

Culture Wars: Sex and Gender

Our role in the culture war

Matthew 5:13-16

March 20, 2022

HDBC

This morning we will wrap up this series, Culture Wars: Sex and Gender. We've looked at four of the key social/moral issues we are now facing. Sex outside of marriage. Pornography. Homosexuality. Transgenderism. You will almost certainly face each one of those. Your kids **absolutely** will. In fact, if you have kids in school, they are already facing them. **I've preached** this series to help equip you respond to these issues in a Biblical, Christ-like way.

Every church, every ministry, every organization, every school, every business, every Christian is going to have to decide what they believe about each one.

When you come to a fork in the road you have to decide. We are at that point in this culture war. What will you do? As for me, and HDBC, we will stand on the firm foundation of God's word, regardless of the changing winds that blow across our land. We will graciously, yet clearly speak the truth, in love.

Will it cost us? Probably.

Will it result in us being criticized? Certainly.

Could we be misunderstood? Yes.

Will some falsely accuse us of being unkind and unloving? Count on it.

Will you be ostracized in the workplace and in the community? At times.

Will the church be attacked in the courts and through legislation? Expect it.

Will they try to silence our voices? They are doing so now.

Could we be fined or imprisoned for speaking the truth? Maybe.

Will any of these things deter us? No.

But there is another question that each of us must answer. **What is my role in the culture war?** Before I get to the positive, let me point out a few things that we are not called to do. These are things that we can easily get caught up in, that can cause us to lose focus on the main things. They can be counterproductive.

1) Not called to save our nation

Patriotism? Yes. Love of nation? Yes. But if we are more concerned about returning our nation to some previous state that we think was better, our focus is too narrow. It's more about the Kingdom than about America. I want to see our nation lead courageously in a world of darkness. I want to see us be a beacon for freedom around the world. These are valid desires. But we must resist the temptation to think it's primarily about saving our nation.

2) Not called to win political battles

There is merit to political involvement. I strongly encourage you to vote and to vote well, as Christ-followers should. Be involved. Speak graciously and compellingly to the great issues of our day. But this is not our primary calling.

3) Not called to win social media debates

Please, please, please, think about what you post and how it will be perceived by others, and most importantly how it will impact your witness for Christ and the witness of the church. We can lose a lot of ground by bad posts!

What is our role? **Matthew 5:13-16**

This is part of the sermon on the mount. In it, Jesus is not declaring the way to be saved, but what He expects of those who are saved. He uses two well-known elements to teach us our role in culture wars. **Salt** and **Light**. From these two, I want to offer five simple, instructive statements. The first two relate to salt.

It preserves, purifies, enhances flavor, creates thirst. You understand those. I think we can keep it simple today. **Salt influences**. That is the key. **It changes what it touches**. Jesus calls us the salt of the world. We are called to be influencers in our world . . . for the Kingdom. **Two things we must do**.

1. Stay salty

The most important thing about salt. It must stay salty. If salt is not salty, it is worthless. Why? Because it has lost its distinctiveness. Without its saltiness it cannot influence. Without our distinctiveness, as Christ-followers, we cannot influence our culture. Two things that set us apart from the culture and enable us to influence the culture. Two things make us salty. **Beliefs** and **Behavior**.

- 1) We must be steadfast in our theology.**
- 2) We must be consistent in our behavior.**

If we compromise in either of those ways, we will lose our distinctiveness and are no longer effective. To use the illustration, we will be salt that is not salty.

2. Stay engaged

To put it another way, the salt must touch what it needs to influence. Salt is no good as long as it stays in the saltshaker. We cannot influence our culture unless we are in touch with people. Avoid two extremes.

- 1) **Reject the temptation to cluster** (in the saltshaker, Christians only)
- 2) **Reject the temptation to fly solo** (thinking we don't need the church)

Those who most influence the culture for Christ understand the need to live in two worlds and to find the right balance. We must be firmly anchored to a fellowship of believers. The church. We must interact with those in our community. Live in two worlds: Church and Community.

The next three relate to the illustration of light. Need to shine in 3 ways.

3. Shine consistently (14)

The image here is of the bright lights of a city, that can be seen from long distances. The light is bright because it is strong. The light is important not only because it is bright but because it is consistent. It is like a beacon for those who are traveling and trying to find their way. They can see the light and know which way to go. By looking to the light they know the way to go.

As Christ-followers we have the light of Jesus that offers hope to the world. Like the city on a hill, the light of Christ in us must be consistently there for people to see. **Like a lighthouse** that shines consistently, in one place, that can be seen by others. Not all ships need the lighthouse at all times. But when they need it, it is there for them.

There are people all around you who feel no need for spiritual help most of the time. But there will come a time when the night gets dark and their world gets difficult and they will look for a place of refuge, a place of hope, truth, and life. They need to know where to turn because they have seen the light of Christ in you. You need to be a city of light for them. **So, how's** your light at work, at school, while watching your kids play ball? It must be consistent. How do you talk to umpires, coaches, co-workers, teachers, students, etc.

4. Shine strategically (15)

Notice verse 15. The lamp in the house is placed on the table so it can give light to the entire house. Shines into the dark places to help you find what might be lost, but also to see what needs to be cleaned up, fixed or changed.

Subtle difference between these lights. The **first** is stationary, but consistent. The second can be moved around as needed. If the first is like a **street light** or **lighthouse** that you can count on, this verse pictures **a flashlight** that can be taken into the dark places where the light is most needed. The first draws people out of danger and toward safety. The second aggressively invades the darkness looking for those who are held in its power.

There are times when we need to bring light to the darkness. We need to move into the darkness with the light of truth. We need to take the light to the dark corners of our world. Wherever there is confusion, distortion, false teaching, false belief, we need to bring the light of truth. The light is most needed where the world and culture are the darkest. **It starts in the home.** Notice, Jesus uses the illustration of the lamp in the home. Starts with family. **We need to shine consistently. We need to shine strategically.**

5. Shine with purpose (16)

What causes our light to shine brightly in a dark world? **Our good works.** As people see them, they are drawn toward God. Our light is not to be a magnet of praise to us, but a beacon of light that points people to Jesus.

The more I allow praise to come to me the less effective I am as a soldier in the culture war. It must not be about me, and it must not be about you. We must consistently live in such a way that people look to Jesus. Rather than making much of me, I must make much of Jesus. I must reject the temptation to seek praise, enjoy praise or be enthralled in it. I must deflect any praise or glory that might come my way and send it quickly to Jesus.

My life's purpose is to glorify God. One of the ways I do that is through my good works, behavior, the way I live for Christ.

I want to tell you a story that I shared with you five years ago. So powerful, it is worth sharing again. It illustrates what can happen when the salt stays salty and engaged; and when the light shines consistently, strategically and for God's glory.

The Story of Aina Flood

This story begins in 1921. David and Svea Flood felt a call to go to the interior of the Congo. They traveled with their friends, the Ericksons, who were in the same church. They would attempt to share the Gospel with unreached people in remote villages. So, they traveled to the Congo with their 2-year-old son. They arrived in an established mission station and after a short time of orientation they set out through the jungle to share Jesus in their first village. They literally were cutting their way through the jungle.

The came to the first village but were not allowed to come in. The village chief was afraid the gods whom they worshipped would be angry, so they were rejected. They traveled to another village but were rejected by them as well. Went to another, and another and another, each time, rejected. After months of this difficult travel, they came to yet another village, the village of N'dolera. Along the way they prayed and wept that God would allow them access to a village where they could share. Once again, they were rejected.

With great difficulty they carried their belongings to the top of a little mountain near the village. They were so weary and weak from the travel and from bouts with Malaria that they knew they could not go on. So, they decided to build mud huts right there on the mountain and hope that God would change the heart of the village chief. He would not budge. In fact, the villagers were not allowed to go up the mountain to see them.

Only one little boy was allowed to go and sell them eggs and chickens once a week. David was particularly amazed when his wife declared that they may never be allowed in the village, but maybe they could win this one little boy to Christ. So, each time he came, she showered him with love and with the gospel. David and the Ericksons were amazed some months later when they watch as Svea knelt with that little boy on that mountain and heard him place faith in Christ as savior and Lord. But he couldn't tell anyone in the village, for fear of being rejected, or worse.

Both couples continued to struggle with malaria and other physical maladies and the Ericksons decided that it was pointless to stay there. They would return to the mission station and minister in another area. But the Floods decided to stay.

Some months later Svea announced that she was pregnant. When it came time for the delivery of the baby, they were surprised that the village chief had agreed to

send a mid-wife to help with the delivery. After a difficult labor and much agony, Svea Flood gave birth to a little girl in that mud hut on that mountain. She whispered to her husband that her name should be Aina, a classic Swedish name. Because of her weak condition, 17 days later, Svea died.

The grief was more than David could bear. He dug a crude grave and buried his 27-year-old wife on that mountain. Erected a cross and put her name on it. Something inside him snapped. He was through with Africa; he was through with the gospel, and he was through with God. He hired some villagers to help him get back to the mission station. From there he would travel back to Sweden and begin a new life. But he knew he could not care for his son and this newborn. The Ericksons had not been able to have children, so he offered Aina to them. They gladly adopted her.

Less than a year later, the Ericksons were poisoned by unbelieving locals, and both died agonizing deaths within days of each other. An American missionary couple agreed to take Aina and raise her as their own. As a toddler she learned Swahili and made friends at that mission station.

When she was three years old, they returned to America and because they were concerned about legal issues with Aina if they returned to Africa, they decided to keep their ministry in America. Aina grew up in the Midwest, came to know the Lord and went to a Christian college in Minnesota. She knew she had been born in Africa and that her mother had died. But that was all. There she met the man who would become her husband, Dewey Hurst. They married, had kids, and were involved in ministry.

Then Dewey became the president of a Christian college in Seattle. It was interesting that there was a large Scandinavian population in that area. One day, without her knowing where it came from, a Swedish Christian magazine arrived in her mailbox. She could not read the articles but flipped through the pages. She saw a picture that arrested her attention. Crude grave on a mountain in Africa with a white cross. On the cross was the name, Svea Flood.

She rushed to the campus to find the Swedish professor at the college and asked him to read and translate the article. It was about a missionary couple from Sweden who went to the Congo and led this one little boy to Christ. Mother had died 17 days after her daughter was born and father had left to return Sweden. The baby was adopted by Ericksons, who were poisoned. Then by American couple.

What Svea Flood did not live long enough to witness was that this little boy was later allowed to start a school in the village. He led his students to Christ. They led their parents to Christ. The village chief became a Christian. Now there were 600 baptized believers and a thriving church in that village. All because one mother influenced her world. But that is not the end of the story.

For their 25th wedding anniversary the college sent them on a trip to Sweden. Aina would have an opportunity to learn of her heritage and maybe find her father. He had remarried and had four other children. She found them and learned that her father was in bad health and was an alcoholic. They told her that if she saw him to never say the word God. He would go into a rage and get drunk again.

She found him. Little apartment littered with liquor bottles. Lying on a bed with his back to the room. She walked over and touched his arm and said "Papa." Instantly he knew it was Aina. He said, "Aina, I never wanted to give you up." She said, "Don't worry Papa, it's ok. God took care of me."

At that he stiffened and flew into a rage. God! God! Don't say God to me. He abandoned us. All the sacrifices we made and only one little boy came to Christ. And then he allowed your mother to die. Don't talk to me about God."

She said, "Papa, I have a story to tell you. Mama didn't die in vain. That little boy started a school and led his students to Christ, their parents, village chief. And now there are 600 believers and a vibrant church in that village. Your sacrifice was not in vain, Papa. He began to soften and looked at her desperately wanting to believe.

"It's a well-known story." She spent the afternoon with him and in only a matter of hours the bitterness melted away and the prodigal returned to God. Aina would travel back to America and within a few weeks David Flood went home to be with the Lord. Aina would learn that in the last hours of his life, in his delirium he had begun to speak Swahili.

That sounds like the end of the story. But there is an addendum. A few years later, Aina and her husband attended an evangelism conference in London, England. Representatives from various parts of the world were giving reports. The superintendent of the church in Zaire, formerly the Congo, stood to give his report. He reported that there were 32 mission stations, 120 bed hospital, several large Christian schools. Our churches now have 110,000 baptized believers.

She rushed up to ask him some questions.

Have you ever heard of David and Svea Flood? They had a mission station. I don't know where. All I know is that it was on mountain near a village.

O, yes, he said. I used to sell them chickens and eggs. It was Svea Flood who led me to Christ! And who are you? She said, "I am Svea Flood's daughter. I was born on that mountain." With that he grabbed her in a big embrace and began to weep. After a moment he released her and said, I **have often wondered what happened to the little girl whose mother died for us.**

Your mother is the most famous person in our church history. You must travel back to the Congo. Months later, she and her husband made the long journey. They arrived at the outpost where she had been adopted twice and had spent the first three years of her life. She saw the graves of her adoptive parents, the Ericksons.

Eventually they drove on a dirt road to the village her parents had cried out to the Lord for. This time there was an amazing reception as the road was lined with hundreds of people cheering, laughing, and smiling. They had built arches of flowers for her reception.

The pastor of the church led me up the mountain and showed me the place where the mud hut had stood and said that is where you were born. We then walk to a grave, now encased in concrete with a beautiful palm tree overshadowing it. Simple white cross with the words, Svea Flood, 1896 – 1923. That is where your mother is buried.

The pastor read from John 12:24:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

He then followed with Psalm 126:5:

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.