

Editorial: Questions, answers about adding Nicene Creed

June 5, 2024

Baptists aren't supposed to adopt creeds, are they? Editor Eric Black has questions about a proposed motion to do just that.

Editorial: Encouraging news during discouraging days

June 5, 2024

The Law Amendment, NAMB, DOJ investigation of the SBC. Yes, there's all of that. There's also a lot of good news happening this summer.

Editorial: BGCT, NAMB and the money

June 5, 2024

When significant sums of money changes hands, partnership necessitates being clear and upfront about expectations.

Editorial: Peacemaking is complicated and necessary business

June 5, 2024

Despite what you may have heard, peacemaking is not as simple as winning elections, passing certain laws, changing culture, growing the church, paying our debts, saying “we’re sorry”—just to name a few of the things people promise will bring us peace.

Peacemaking is more complicated than that.

If we can believe the news—and I believe we can believe enough of it to matter—the world is moving beyond conflicted to fractious. In such times, it is imperative that we who identify with Christ take on the complicated and necessary business of peacemaking.

Peace, if possible

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people.”

Paul wrote that. Paul, the apostle we love to quote and memorize, the apostle whose writing systematizes so much Christian theology. That Paul.

Along with his exhortation to be at peace with all people, Paul instructed: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ... Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never repay evil for evil to anyone. ... *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people.* Never take your

own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ‘But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’ (Romans 12:14-21, NASB).

How are we doing with that?

In the midst of a tumultuous, angry, fearful, anxious, suspicious, busy time, how are we doing with that? In a time when leaders stoke those fires while using God’s name, Christian labels and biblical language, how are we doing with *allof* that?

It’s interesting that every other instruction in that passage is declarative: bless, do not, never, feed, give. The only qualification to those last two—feed and give—is if the person is hungry or thirsty.

But peace: “If possible, so far as it depends on you.”

We live in these days as if to say, “Thank you, Paul, for that escape clause.” We live as though it isn’t possible for us, as though it doesn’t depend on us to be at peace with all people.

Or maybe it’s just me.

Defining peace

I want to revisit [an August editorial](#), perhaps because I need the reminder.

In August, I explored the meaning of peacemaking by way of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus called peacemakers blessed. The context—the Beatitudes, the opening of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12)—indicates Jesus expected his hearers, which now includes us, to be peacemakers.

But peacemaking in a conflicted world is a complicated business. And ours

is a conflicted world.

In August, I wrote in response to a host of things happening at the time, here and around the world. That list hasn't changed much over the last nine months. Except to add the horrors of the Israel-Hamas war, more natural disasters and additional political strife, here and around the world.

Part of what makes peace such a complicated business is we don't agree on definitions. "What one person calls 'peace' another derisively calls 'pacifism.' What is peacemaking in one situation is placating or avoidance in another," I wrote then. It's no less true now. This is just scratching the surface of disagreement about peace.

There is disagreement about what it takes to have peace. Some believe we must legislate it to have it. Others believe peace is internal work, not imposed from outside. Still others believe peace is pure gift, spiritual, supernatural.

In reality, peace needs something of all three. God does give us peace—that surpasses all understanding. We do have internal work to do in our hearts, minds and souls. And we do need guardrails to govern behavior for the good of society, even if we differ mightily on what those guardrails should be. Indeed, peacemaking is a complicated business.

But it's harder than that. "All people," Paul wrote. "Be at peace with all people."

'Be at peace with all people'

Some translations read, "Live at peace with everyone."

The context doesn't limit the reach of "all" to some people. The context indicates "all people" isn't just fellow Christians or, more specifically, those Christians who think like us, worship like us and vote like us.

Given the rest of Paul's instructions in the passage from Romans quoted above, "all people" means ... all people.

If we don't think it's possible to be at peace with all people, then we need to ask for God's gift of peace, and we need to do the internal work of discipleship, allowing the Spirit of Christ to shape us into the kind of followers who look an awful lot like the Lord who "emptied himself by taking the form of a bond-servant" (Philippians 2:7) and told us the disciple is not above the teacher (Matthew 10:24).

This isn't just complicated work; it's bloomin' hard work. It's no wonder we'd rather fight. At least fighting seems just.

We don't want to bless those who persecute us. We want to give as good as we get, tit for tat. We want to believe we are agents of God's wrath. We want to justify withholding from our enemies, bending the definition of "enemy."

We do consider ourselves wise, at least wiser than those who see things differently. And in our wisdom, we overcome what we consider evil with what we consider good. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. We've been redefining God's instructions from the first bite.

We've been at odds ever since.

We must give up that path and follow the footsteps of Jesus into the complicated and necessary work of peacemaking.

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Editorial: In or out of the SBC, one connection matters most

June 5, 2024

The SBC has significant business to consider during its 2024 annual meeting that will affect the connection of many SBC churches.

Editorial: Why we need to listen to protesters

June 5, 2024

We need to listen to protesters, not necessarily to agree, but to love and to learn. But those aren't the only reasons we need to listen.

Editorial: To make an impact,

you have to be there

June 5, 2024

Zoom in on the photo accompanying this article, the one up by the headline. What do you see? Do you see all of it?

Editorial: Superman is not your pastor

June 5, 2024

Superman is not your pastor. Even if he was, he'd still disappoint you. Why, then, do we expect pastors to be superheroes?

Editorial: 'Rejoice with those who rejoice'

June 5, 2024

If we are what we celebrate, then we need to know what we're celebrating, why we're celebrating it and that we're celebrating the right things.

Editorial: Loving our transgender neighbors

June 5, 2024

The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The second command is like it—to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

It's not just the Bible saying it. It's Jesus saying it.

When it comes to transgender, many point to another Scripture—Genesis 1:27: “Male and female God created them.”

The longer passage reads: “God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness.’ ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them” and told them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill, subdue and rule over all living things (Genesis 1:26-28 NASB).

For many, the discussion ends here. Or it's where many want the discussion to end.

But the world is a more complicated place than that. It's a place where some people, for whatever reason, do not situate themselves neatly in one of two categories—male and female. It's a place Christians are expected to engage through love. And not just any love—God's love.

A framework for love

Alan Noble, associate professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University and widely published writer on Christianity and culture, provides a helpful framework for this engagement.

During a March 19 keynote address at East Texas Baptist University, Noble [called for the cultivation of four virtues](#): humility, desiring the good of others, prudence and fortitude.

The following is from an audio recording of Noble's keynote furnished to me by ETBU.

Humility

"All wisdom involves humility," Noble said.

"Humility means not assuming that you are an expert on every topic. ... Humility means knowing what you don't know, and accepting that you don't know, and that others probably know a lot more than you do," Noble continued.

"Humility means honestly and openly listening to and considering different points of view" without prior assumptions about another person's perspective, he said. Importantly, "openness to ideas does not require you to accept ideas," Noble noted.

Desiring the good of others

Loving our neighbor begins with humility. Loving our neighbor means desiring our neighbor's good, Noble said.

"Desiring the good of the other does not mean that you desire whatever the other person wants," he said, but does involve wanting the other person to know the truth.

Rather than actually desiring the good of others, however, we often desire that those with whom we disagree be shamed and punished, Noble cautioned.

He also warned that desiring the good of others “will be costly. It will take more work and will demand more of your time.”

Desiring the good of the other means we communicate with others in a way that invites them to see the truth, rather than coercing them into our view of the truth, Noble said.

Prudence and fortitude

We do not always need to speak or be the one who speaks. It is prudence, not cowardice, to know when not to speak, Noble explained.

Fortitude, or courage, means being “willing to lose social standing to speak for the truth.” Prudence should guide fortitude, so our courage does not become reckless, Noble warned.

A Christian response

These four virtues are relevant to how Christians interact with the issue of transgender, a topic brought to the fore last week by a [presidential proclamation](#). We must not let the proclamation divert us from our duty to love our neighbors—including our transgender neighbors. What that love may look like is a source of much debate.

As Christians try to fulfill their obligation to love, we must not overlook two simple facts: Transgender people are created in the image of God no less than anyone else, and therefore are worthy of compassion no less than anyone else.

Whatever one’s position is on transgender, these two things are non-

negotiable: Transgender people are created in the image of God, and Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

If we think a transgender person is anything less than our neighbor, then we are deeming that transgender person as less than or other than human. I am certain that attempt to qualify our love will not stand up to scrutiny when we stand before our Maker.

How to love

Christ's followers are expected to interact with our transgender neighbors through love. And not just any love—God's love.

We can love our transgender neighbors well by moving beyond typical caricatures of transgender people to learn more about the complexity of transgender.

We can love our transgender neighbors well by listening to their stories. Their stories are just as important as ours, illuminating how we came to be who, what and where we are now.

We also can love our transgender neighbors well by remembering they are whole persons, not simply gender identities. We can offer dignity, honor and respect when we take the time to discover their interests, gifts and talents—some of which we may share—or by following Jesus' example and eating a meal together.

We can read books like *Talking to Kids about Gender Identity: A Roadmap for Christian Compassion, Civility, and Conviction* by Mark Yarhouse and *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church and What the Bible Has to Say* by Preston Sprinkle.

Neither book is perfect, but they are a helpful start toward understanding transgender by providing language and research alongside a biblical and

Christian perspective.

While learning can be helpful, knowledge is not sufficient for fulfilling our obligation to love our neighbor. There must be more, and Noble's framework helps here.

Remembering what Jesus did

Our love for our transgender neighbors must be built on humility. Humility does not make our transgender neighbors the object of shame, contempt or hostility, but recognizes each of us contains brokenness in need of Christ's redemption and restoration.

Rather than heaping shame on a transgender person, we must remember what we as Christians just commemorated and celebrated.

We spent the last week remembering Christ bore our shame to the point of death, even death on a cross, and that he told us that to follow him means denying ourselves and taking up our own cross.

The week of commemoration culminated in our celebration of Christ's rising from the dead to defeat sin and shame, and that he invites us, calls us to share in his everlasting life. What invitation are we issuing to our transgender neighbors?

The challenge

If we were to ask transgender people that question, I am certain they would say "invitation" is the wrong word. They would say we condemn without inviting. They would say we have generated more fear than Christlike love.

Our transgender neighbors should not be afraid to be in our presence. They should not be afraid we will revile them, berate them or otherwise harm

them, even as we hold to our convictions about gender. This is possible—even if not easy—if we humbly, compassionately and prudently communicate our convictions—in word *and* deed.

Our foundational and guiding conviction is love. And not just any love—God’s love.

As Noble pointed out, loving our neighbor does not mean anything goes. It does mean when we interact with a transgender person, we will treat that person as a human being, not a cause. Our words and our actions will convey dignity, honor and respect that should be accorded any human being.

Some will accuse me of arguing for affirmation of transgender and all that goes with it. No, I’m asking us to do something much harder than that.

I’m asking us to hold our biblical convictions about gender while extending as much compassion, dignity, honor and respect toward transgender people as we expect to be extended toward us.

Why? Because the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with *all* our heart *and* soul *and* mind *and* strength. The second command is like it—to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

This love cost our Lord his life.

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Guest Editorial: Letters to my past and future selves

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A married young adult mom of two children, Baylor graduate, NICU nurse and church member shares letters to her past and future self.

Editorial: Celebrate our organizations by supporting them

June 5, 2024

One great way to celebrate God-called organizations is to support them. Support isn't always money. Support takes many forms.