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Several times during the past week, I read references to the races for the Democrat and Republican Presidential nominations, at least one of which referred to “the conventional wisdom,” not referring to the political conventions, but to widely held, or *conventional* beliefs, *conventional wisdom*.

*Conventional wisdom* is somewhat comparable to *common knowledge*; *common knowledge* is often used by someone when they cannot support what they are saying, “Well, it is common knowledge that the Apollo 9 did not actually land on the moon,” but it is usually neither *common* nor *knowledge*, but the speaker’s believing it to be so.

And so it is with *conventional wisdom*; *conventional* frequently refers to those who presume they are in the know, such as political pundits, while, well, such *wisdom* frequently refers to what is not — not *wisdom*, that is. The references to which I earlier referred are that conventional wisdom said Donald Trump would self-destruct during the Republican primaries, and that Hilary Clinton would easily coast to the Democratic nomination. Both proof, I think, that *conventional wisdom* is not very wise, or at least knowledgeable, no matter how “conventional.”

*Wisdom*. As read in our Hebrew Bible lesson, *wisdom* is, well, a *godly* trait. Most of us know it when we see it, but defining it is not always so easy. There is no one definition, but this one is reasonable: *the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment*; *experience* might seem an odd term, but I think it probably relates to *knowledge* — and probably *caution*, even *humility* — gained through *experience*. Consider the old “doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result” as the opposite of *wisdom*.

But I particularly like the part, *good judgment*; that is something very worthwhile, yet it is often lacking in those who possess an abundance of *knowledge*. No, *wisdom* is a good, but it is hardly something that is conventional, for as I say, *conventional wisdom* is not of necessity experienced nor knowledgeable nor good judgment, and to stop talking in generalities, let me give a specific example:

Is it not true that the idea of Christianity is, “follow the Ten Commandments and you’ll go to heaven, don’t follow them and,” well, use your imagination. Isn’t that example of *conventional wisdom* true?

And just as is the case with those political pundits, those — and this undoubtedly includes some of you, so please do not take offense — those who believe that “follow the Ten Commandments and you’ll go to heaven” is the essence of Christianity are *wrong*.

Wrong; not a basis for punishment, not wrong in that Christians should seek to follow those Ten Commandments, just *wrong*, *wrong* as a matter of what the Bible leads us would-be Christians to believe, and for that we need look no further than our reading from Romans, in which Paul writes:

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>*

*Justified by faith.*

I want to be exceedingly blunt: *It matters that we counter the “conventional wisdom” that fails to understand and to proclaim that Jesus died for us — indeed, for all! — not because some lead sinful lives, but because everyone leads a sinful life.*

Why does this matter? As an example, whatever your degree of indifference or displeasure toward the so-called “bathroom wars,” there is no way to argue them as a *religious freedom* issue. Foolish or impractical, poorly defined or not the proper role of the federal government, maybe even risky, are all *intellectually* valid arguments to raise, but to argue that there is a religious — at least *Christian* — argument against them, is to fail to understand the message of Christianity; it has nothing to do with a person’s being a “B” or a “T,” and, as I often argue, I would apply the same to the “L” and “G.”

When people purport to use Christianity as an argument *against* other people, maintaining that other people are sinful but they are free from sin, they are misusing and misstating our faith, and when people attempt to use their *conventional wisdom* Christianity, as an argument against associating with others, as an issue of “religious liberty,” they are doing Christianity a disservice. When the Pharisees criticized Jesus, one of their arguments was, “He dines with tax collectors (who were known to be dishonest) and prostitutes”; in other words, Jesus dined with *sinner*s! Anyone who sincerely asks the question, “What Would Jesus Do?” in the context of dealing with others, has the answer right in front of him or her.

And any Christian who loves to sing the wonderful hymn, “Amazing Grace” and does not say, “Amen” to that part of its opening sentence, “Who saved a wretch like me,” does not get the song, and does not get Christianity beyond that faulty *conventional wisdom*.

It matters. The first way in which it matters to which I alluded, is that I know I want, and I believe all of you want, the whole world to experience Jesus Christ, but if the image we portray to the world of Jesus Christ is a smug, self-righteous prig, no “wretch like me” is going to want anything to do with him.

And it matters because, if that is the way we see Jesus, as proclaiming that *conventional wisdom*, then as the late English minister J.B. Phillips would say, “Our God is too small.”

So I want to make plain that I suspect that when we engage in silent confession, most of you, as I, have sins to confess that we would feel embarrassed, humiliated, maybe even ashamed to have known by others, but what I want everyone, all of you and everyone, to feel is the same sense of relief and

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:1 (NRSV)

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forgiveness and gratefulness to God that I feel when I confess, despite the moments of uncomfortable honesty confessing causes me.

“Yes,” I do believe that sincere confession involves repentance, and that we must earnestly desire to sin less, but sin we shall do, violate one of the commandments we shall quite likely do — who does not envy? a form of “coveting,” — but our salvation, as Paul says, comes because, *we are justified by faith*. We are *justified* by our faith in Christ, and, perhaps even more, by God’s faithfulness to us shown in Jesus Christ.

When we understand that, we stand in awe — what “fear” means in that psalm — in awe of what God has done for us through Christ, and we acquire *wisdom* to want to follow his will — and, I hope, the desire to want the whole world to have that same *wisdom* and *belief*.

Which, as the *conventional wisdom* goes, is to seek to follow the Ten Commandments, the Ten Commandments made simple for us by Jesus: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength; and Love your neighbor as yourself. For we have been saved, *justified by faith*.

“Conventional”? I hope it becomes so; “wisdom” — You bet; may we all share it.

Amen