

Christians are taught to love, forgive

By Joan King

COLUMNIST

The first thing I do when I get a newspaper is turn to the opinion page and read the letters to the editor. Liberal or conservative, big city paper or the home time news, two words appear over and over again: hate and love.

"Our enemies hate us for our freedoms." "Christians love the sinner but hate the sin." "She's just another Bush hater." Today, even the edgiest of editors no longer allows a writer to accuse someone of being a "---- lover," but you get the point.



Joan King

We use these words to reinforce a prejudicial viewpoint, but in almost every case we use them with no thought to their true meaning. Recently this paper published a letter from a writer who insists he "loves" the homosexual, the adulterer, the false prophet, and so on. It's because he "loves" them that he wants to bend them to his will.

I'm sure the writer means, "the will of God," not his own will, but he clearly believes he understands God's will better than those he deems sinners and is therefore in a position to tell them how to behave. But what he says and what he actually does are two very different things.

With all due respect to this particular writer and others like him who strive for goodness and sanctity in their lives, I must point out that they are not preaching love when they condemn others. The homosexual, the illegal immigrant, the woman with an unplanned pregnancy, all are not helped by threats, either of damnation or political reprisal.

Since many of these writers use the Bible to justify their beliefs, let's go to the Bible for a definition of love. "Love is patient; love is kind ... It does not insist on its own way."
(Corinthians I - 13:4-6)

But it doesn't matter if it's the Bible, the Quran or any other scripture when believers insist they alone know the truth and thus can dictate to others. They are not kind; they are not patient. Above all, they are not loving.

Every religion has the right to instruct its own, but the faithful will be judged by what they do, not what they say they believe. Do they support the weak? Do they feed the hungry? Do they welcome the stranger? Love and hate are meaningless in and of themselves. It is the connection between what is said and what actually happens that is important.

So far, Congress has been unable to pass an immigration bill, and things are getting ugly. Undocumented immigrants live in fear. The public has even turned on politicians like Sen. Saxby Chambliss, who understands the country simply can't deport 8 million illegal immigrants. It must find a pathway to citizenship for these people.

Where does the religious community stand? What should a good Christian do? I can tell you what some churches are doing. They are offering sanctuary to illegal residents, but they can only do this if they are safely established in the community, and they can only do it for a few individuals.

Even then the leaders of this New Sanctuary Movement (www.newsanctuarymovement.org) are risking a lot, but when they turn to their Bible and read, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," (Matthew 25:35) they feel obliged to act.

They do it with love that is both biblical in origin and universal in humanitarianism. I respect the law, and I respect the Bible, but I judge myself and others based on human reason and human compassion.

Since I started writing this column, I've become fascinated with words and how people use them for good or ill. Two words stand out in the immigration debate: law and amnesty. We are a nation of laws letter writers proclaim, but laws are made by man, and they change with time.

Few among us have unblemished records. However, when applied to the immigrant, it seems no matter what the circumstance, no matter how long he has been here or how hard she has worked, they are to be judged by one standard only: How they got here.

Technically, amnesty means a government pardon for a political offense, but one has to ask if the word forgiveness isn't equally applicable. Why then are so many people incensed by the idea that an undocumented immigrant might be granted amnesty based on time served and good behavior?

Haven't we as Christians been taught to forgive?

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