

The Mission of the Church
Matthew 28:19-20
Part One

From time to time in the course of our lives there are what I call “teachable moments.” I believe we are in the midst of one of those moments now.

If you have been reading newspapers, listening to radio or watching television I am sure that you are well aware of the debate that has been stirred up by Proposition 8. And what is Proposition 8?

Proposition 8 is a proposed state constitutional amendment that will appear on our November ballot designed to overturn the practice of granting marriage licenses to same sex couples in the State of California.

What are the chances of this proposition passing? I would think that our initial response would be, “The chances are fairly good.”

And why would I think this? I would think this, first of all, because proposition 8 does, in fact, reflect the biblical definition of marriage. Let me read for you **Genesis 2:24**.

“For this reason [in other words, since Eve was created out of Adam’s rib in order to provide him a lifelong companion, God said,] **a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**” So, what is the biblical definition of marriage? Marriage is defined in Genesis 2:24 as the joining together of a man and a woman in an exclusive partnership that is both intimate and lifelong. This is the biblical definition of marriage.

Two women do not make a marriage and two men do not make a marriage. A marriage in the sight of God can only be formed when a man leaves his mother and father and cleaves unto his wife and they become one flesh. This is the biblical definition of marriage. And it is this definition that is reflected in proposition 8.

So will Proposition 8 pass? I believe that our initial response would have to be, “The chances of proposition 8 passing would seem to be fairly good in

light of the fact that the proposition reflects the biblical definition of marriage.” But this is not the only reason why I would think that our initial response would have to be, “The chances are fairly good.” There is still another reason. And what is that?

Not only does Proposition 8 reflect the biblical definition of marriage but it also reflects the traditional definition of marriage since the biblical definition of marriage and the traditional definition of marriage have always been the same as far back as we go into American history.

But even though all this is true and we might initially think that the chances of Proposition 8 passing are fairly good, this is not the case at all.

The most current tracking data indicates that fifty one percent of Californians presently support same sex marriage while only forty two percent are opposed. Obviously, in light of the current tracking data in the State of California, Proposition 8 could fail to pass.

Should this disturb us? Of course it should disturb us. How could it not disturb us? We are presently witnessing the possible abandonment of the biblical and traditional definition of marriage in the State of California and if this happens it truly will be a very sad day.

So in light of this how should we respond? Understanding how the church should respond to the prospect of Proposition 8 not passing, based on what the Scriptures teach, requires that we know three different things.

My hope over the course of this study is that after we consider these three things we will not only understand how the church should respond but that we will respond. So, what is the first thing that we need to know?

The church needs to know the real problem that we are facing. What do I mean by this? We are steadily seeing increased support for same-sex marriage? Isn't this true? In 1977 only twenty-seven percent supported same-sex unions in the State of California. Today fifty-one percent support same-sex unions. Is this trend disturbing? Absolutely! It is disturbing.

Let me ask you this question. If everything continues as it is, regardless of whether or not the proposition passes or doesn't pass, do you think that there will be increasing numbers of people throughout the state of California

supporting same sex marriages in the years to come? What is your answer? I believe that the answer would have to be yes.

If everything remains the same, regardless of whether or not, Proposition 8 passes or does not pass, support for same-sex marriage will most likely in the future increase.

And in support of this statement let me give you another statistic. Though only thirty-six percent of those over 65 presently support same-sex marriage, this is not the case for those presently 18 to 29. In fact, the percentage of those supporting same-sex marriage in the 18-29 year old age group is sixty-eight percent. This is scary! Everything is going in the wrong direction.

If nothing changes we can see the handwriting on the wall. Same sex marriages not only will one day be accepted by an even greater number of Californians but that greater wide-spread acceptance, I believe, will one day be reflected in the way our state constitution is written, no matter what may happen this November.

Is the possibility of Proposition 8 not passing a problem? Absolutely! It is a problem. But it is not the real problem; it is only a symptom of the real problem. So if the possibility of Proposition 8 not passing is not the problem but only a symptom of the real problem, then what is the real problem?

The real problem facing the church today is that the world is spiritually dead and under the control of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3). This is the real problem that is facing the church today. And as long as this stranglehold on the world continues the world will continue to think and act in accordance with their father the devil. This is the truth. This is what the Scriptures teach. And this is the real problem that we are facing. And this is the problem that we as a church need to be addressing.

If there is any doubt about the fact that the real problem that the church is facing today is that the world is spiritually dead and under the control of Satan, all we have to do is to consider what we are told in Ephesians 2:1-2. So let me read these verses for you. **“And you [The members of the Ephesian church prior to your conversion] were dead in your trespasses and sins, (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of**

this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”

Before these Ephesians came to Christ and were converted they were spiritually dead and under the control of Satan. And this would also be true of every other person who is living in our world today if they themselves have not yet come to Christ and been converted.

Do we believe this? If we believe this then we should understand that seeking to change the thinking of the world and the conduct of the world while the world is in this state of spiritual deadness, by secular means such as by using a ballot box, would ultimately prove futile. This would be like us beating back the Pacific Ocean with a broom. The effort might be well motivated the effort will fail.

If we don't believe this let us go back to **Ephesians 2:1-2** and look a little more carefully at these two verses and see if what I have just shared is not so.

First of all, the members of the Ephesian church prior to their conversion were described as “dead.” What does this mean?

When Paul in Ephesians 2:1 described the members of the Ephesian church prior to their conversion as “dead,” he was referring to their spiritual state not to their physical state. This spiritual state of “deadness” certainly was not exclusive to them. Every person born into this world though physically alive is born spiritually dead.

Isn't this exactly **Romans 5:12** teaches us? **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”** Sinned how? Sinned in Adam.

So how did Paul describe the members of the Ephesian church prior to their conversion? He described them as “dead” or as “spiritually dead.” So, what is the significance of someone being spiritually dead?

When a person is spiritually dead it means that he is alienated from the life of God and is therefore unable to respond to Him. In other words, when people are spiritually dead they are like dead men walking or perhaps more

graphically speaking they are like spiritual zombies. They appear to be alive, but the truth is they are spiritually dead, unable to respond to any stimulation from God, including His Word.

This unfortunately pretty much describes the condition of the vast majority of the people that are presently surrounding us: in our neighborhoods, in our places of employment, in our schools, wherever we might be.

And because of this, of having being alienated from God and not being able to respond to Him, what will characterize their lives? Sin will characterize their lives. Not maybe, not might, it will.

Let us continue to read **Ephesians 2:1**. “**And you** [the members of the Ephesian church prior to your conversion] **were dead** [spiritually dead and then what does it say?] **in your trespasses and sins.**” Or perhaps better said, “In the sphere of trespasses and sins.”

Those who are spiritually dead are described as being dead in the sphere of trespasses and sins for the simple reason they cannot do anything else in their deadness but sin. Spiritually dead people cannot do anything else but sin in their state of deadness because spiritually dead people are alienated from the life of God and will be unable in that state to please Him in any possible way. All their so-called good works are but filthy rags in the sight of God. That is just the way it is and they cannot do anything about it. Those who are spiritually dead will live in the sphere of trespasses and sins.

And because those who are spiritually dead will live in the sphere of trespasses and sins, they of course will do what? They will walk according to the course of this world. Let us now go on and read the first part of **Ephesians 2:2**. “**And you were dead in your trespasses and sins** [and then what does it say in verse 2?], **in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world.**” The Ephesians, prior to their conversion, were not only dead in trespasses and sins, but because they were dead in their trespasses and sins were walking according to the course of this world. Isn't that what the verses says. So what does this mean?

The word “world” (KOSMOS) in Ephesians 2:2 does not refer to the physical world but to the to the evil world system. In other words, the members of Ephesian church prior to their conversion, like other spiritual

zombies who could do nothing else but sin, would find themselves doing what? Going with the flow of the evil world system that they were in, not fighting against it but going along with the flow and, of course, indulge in what? The sins of the times! Or perhaps better said, they would find themselves walking according to the course of the world.

But now let me ask you this question. If those who are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins are walking according to the course of this world, according to the course of this evil world system, who in effect is controlling them?

Let us continue to read **Ephesians 2:2**. **“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air.”** So who is the prince of the power of the air?

The “prince of the power of the air” (ARCHOS) is none other than Satan who is referred to as the ruler of this world in John 14:30. We, the church, have our “head” who is Christ, and the world has their “prince” who is Satan.

In light of all of this it should not surprise us that those who are spiritually dead and who are a part of this world’s evil system and are ruled over by Satan would find themselves possessing the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Let me now once again read for you Ephesians 2:1-2 but this time I will read both of these verse in their entirety. **“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”** So, what is this “spirit” being referred to here that is now working in the sons of disobedience? The “spirit” that is now working in the sons of disobedience in Ephesians 2:2 is the spirit of rebellion.

Proposition 8 is in trouble. But before we begin to consider how we should respond to this problem we need to know some things. First of all, we need to know this: The real problem facing the church is not that Proposition 8 is

in trouble, but rather that the world is spiritually dead and under the control of Satan.

This is the real problem. And if we can appreciate this to be the real problem hopefully we all will be able to see while mobilizing the church to address this problem, such as by mobilizing support for proposition 8 by getting people out to vote, is not necessarily the best way to go about addressing the problem.

Why? First of all, because as hopefully you see now that in the long run it will be unproductive. And secondly, not only will it be unproductive; I believe it will also prove to be counterproductive.

This will become clear to us the next time I speak to you when I share with you the second thing you will need to know if we are going to know how we should respond to the possibility of Proposition 8 failing.

May we by the grace of God see the world as God sees the world and engage the world as God would have us to engage the world.