



The Distance Between Shame & Grace The Line in the Sand

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SO PA District Church of the Brethren

Recently, someone I would classify as an elder of the church stopped by my office for a visit. After asking what the elder needed to know from me, the elder asked, "How is it going in your new position?" In response I shared that the load was currently heavy. In addition to the normal administration of such an office, there were the abundance of congregations in the pastoral search process, along with those congregations finding themselves in economic straits, losing members and not having the financial base they once had to pay their staff, causing cutbacks on the local level. Then there are the usual disagreements in some churches, to which causes distress for both leadership and lay persons, topped with the issues found in our denominational circle. Yes, I said the work load was heavy but so to was the concern for the depth of our spirituality. Then the question came that continues to make me ponder the real responsibility of a leader's office – "What are you doing, Georgia, to help teach our church leaders what the Bible says?" WOW! I have been busy trying to keep the paperwork flowing, but what about the teaching part—the deeper delving into what Jesus said or maybe even left unsaid?

A recent Alban article entitled, Shame-Less and Grace-Full by Karen A. McClintock draws from the analogy of the writer's youth when she was taking dancing lessons and being shamed by her instructor for not always measuring up or being as graceful in those dance steps as some of the other students. She



states that in ballet training you have to look exactly like the other students and that she was mercilessly compared to the best students in the class. She learned that "grace can be achieved only through hard work. That grace is not free; either your parents pay for the lessons or you do. She learned that grace doesn't come naturally and that she could not become graceful out of her desire to dance; but had to overcome her unworthiness by righteous hard work. Only when she had achieved the perfect line, the perfect form, the perfect leap into the air, then, maybe, she could enjoy the riches of grace." McClintock went on to allude to the fact that we need to back away from "shame-laden messages from the pulpit so we do not become so defeated that we can't change our sinful ways. McClintock's article took me back to the Book of John where the Scribes and Pharisees were baiting Jesus into making a statement about the woman caught in adultery. No matter how Jesus would have replied to those Pharisees, they would have found fault with Jesus' response. His response to those Scribes and Pharisees is often used today when some want to make a point and they indicate the line has been drawn in the sand. The scripture says that, "He made no reply, but bent down and wrote on the ground with His finger." Certainly, His gesture heightened the tension of that moment. Whatever, we try to make of His action, His words are certainly clear enough – "If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Did He possibly write some of the Scribes and Pharisees names in the ground with the names of those women they had cavorted with some time in their past life, or uplifted that one of them had cheated someone?

This passage has much to say to us in today's world which is full of what many of us have been taught is immoral. Sadly, sexual activity
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before, alongside and outside marriage is today a fact of social life. It happens, I dare say, both by those in and outside the church. Unfortunately, not only our society's promiscuity is subtle and unrelenting, it is for some, a way of life. Writer John Stott comments that the context of this story in the Book of John, is first a plea for understanding that blanket condemnation gets no support from Jesus which ties in with McClintock's theory of shame laden sermons not being valuable. Stott goes on to say that the pulpit needs urgently and repeatedly to clarify the Christian norm of sexual sanctity and highlight its' benefits, which certainly is the honoring of God whose will, these standards reflect. In its handling of the individual who has failed; however, the church, in its pastoral mission needs to move with the greatest sensitivity and understanding. (P 126)

So the question is, was there a line in the sand? Scripture does not say it was a line in the sand, but that Jesus wrote in the sand –What did He write? I dare say we will never know during our walk here on earth, but we do know that He called out the Pharisees and Scribes for their righteous indignation. We also need to be sure and grasp the fact that Jesus told the woman in the text to go and sin no more. This scripture learning is not one or the other, it is a BOTH AND.

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Pg. 126 - The Message of John by John R.W. Stott

DISTRICT NEWS

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Annual Conference Moments with the Moderator

Annual Conference Moderator, Tim Harvey, is planning to do a number of videos between now and AC called "Moments with the Moderator." These videos will be uploaded and posted on the AC website and Facebook page. View the first posting by going to www.brethren.org/ac, then click on "Moments with the Moderator" in the right-hand column.



What Are American's Main Concerns? The George Barna Group conducted surveys to find out, and their data indicates that U.S. voters are most interested in issues concerning security and comfort, and are least interested in moral issues.

Do you think this helps explain why society is so accepting of immoral behavior? No indication of how many Christians participated in the surveys, or how many, if any, were COB.



Sympathy is extended to the family of Paul Ritchey, York Madison Ave., who died on 2/4.

Sympathy is extended to Jerry & Vernne Greiner, Mechanicsburg COB, on the death of Vernne's mother, Carolyn Wetzel, on 2/7.

Remember in prayer Pastor Brian Markle's father, Mac, who recently underwent double bypass open heart surgery.