

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

God is OK With Sex—Yes, Really! Christians have a reputation—not altogether undeserved, I must admit—for being uptight about sex. So let's get one thing straight: God is very much in favor of sex. After all, it was His idea:

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 God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. . . ." ¹

A whole book of the Bible—Song of Solomon—is devoted to the subject of the physical attraction between male and female. ²

Nor does the Bible support the idea that God intended sex only for procreation. Even that old prude Paul warns married couples not to abstain from sexual relations, except occasionally and for short periods of time, because the sexual attraction is too strong:

The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ³

Paul himself was unmarried, and he considered that to be preferable to marriage, since he had no wife to distract him from service to God. ⁴ Yet Paul recognized the reality of sexual desires, and he endorsed marriage as the way to give expression to those desires. ⁵ The idea that God frowns on sex, or that He approves of it only for making babies, finds no support in the Bible.

However, the Bible does prohibit various types of sex outside of the marriage relationship. Adultery is probably foremost on this list, since it is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments, and even has a place in the Ten Commandments. ⁶ Bestiality is also forbidden, ⁷ as is incest ⁸ and rape. ⁹ Homosexual conduct (as controversial as this has become) must also be included on this list—both the Old and New Testaments denounce it. ¹⁰ The punishment in the Old Testament for each of these sexual offenses was death. Consensual sexual

intercourse by an unmarried man with an unmarried woman was also forbidden, but carried only a life sentence: he was required to marry her, if her father would permit it.¹¹

To Judge or Not to Judge. With that said, what should be the proper attitude of a Christian toward those who commit sexual offenses? That depends on the status of the offender, as Paul points out in his first letter to the church at Corinth:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? But those who are outside, God judges.¹²

In the Corinthian church, one of its members was committing adultery with his step-mother.¹³ Since Paul learned of it in Ephesus, where he wrote 1 Corinthians, the man was apparently making no effort to conceal the affair—nor were the Corinthians.¹⁴ Paul ordered the Corinthians to kick this man out of the church, so that others would not be led astray through his wickedness.¹⁵

Like Paul, we must concern ourselves with open and obvious wrongdoing *within the church*, lest it spread like a contagious disease. Jesus makes the same point in Matthew 18:15-17:

“If your brother sins,¹⁶ go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”¹⁷

On the other hand, the behavior of non-Christians is God’s concern, not ours. The words of Jesus echo this sentiment, as He warned us against judging others:

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”¹⁸

The humorous image of a man with a log in his eye attempting to remove a speck from his brother's eye¹⁹ effectively communicates the truth that we should be more concerned about our own behavior than the behavior of others. Jesus' approach toward ordinary sinners was to freely associate with them and try to lead them to God.²⁰

The lesson for Christians is that we should not judge those who are outside the church. Jude explains that even when we are revolted by someone's sin, we should be gentle and merciful toward the sinner:

And have mercy on some who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.²¹

But when someone *within the church* openly practices sin, or openly advocates it, then we are forced to act, not only for the good of the sinner, but for others whom he might lead astray. The sinner must be confronted and, if he refuses to repent and change, then, as Jesus said, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”²² This means that he is no longer part of the church body—he is excluded from the assembly and from communion—but it does *not* mean that we should break all ties with him. Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors with patience and kindness, seeking to lead them to repentance without imitating their deeds. That, I believe, is how we should treat an unrepentant Christian who openly misbehaves, sexually or otherwise.

Such treatment fits well with the second greatest commandment, which is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”²³ The parable of the Good Samaritan²⁴ reminds us that *everyone* is our neighbor. So we must be kind to all people—even those society tells us to be afraid of.

Advice for the Honest Christian. In our culture today, many disagree with some of what the Bible says about sex. They see nothing wrong with sex between consenting adults, whether or not they are married, and even if they are of the same sex. How should we respond as Christians? First, to the extent that these people are outside the church, our response is simply to treat them with as much love, kindness, and patience as we can. As Paul and Jesus tell us, the task of judging

such people is not ours.

But what advice can we offer the Christian who is honestly torn between the sexual longings he feels and his desire to obey God? First, God knows much better than we do what is good for us, and what is not, and we tread on very thin ice when we think we know more than God. Our “enlightened” society has led to dramatic increases in divorce and unmarried pregnancies since the 1950s. Yet studies cast doubt on the wisdom of such enlightenment, since they tell us that children who grow up with two married parents generally do better than those who don’t,²⁵ and that children who grow up with a father are, on average, more well adjusted than children who lack one.²⁶ The “sexual revolution” of the 1960s eventually led to greater problems with sexually transmitted diseases, which spread more rapidly and more extensively when people routinely have multiple sexual partners, be they heterosexual or homosexual. And I need hardly point out the devastating effects of adultery, which destroys the trust between husband and wife which is essential to any good marriage.

God didn’t make rules about sex because He wanted to deprive us of pleasure, but because He wanted to protect us—and, perhaps more importantly, our children and our sexual partners—from the potentially adverse consequences of sexual misconduct. Violating God’s rules about sex is a terribly selfish thing to do. We sacrifice the feelings and the welfare of others for the sake of our momentary pleasure. God expects more from Christians. So God tells unmarried heterosexual Christians to remain celibate²⁷ until and unless they get married, while married Christians must confine themselves to sexual relations within the marriage relationship. To do otherwise is to elevate our own selfish pleasures above God’s commands, thereby jeopardizing our relationship with God, who insists that we love Him, and others, more than ourselves.²⁸

But what about homosexuals? If, as most homosexuals contend, their inborn sexual attraction is toward persons of the same sex,²⁹ and they have no sexual interest in members of the opposite sex, is God really telling homosexual Christians that they shouldn’t engage in sex with those to whom they are naturally attracted? Must they remain celibate? I believe the answer has to be, “Yes.” And to those who claim that this is not fair, my response is this: If a person is sexually attracted to children, as some seem to be, does he then have a right to enjoy sex with children? If he is naturally attracted to animals, does he have a right to enjoy sex with animals? If he gets sexually excited by exposing himself to others, does he have a right to do that? Where did we ever get this misguided notion that sexual activity is a God-given right? Our society places many limits on sexual conduct, and so does God. We place ourselves at risk when we transgress either one. And

after all, celibacy is not a death sentence. For the past 2,000 years, Christian monks, nuns, priests, and others have voluntarily adopted an unmarried and celibate lifestyle through a desire to get closer to God—just as Paul did.

Homosexuals in Heaven? Nevertheless, I do not say that a Christian who has engaged—or even who continues to engage—in sexual misconduct cannot be saved and reach Heaven. God, not I, will judge such matters. And I ask this of Christians who insist otherwise: why are sexual offenses different?

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount³⁰ lays down a moral standard that is virtually impossible to fully meet. In only a few chapters of the Bible, Jesus tells us that we should not be angry with our brother, much less insult him;³¹ that merely lusting after a woman is tantamount to adultery;³² that divorce is wrong except in very limited circumstances;³³ that we are not to resist the evil person or lash back at him, but treat with kindness even those who hate us;³⁴ that we must practice our religion privately, trusting God, rather than men, to recognize our piety;³⁵ that we should not love money, or worry about the necessities of life, but trust God to provide everything we need.³⁶ Even Paul, who was a giant in the faith, admitted that he was not perfect,³⁷ and boldly asserted that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”³⁸

While not retreating from the position that sexual misconduct is wrong, I have long wondered why many Christians seem to consider sexual offenses so different from all of the other sins criticized in the New Testament, such as: greed, envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, arrogance, boasting, disobedience to parents, and untrustworthiness;³⁹ fornication, idolatry, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, and dishonesty;⁴⁰ murder, kidnapping, lying, perjury, “and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”⁴¹ Has there ever been a Christian other than Christ who successfully eliminated all of these faults from her life? Add to that the list in the Sermon on the Mount, as well sins of omission (such as ignoring the sick and the needy),⁴² and none of us has any cause to be self-righteous.

If you are a Christian who cannot conceive of a homosexual or a child molester getting into Heaven, consider Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector who go to the temple to pray.⁴³ In many ways, the tax-collectors of Jesus' day were treated like the sex offenders of today. “Good” people hated them and refused to associate with them.⁴⁴ Yet in Jesus' parable, the tax-collector who seeks God's mercy receives it, while the self-righteous Pharisee does not. Note that Jesus did not say that the tax-collector stopped sinning, or even that he stopped being a tax-collector—only that he humbled himself before God and received mercy. Luke's commentary on this parable is enlightening: “He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt. . . .”⁴⁵

The story of the woman caught in adultery ⁴⁶ illustrates the point that none of us is without sin. When the Jewish leaders brought the woman to Jesus and demanded that she be stoned in accordance with Jewish law, Jesus replied: “He who is without sin among you, let him *be the* first to throw a stone at her.” ⁴⁷ One by one, her accusers all left, recognizing that none of them was sinless. Paul makes the same point repeatedly in his Letter to the Romans, ⁴⁸ and also gives this warning: “Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” ⁴⁹

Jesus seldom got angry, but when He did He generally directed His anger at the unmerciful and at those who pretended to righteousness. ⁵⁰ When the Pharisees criticized Him for associating with tax collectors and sinners, He rebuked them:

But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, “*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” ⁵¹

Those of us who self-righteously condemn “sinners” would do well to imitate the humility of the tax collector in Jesus’ parable ⁵² rather than the arrogance and conceit of the Pharisee. ⁵³

Good Works and Bad Deeds. I am not saying that Christians should intentionally commit sexual misconduct, or that God is happy when we do. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ⁵⁴

But Paul makes the point in Romans that we cannot *earn* salvation—instead, God bestows it as a free gift on those who love and trust Him:

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. . . . ⁵⁵

All of our good works and righteous living count as nothing when it comes to salvation. Isaiah says, “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment,”⁵⁶ because we can never be *good enough* to merit salvation through our own efforts. God’s standards are simply too high: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.”⁵⁷ If you have ever lied, stolen, or gossiped, or been dishonest, envious, arrogant, or greedy (and who hasn’t?), then you are just as guilty in God’s eyes as the worst murderer or sex offender. We will not get into Heaven because we have done anything to deserve it, but because of our devotion to Him. As Paul says:

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. . . .⁵⁸

If our good works cannot get us into Heaven, will our bad deeds keep us out? The answer, I believe, must be a qualified “no.” Our heart, not our deeds, is what matters to God. So long as our heart remains true to God, our deeds matter little or not at all. Consider what Jesus says: “But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.”⁵⁹ Jesus, who was careful with his words, did not merely say “all foods,” but “all things.” Paul makes a similar point, more than once, when he says that “all things” are lawful for Christians, although not all things are “profitable.”⁶⁰ If “all things” are lawful, does that include sexual misconduct? Or does “all” not really mean “all”?

Are Sexual Sins Different? I will concede that evil deeds—and especially those which are deliberate—can lead us away from God and corrupt our heart’s devotion to Him. That corruption can in turn endanger our relationship with God and, I think, jeopardize our salvation. Nevertheless, I don’t believe most Christians would argue the point that none of us is perfect, and that God will forgive our imperfections if our heart is devoted to Him. That is very basic Christianity.

Yet some of these same Christians who seek and accept God’s mercy for their own faults seem unwilling to extend the same mercy to those who are guilty of sexual misbehavior. So why are sexual sins different? I believe they are different only if—and to the extent that—a Christian advocates sexual misconduct as good and acceptable, rather than admitting its wrongfulness.

The New Testament consistently teaches that any person who becomes a Christian should to try to avoid sin and eliminate it from their lives, whether that be envy, greed, lying, arrogance, etc. And we cannot ignore the admonitions of Paul and

Jesus that we must never tolerate manifest, unrepentant sin within the church.⁶¹ Any Christian who openly encourages murder or divorce or lying, or any other sinful conduct, would have to be confronted about it. Similarly, a Christian who overtly practices or endorses sexual behavior which the Bible says is wrong must be opposed according to the model Jesus outlines in Matthew 18:15-17.

In such an encounter, we must be careful about our own motives and actions. “Judgment” in this context has nothing to do with condemnation or punishment—that is God’s job, not ours. That is why Paul tells us not to judge those outside the church.⁶² Instead, the purpose of judgment in this context is *always* to help our fellow Christians—the Christian brother who is going astray, as well as the Christians who are in danger of being led into sin by him. We must carry out this duty in love and humility, keeping in mind that we too are sinners, and that we are no more precious in God’s eyes than the person whom we are trying to correct. Our purpose must be to turn the sinning Christian brother back to God’s ways—or perhaps, more accurately, to persuade him to repent and turn himself back.

On the other hand, the Christian who is trying not to sin, but who sometimes succumbs to temptation, sexual or otherwise, is *not* the type of person we should be judging. She needs our prayers, our assistance, our encouragement, and our efforts to help her mature spiritually, but not our judgment. As Paul said, “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”⁶³

¹ Genesis 1:27-28 (all Biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* translation).

² For example, note this description from Song of Solomon 7:1-4, in which the groom admires his bride’s many attractive features:

The curves of your hips are like jewels,
The work of the hands of an artist.
Your navel is *like* a round goblet
Which never lacks mixed wine;
Your belly is like a heap of wheat
Fenced about with lilies.
Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle.
Your neck is like a tower of ivory,
Your eyes *like* the pools in Heshbon. . . .

See also Song of Solomon 1:2 (“May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!”), 2:2, 2:14, 4:1-5, 4:7, 4:9-16, 5:1, 5:4, 5:8, 5:10-16, 6:3-7, 7:1-12, and 8:6-7.

³ 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 (note that Paul calls marital sexual relations a *duty*)

⁴ See 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7:7-8, 7:32-40.

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 7:2, 7:9; 1 Timothy 5:11-12, 5:14.

⁶ See Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18. Adultery is also condemned elsewhere, such as: Leviticus 18:20, 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22; Proverbs 6:32-35; Jeremiah 5:7-8, 7:9-10, 23:14, 29:21-23; Hosea 4:2; Matthew 5:27, 19:17-18; Mark 10:17-19; Luke 18:18-20; Romans 13:9-10; James 2:11. Deuteronomy 22:23-24 should probably be included in this list as well, since it addresses sexual intercourse with a girl who is engaged to be married. God also uses adultery as a metaphor for the unfaithfulness of His people, who chased after false gods instead of remaining faithful to the “Husband” who made a covenant with them. See, for example, Jeremiah 3:6-9; Ezekiel 16:32-39, 23:36-39; Hosea 1:2, 2:1-8, 4:12-13; Revelation 2:20-22.

⁷ Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18:23, 20:15-16; Deuteronomy 27:21

⁸ Leviticus 20:11-12, 20:14, 20:17, 20:19-21; Deuteronomy 22:30, 27:20, 27:22-23

⁹ Deuteronomy 22:25-27

¹⁰ See Leviticus 20:13: “ ‘If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.’ ” Or Romans 1:26-27:

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

See also Leviticus 18:22, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10.

¹¹ Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:28-29 is similar, and adds that he may not divorce her.

¹² 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

¹³ 1 Corinthians 5:1

¹⁴ Paul accuses the Corinthians of being arrogant and boastful about this immorality (1

Corinthians 5:2 and 5:6). Perhaps the offender was wealthy or a man of some importance.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 and 5:13.

¹⁶ In simple terms, “sin” means to fall short of what God wants us to be. See Romans 3:23.

¹⁷ The language in all-capitals is a quote from Deuteronomy 19:15; see also Deuteronomy 17:6.

¹⁸ Matthew 7:1-2; see also, Luke 6:37-38

¹⁹ Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 6:41-42

²⁰ See Matthew 9:10-13, 11:19; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32, 7:34, 15:1-32.

²¹ Jude 22-23

²² Matthew 18:17

²³ Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; see also Leviticus 19:18

²⁴ Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ Note the following language from *The Role of the Father in Child Development, 4th Edition*, ed. by Michael E. Lamb (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2004), Chapter 12, “The Effects of Divorce on Fathers and Children,” by Paul R. Amato and Julie M. Sobolewski, at page 342:

Research has demonstrated that children with divorced parents score lower than children with continuously married parents on a variety of indicators of adjustment, development, and well-being. . . . A number of factors appear to be responsible for the problems experienced by children of divorce, with the loss of the fathers’ economic and social resources playing a prominent role.

²⁶ Again, see *The Role of the Father in Child Development, 4th Edition*, Chapter 1, “The Role of the Father: *An Introduction*,” by Michael E. Lamb and Catherine S. Tamis-Lemonda, at page 6:

As indicated by Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) children (especially boys) growing up without fathers seemed to have problems in the areas of sex-role and gender-identity development, school performance, psychosocial adjustment, and perhaps in the control of aggression.

And Chapter 1, page 16: “. . . the adverse effects of absent fathers on child development have been well documented.”

²⁷ Masturbation can provide a sexual outlet for those who are celibate, and the contention of

some that the Bible prohibits masturbation is simply wrong. The 66 books of the Bible do not even mention the word. The fallacy that masturbation is prohibited by the Bible is allegedly based on the story of Onan in Genesis. (See Genesis 38:6-10.) Onan was the brother of Er, who was the husband of Tamar. Er died before he and Tamar had any children. In this situation, Israelite custom required Onan to provide children for his deceased brother by impregnating Er's wife, Tamar. (Genesis 38:8. See also Deuteronomy 25:5-10.) Apparently Onan didn't like this custom, because "when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother." (Genesis 38:9) As a result, God killed him. (Genesis 38:10) But what Onan did was not masturbation, but *coitus interruptus*—stopping sexual intercourse before he ejaculated, in an effort to avoid getting Tamar pregnant.

²⁸ See Mark 12:28-31:

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these.' "

(Matthew 22:36-39 and Luke 10:27 are similar.) See also Luke 14:25-26:

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

The message of these verses—and indeed, the overriding message of both the Old and New Testaments—is that God must be of first importance in our lives.

²⁹ I have no reason to doubt the contention of homosexuals that, for most of them, their natural sexual attraction as adults is toward persons of the same sex. Whatever may be the reason for this, I do not believe that most homosexuals *choose* to be attracted to members of their own sex, anymore than I choose to be attracted to women.

³⁰ Matthew 5:1-7:29

³¹ Matthew 5:22

³² Matthew 5:28 (this seems to assume that at least one of the parties is already married, or there could be no adultery)

³³ Matthew 5:32

³⁴ Matthew 5:39-47

³⁵ Matthew 6:1-18

³⁶ Matthew 6:19-34

³⁷ See Philippians 3:12: “Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

³⁸ Romans 3:23

³⁹ See Romans 1:28-31.

⁴⁰ See 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

⁴¹ See 1 Timothy 1:9-10.

⁴² See Matthew 25:31-46, and especially verses 44-45:

“Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ ”

⁴³ Luke 18:9-14

⁴⁴ The tax-collectors in Palestine were actually Jews who collected Roman taxes. The Romans required the tax-collectors to pay a certain amount to Rome, and they could keep whatever money they collected in excess of that amount. Thus, the tax-collectors were viewed as collaborators with the hated and oppressive Romans. In addition, many of the tax-collectors were corrupt, and became wealthy by oppressing their fellow Jews.

⁴⁵ Luke 18:9

⁴⁶ John 8:3-11

⁴⁷ John 8:7

⁴⁸ See, for example, Romans 2:1-8, 3:9-12, and 3:23.

⁴⁹ Romans 2:1

⁵⁰ See, for example, Matthew 12:9-34, 23:1-33; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 13:10-16. Similarly, Jesus' righteous anger when he cleansed the Temple of those who were cheating people in the name of religion (Luke 19:45-46; Mark 11:15-17; Matthew 21:12-13) appears to have been directed primarily at the Jewish leaders who permitted it, as we see from their reaction: "The chief priests and the scribes heard *this*, and *began* seeking how to destroy Him." (Mark 11:18; see also Luke 19:47)

⁵¹ Matthew 9:12-13 (Jesus is quoting Hosea 6:6); see also Mark 2:15-17 and Luke 5:29-32

⁵² Luke 18:9-14

⁵³ For more on the topic of humility and arrogance, see the article, "The Greatest Obstacle to Happiness," on this web site.

⁵⁴ Romans 6:2; see also Romans 3:7-8 and Romans 3:15-16

⁵⁵ Romans 3:21-24. The English words "faith" and "believe" translate the Greek word, *pisteuô*, which means to trust God, to rely on Him, and to make a strong personal commitment to Him—i.e., to surrender our lives to Him. For more on this subject, see the article, "For God So Loved . . . Well, Wait a Minute" on this web site.

⁵⁶ Isaiah 64:6

⁵⁷ James 2:10

⁵⁸ Romans 4:4-5; see also Philippians 3:8-9:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith

⁵⁹ Luke 11:41

⁶⁰ See 1 Corinthians 6:12: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything." And 1 Corinthians 10:23: "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify." See also Titus 1:15 and Romans 14:14.

⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Matthew 18:15-17

⁶² 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, 12

⁶³ Romans 14:4