

I recently attended a workshop by MLC Professor Mark Paustian called "Communicating Christ in the 21st Century." One of Prof. Paustian's phrases stuck with me. **"Our current cultural narrative strives to reach a point where no one is condemned for who they are or what they do."** Basically, society wants to establish the rule that "no one can say anyone is wrong."

And so, Christians with a Biblical mindset on topics like homosexuality, sexual ethics, marriage, creation, and God are often viewed with contempt. Because the Bible teaches that some actions or beliefs are wrong, a Biblical mindset is deemed unloving. True love means accepting everything as good. Thus sayeth the world.

And yet, the TV show Intervention, a reality show about people staging interventions to get their loved ones help with issues like eating disorders, or addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, or gambling, has been airing for 18 seasons. And for over 350 episodes, Americans haven't sat on their couches angrily shouting, "Shame on them for telling their friend he's wrong!" No! We rightly think those interveners are loving, as they bravely jeopardize their relationships to get their loved ones help to break free from horrible addictions. People acknowledge that a deadly, destructive habit is bad, and needs to be corrected before it's too late.

Do you see the disconnect? Intervening when someone is caught in what God calls a spiritually destructive lifestyle is condemned as "hateful," but intervening when someone is caught in an emotionally or physically destructive lifestyle is praised as "loving."

This puts Christians at a high-pressure crossroads. Knowing that Jesus commands, **"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault,"** we want to help people break free from destructive sinful lifestyles before it's too late, but we risk being ostracized or alienating relationships for doing so. Should we accept every belief and lifestyle, according to society's definition of love? Or should we point out the truth of God's Word to people caught in sin, according to God's definition of love?

In Exodus 32, we see people taking both paths of that crossroads, and where each path leads.

3 months after God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt, they arrived at Mount Sinai. There, as God's glory boomed and flashed, God gave his covenant law to his covenant people, including his first commandment—**"You shall have no other gods."** As Jesus echoed 1,500 years later, God wanted his people to love him more than anything else!

But after Moses had been on Mount Sinai for a month, the people feared they'd been abandoned. So, they demanded that Moses' brother, Aaron, make them some new gods to follow. Aaron was at the crossroads. Would he rebuke this sin of idolatry because he loved God most? Or would he keep silent to avoid confrontation?

Sadly, Aaron buried his head in the sand, fashioning Israel's jewelry into a golden calf idol. Not even six months after God freed them from slavery, Israel re-chained themselves as slaves to idolatry.

Why didn't Aaron intervene when Israel plunged into idolatry? Because Aaron was also breaking the first commandment. We're not told that Aaron worshiped the golden calf, but his actions reveal that he loved other things more than God. By not standing up for God's truth, it's clear that Aaron valued his relationships, his personal safety, and his earthly life more than he valued the true God. He kept silent to keep the things he valued most intact.

Is it any different when someone fails to speak up when their child moves in with his girlfriend? When you say nothing against your friend's wild, drunken hookup weekend? When you keep silent about your sibling who

hasn't been in the pews for six months? When I pretend to not notice a member's sin, so we don't have to talk about it?

We fail to point out sin when we worship at other altars. Bowing to the idol of our friends or family. "I don't want to jeopardize our relationship!" Singing the praises of society. "I want to blend in, not stand out." Although we love God, we often give larger portions of our heart to other things.

As Moses descended Mount Sinai, carrying the 10 Commandments God had written, he was also at the crossroads. Would he stage an intervention to prevent the people from straying even further from God? Or would he avoid confrontation like Aaron?

Reaching the foot of the mountain, Moses smashed the tablets like the Israelites had smashed their promises to God. Then he smashed their golden calf as if to say, "You'd rather worship this powerless idol than the all-powerful God?" making them literally "drink in their idolatry."

Then he confronted Aaron, saying, "***What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?***" Worshiping other gods wasn't Aaron's idea, but the guilt fell on Aaron also. When he should have confronted the people over sin, Aaron kept silent. Inaction against sin also causes guilt, not just sin in action.

Two brothers. Two different paths. Which was loving, and which was hateful? Much of society would say that Aaron was loving. He didn't judge, he just let the people do what they thought was best.

But is that love? Is it loving for me to stay silent to keep an earthly relationship intact while my friend walks the path to hell? Is it loving to smile and nod while Satan prowls closer to devour my relative? Is it loving to turn a blind eye to sin when God says, "***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.***" No more loving than handing an alcoholic a beer. If we care more about someone's eternity than their temporary, we can't pretend sin isn't sin. Our love for God and our love for them necessitates an intervention of love.

And that's why, at this deadly spiritual tipping point, God, in love for Israel's eternal souls, commanded Moses to intervene. Less than 2 months after promising to have no other gods, they were already serving other gods. They needed help to escape their deadly idolatry before they fell away completely.

But if this was an intervention of love, why did God command the Levites to grab swords and kill? Killing 3,000 people seems pretty brutal! But the Israelites were running wild in unconstrained sin, a large portion teetering dangerously close to the edge of unbelief and eternal damnation. They needed a drastic reminder that sin is serious; life or death.

But God still acts mercifully! Consider this. When the Israelites left Egypt, they numbered about 600,000 men, not including women and children. Even conservatively estimating, the Israelites numbered around 2 million. To help Israel break the eternally destructive actions they were caught in, the Levites killed only .15% of the population, so that 100% wouldn't be eternally destroyed in hell. The God of justice had every right to destroy all of those 2 million sinners. And yet, the God of grace lovingly intervened to divert them from the path of eternal destruction.

Admittedly, this account makes us squirm uncomfortably, because deep down, we all feel the guilt of our own idolatry. We know we deserve to feel the steel of swords and the fires of hell. Because we've been Aaron, idolaters who fail to lovingly confront others over sin. Because we've been Israel, sinners who need to be confronted for our own idolatry.

And that's why God enacted the ultimate intervention for the world's sin. Instead of destroying every sinner who deserves hell, God chose to destroy only one man. Not 1%, not .15% percent, but one man to bear the sins of all--his own perfect son Jesus, who never failed to keep God's law. Who never put his relationship as God's Son, or his divine power and glory ahead of his desire to free the world from its slavery to sin and hell. The perfect intervention of love. And that intervention changes the way we intervene for others.

Obviously, God's doesn't command us to strap on swords and cut people down. But he does tell us to lovingly intervene when someone is caught in unrepentant sin. Paul wrote, ***"If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently."***

But how do we intervene gently? How do we ***"speak the truth in love,"*** while best loving those caught in sin? It's simple. In order to best love your neighbor, you need to love Jesus more than them. Loving Jesus more than you love that person helps your intervention in four ways: It allows you to have a clear picture of who your neighbor is, of who you are, of who Jesus is, and of what you speak.

When you love Jesus more than your neighbor, you'll see your neighbor as Jesus sees them: a blood-bought, perfectly loved child of God. And if you see them like that, you'll be more concerned about their eternal soul than about your earthly relationship or their feelings, and you'll lovingly point out the sin that's leading them away from Jesus.

When you love Jesus more than your neighbor, you'll see yourself accurately; not intervening as a self-righteous person who never sins, but as a sinner who completely depends on Jesus for forgiveness. That leads us to intervene not looking down our noses at them, but with a compassionate arm around their shoulder, because you know the horrible struggle of sin, and desperately want everyone to experience the beautiful unburdening of guilt through repentance and forgiveness in Christ.

When you love Jesus more than your neighbor, you'll remember who God is. The one who sent Jesus to intervene for the sins of all. The one of whom John says, ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."***

When you love Jesus more than your neighbor, you'll remember the authority of the message you speak. The Law we use to point out sin isn't man's opinion or church's decision. ***"The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God."*** The law comes from God himself! So, when you intervene, you're not judging. You're lovingly pointing them to the truth of God's own Word. And God promises that when we use his Word, ***"it does not return to him empty, but accomplishes what he desires."*** When you love Jesus more than you love your neighbor, you'll love them best for you and them.

I have a friend who is a recovering alcoholic, and he's taking classes to become an alcohol addiction counselor. He says he's perfect for the job, because he knows all the excuses alcoholics make; all the lies alcoholics tell themselves; all the mind games alcoholics play to convince themselves they're fine. He knows the lies firsthand, so he wants them to know the truth that they aren't fine, so they can get the help they need.

When you intervene for someone caught in sin, you intervene as one who knows the tricks, lies, and excuses. Help them see the truth. The truth of their sin. The truth of the forgiveness that is theirs in Christ. That, my friends, is love.