

*“Christians Behaving Badly?”*

(Graphic of a man and Jesus on a bench.) That graphic may be a little jolting. Yes, human beings share significant responsibility for much of the bad things, which happen in the world, especially to the powerless and the victims. Unfortunately, at times, supposed Christians behave badly. The C.S. Lewis quote on the screen reminds us of the negative impact on the reputation of Christianity by the bad behavior of espoused Christians. The Apostle Paul wrote in our Scripture Reading about some of the many ways Christians can behave badly. This Sermon’s title focuses on the subject of Christians behaving badly. Yet, there are two ways to think about what that title means. One of those two is to emphasize the questioning of the Christian identity of the person behaving badly. Such as, “Christians(?) behaving badly”. A second approach to the sermon title is to question “behaving badly” by us Christians.

First, let’s consider the subject of the Christian identity by someone, who is prone to or habitually behaves badly. The Apostle Paul stated in **verse 25a**, *“No more lying, then! Each of you must tell the truth to the other believer”*. Unfortunately, during the last two weeks or so, members of the Trump Administration have clearly been lying about the policy of separating immigrant children from their parents. For example, J.M. Rieger wrote in the Washington Post, *“This administration did not create a policy of separating families at the border,” Homeland Security Secretary Nielsen said Monday.*

**On Tuesday, Marc Short, the White House director of legislative affairs, said it was indeed a policy.”**

Rieger continued, *“When a reporter asked Nielsen on Monday whether the policy was being used as a deterrent, she called the question ‘offensive.’*

**Hours later, Attorney General Jeff Sessions told Fox News Channel’s Laura Ingraham that yes, the policy was meant to send a ‘message’ to immigrants crossing the border illegally.”**

Rieger reported, *“For days, Trump, Sessions and Nielsen insisted that family separation was required by law. Then White House counselor Kellyanne Conway told CNN that ‘nobody said’ the law mandated family separation.”*

**Rieger stated, “And when reporters asked Trump on Friday why he would not reverse his two-month-old policy via executive order, Trump shot back, ‘You can’t do it through an executive order.’**

**Five days later, Trump contradicted himself again.”** (*“The Trump administration changed its story on family separation no fewer than 14 times before ending the policy”* by JM Rieger in the Washington Post)

Unfortunately, in addition to lying about the law requiring the separation of the children from their parents, senior members of the Administration claimed their religion condoned the separating of immigrant children, including babies and toddlers, from their parents. Friends, even a large number of Session’s own church’s members and many religious leaders, including friends of the Administration, have denounced separating immigrant children from their parents. Let’s consider what Jesus would do or, perhaps, it would be better to consider what God and Jesus’ human parents did. Remember in the Gospel of Matthew **God sent an angel to Joseph to tell him to take the baby Jesus and Mary to be refugee immigrants in Egypt because King Herod wanted to kill the Christ Child!** Most of the parents, who were being separated from their children, were doing the same – they are refugee immigrants!

(Graphics of the little immigrant refugee girl and of the newest Time Magazine cover.) Yes, separating the parents from their children because the parents broke the law by illegally entering the United States and they were being tried as criminals. However, what the Administration doesn’t confess is they are **forcing the refugees to break the law because they are refusing to allow them to enter the United States legally through the official ports of entry**. Many eyewitnesses have documented that border agents are preventing refugee immigrants from legally crossing the border at ports of entry and they are using excuses such as, we are too full and you can’t come in, so come back later. Many have waited at those ports of entry and have come back a multitude of times. Finally, they have given up and have gone into the United States at an illegal crossing.

The executives of the national level of the United Church of Christ have released a statement about the crisis caused by the separating of immigrant children from their parents. Part of it reads, **“Friends, once again we stand at the**

**brink of a moral precipice in our society and the question before us is will we choose to act in covenant with God on behalf of God's people or will we sacrifice our soul."** The letter continues, "The United Church of Christ has long been a supporter of migrant families seeking refuge within our borders from intolerable and unsafe living conditions in their homelands. As people of God committed to the sacredness of all creation and the sanctity of every life, we are compelled to heed the cries of families now being violently torn apart at our borders for political expediency and profitability. Such violent acts are unnecessarily punitive and place at risk the physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and developmental stability of hundreds of families who now find themselves separated, caged, and commodified in a strange land."

The executives' letter continues, "**All of our sacred texts, no matter the faith, identify the disregard of the humanity of the vulnerable as sin.**"

"And God hears the cries of God's people. The plight of black and brown migrant families whose children are ripped from their care cannot be the policy of a civilized land. We've been here before. Our nation's history bears witness to a legacy of lost love. We separated the **children of Native people** from their families. We separated the **children of enslaved people** from their families. We separated the **children of Japanese** people from their families. Many of these families were never made whole again. This legacy of white supremacist ideology is idolatrous and leaves an indelible mark of evil that can only be redeemed by a conscious act of spiritual repentance and repair."

The national UCC executives issued the call, "**We must resist the evil of dehumanization enacted upon the vulnerable among us.**" "The United Church of Christ strongly condemns the dismantling of families, the criminalization of the quest for freedom, and the caging of those whose only crime is to seek shelter from harm. How we treat those who seek shelter in our midst is a direct reflection of how we treat God."

The family separation done by the Administration brings us back to the second focus raised by this sermon's title, "Christians behaving badly?"

(Graphic of a man with Jesus on a bench shown again.) Going back to this message's opening graphic, Jesus asks us why we Christians are not doing what is needed to overcome the evil in the world. The Apostle Paul raised the same basic question by calling Christians to turn from specific types of behavior. He said in **verse 31, "Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort."** It is clear the head of the Administration doesn't believe that verse applies to himself. However, it does apply to us and all persons, who intentionally seek to live the New Life in Jesus Christ!

The Apostle also put our calling in positive terms. **Paul stated in verses 29 and 32, "Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you. ... be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ."** We are called to build up one another and especially those who are vulnerable and suffering!

The national level UCC executives in their letter also called "**upon our 5,000 member churches to write letters to your representatives in Congress as an act of worship this month. ... Remind Congress there is a law that supersedes partisanship and political bantering, and that is the sanctity of all people of God.**" They also urge us to donate through the National UCC, designating our gifts to "**Keep Families Together**".

Unfortunately, the Administration does not seem to be working to help the parents, who were separated from their children to get back together with their children, following the President having signed the Executive Order, so there is a great need for financial support for different organizations, which are helping parents find and reunite with their children. Further, it may take a lot more pressure on Congress and the Administration for them to make sure those parents are reunited with their children.

**It is time for us to pour out God's Love and Grace on those families, who have been so terribly abused.** And yes, that also includes praying for their welfare and healing and for the Government employees and Administration Leaders, who have played a role in that terrible miscarriage of human rights and justice. Let's not be Christians behaving badly! **Let's build one another and others up with our words and our actions of love, grace, forgiveness, and comfort.** Amen.