with adultery had little to do

with justice or a jealousy for God's honor. If Jesus shows no partiality, how could He acquiesce in the death of the woman but not of the man?

And think about this. A minimum of two witnesses were necessary to invoke the death penalty. But here, no witnesses remained to testify. All—apparently in response to Jesus' provocative question and also what He had written on the ground—had left. The accusers would have had to be the first ones to cast the stones of execution. Now they had left. Furthermore, Jesus was not a witness to this event. He could not justly condemn her. No wonder, then, He replies to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on, sin no more."

Was she guilty? The community of faith was built upon the revelation of God. In the Tanakh (Old Testament), God had laid down clear principles. Multiple witnesses must testify; guilt must be established; in a case of adultery, both parties must be put to death—not only the woman. The party must go outside the gates of the city. Then the execution was to begin with stones cast by the witnesses. Only then, was the congregation to join in and complete the removal of evil from the midst of Israel. The congregation had something to do with the removal of evil from its own midst.

What did Jesus do? He was meticulously fair. He perceived the hypocrisy of those who, under cover of God's name, would have killed this woman in order to create a bad feeling against Him. He kept to the agreed upon processes of the community. Then He bade the woman to go and refrain from sinning. In every way Jesus was right, and merciful, and just. The accusers are gone, now the woman leaves. The onlooking crowd, listening to the whole exchange, is left to ponder the goodness of God.

The most loving thing for Jesus to do was to affirm the moral boundaries of God, boundaries, indeed, which He Himself had marked out in revelation 1,000 years before. The most loving thing for Jesus to do was to protect the community of faith and to obey the commandments of God.

It is good for Jesus and it is good for Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Somewhere in a famous book about Jesus, I once read these very redemptive lines:

Those who are forward in accusing others, and zealous in bringing them to justice, are often in their own lives more guilty than they. Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein.

That day, No doubt, was a new beginning for the woman caught in adultery. Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17).

In Achan, we see God preserving His people from destruction, removing evil from the camp. In the woman caught in adultery, God revealed to the scheming men their hypocrisy. Not only the woman was set on a new course that day, but those schemers were brought face-to-face with their own evil. They were given opportunity to repent. I hope that we meet some from that party in heaven because Jesus was straight with them.

### **Conclusion**

Brothers and sisters, God's good name must be protected. Our witness must be credible. Let us keep in mind that to remove someone from membership in the church today is no pronouncement about their eternal salvation, nor is it anything like the imposition of a death penalty. Nor need removal from membership necessarily even be permanent.

If there is a clear moral line that God has drawn, and we affirm it, since God is love, and He is the Master of all morality, then our affirmation of that moral line is the most loving thing for us to do. To call an action of affirmation “unloving” is to say that we think we know better than God, we are more loving than God. We are not.

Jesus created His community in earliest Bible times, and 2,000 years ago upheld the principles of the community. His work was always redemptive. When possible, all were included in that redemption, but when sinners failed to demonstrate repentance by their behavior, they were granted their choice, and perished in their sin. Jesus did not approve of sin. Not ever. Neither can His people today. God calls us to higher ground. Must sin be removed from the camp? Always. But does God countenance hypocrisy in its removal? Never.

We have not tied together every loose end that we have introduced, but we have started the journey. Next time, we take up the topic of biblical singleness.

**Biographical note:** Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.