

## *Smoky Mountain Reflections #191*

Last month we discussed identity politics from a perspective of marriage and the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. This month I would like to continue that theme but focus on our role as members of the world we live in. In 1 John chapter 2 we are admonished to remember that we are to be *in* but not *of* the world. This can be a difficult proposition in the face of intense persecution, as has been common to Christians around the world throughout history and in the present. Today we find ourselves in a society which used to view Christians as virtuous and trustworthy, but increasingly paints us as mean, bigoted, “homophobes”. Unfortunately, it is difficult to discuss this topic without being accused of lobbying for some “rights group”, “victim group”, or the evil “status quo group”. So, let me make clear that this pastor believes and teaches that God’s word is clear from front to back that there is **one human race**. ALL are created in God’s image and as such, are priceless beloved members of God’s created human race. Differences in size, shape, ability, color, height, width, disability, intelligence, etc., are all differences that God designed either to show his great creativity or to give us multiple opportunities to love and care for each other while experiencing His love in all the relationships he blesses us with. All are of EQUAL value to God. He bled and died to redeem all!

A large “machine” of sin exists in this world, and it divides us from peaceful, harmonious God pleasing relationships. It does so by isolating us from God and each other; divorce, loneliness, depression, greed, envy, and revenge are just some of the cogs in this machine that our sinful world and flesh, it has as its fuel and oil our sinful nature. That being said, I set before you one example of information that sinners on all sides of the discussion will continue to use to divide instead of to point out that we are all the same as sinners loved by God. (Or, as I used to say in my Navy days, we are all in the same boat, and infighting only endangers our peace and safety.) We must speak the truth in love; that is what those called to be in but not of the world do.

Back in March, I posted on Facebook a 13-minute video of Tucker Carlson revealing some interesting facts about the supposed “patriarchal privileged male” in America. Let me touch on a few highlights (or lowlights). The average male lifespan is 5 years shorter than females’, men are twice as likely to be addicts, the majority of overdose deaths are males, and 77% of all suicides are committed by men. Between 1997 and 2014, there was a 43% rise in suicide deaths among middle aged American men. The rates are highest among American Indian and white men, who kill themselves at about ten times the rate of Hispanic and black women. Over 90% of inmates are male. More girls than boys graduate high school, women outnumber men in graduate school, earn the majority of doctoral degrees, and are the majority of new enrollees in both law and medical schools. There are now seven million working age American men who are no longer in the labor force. They’ve dropped out. Nearly half of them take pain medication on any given day; that’s the highest rate in the world. 20% of American children grow up in fatherless homes, and 70% of prison inmates grow up in those homes. Single women buy their own homes at more than twice the rate of single men. Tucker Carlson also cited many other mental, financial and physical realities for American men that show how they are as a group failing, in body, mind and spirit.

He claims that this a crisis, but our leaders pretend it’s not happening. While there may be some truth to that statement, what ails American men is what ails us all; we are suffering collectively and individually from our sins and the sins of others, life in a cursed and broken world. While he may have cited some things that are a cause for concern and action by those in positions of power, influence, and responsibility, establishing another victim group is not the answer. We need to do away with the concept that our society can gather around to right the wrongs of the past by getting our pound of flesh from the hide of the oppressor. “Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.” We are called to love God and our neighbors as best we can with his help, and that includes being forgiving towards those who have offended or harmed us or our “group identity”. Christ bled and died for all those offenses; we need not carry the burden of fixing a world that cannot and will not be fixed. Jesus said that the poor will always be with us. Let us cast aside the ideas of identity politics and “us versus them”. Let us act like the baptized children of God that we are and treat the whole human race created in God’s image with the love, dignity, and kindness that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ would have us treat them with.

Your neighbor in Christ,  
Pastor Portier