

## Sharing Christ in a brWOKEn World

### Sernon 3 – In the Shadow of the Flag

An idol is an object, image, or concept that is worshipped, admired, or revered as representing a deity, an ideal, or a source of inspiration. God explicitly forbids the making of or worship of idols.

Today, we live in a culture of “revived paganism” where pluralism, individualism, and secular humanism have come together to create new idols in our culture. From Hedonism, the worship of pleasure, to Materialism, the worship of possessions and wealth, the actions and motivations of Canadians show us where our loyalties lie. This morning, I want to tackle a very challenging cultural topic which has, I believe, risen to the top of the pecking order when it comes to the idols of our age.

Today, there seems to be no more powerful symbol in Canada, no more pervasive image in our country than that of the Pride Flag. It is everywhere. It has become the litmus test for true Canadian citizenship, the standard by which all “tolerant and loving people” are measured, and the mark of acceptance in our society. Fly the flag and you are in. Don’t, and you are held suspect as hateful, discriminatory, and ignorant.

And let me assure you that this morning, I am aware of the age groups represented here today and I will not use language that is inappropriate for the younger ones. It will make more sense in a few moments, but this cultural focus today is on idolatry and the worship of an idea that is much bigger than a lifestyle or orientation. And so that I do not give honour to that idol, I have chosen to show it in black and white, which I’m sure, will be considered an act of hate by those who adhere to its doctrines.

**So, let me explain to you why I believe this symbol is an idol, not a normal flag.**

- Public Schools across the country are mandated to fly the flag for the month of June, and many of them fly it year-round, or have this symbol somewhere in the building at all times. This is not done for any other people group. African flags are not flown during Black History Month; Indigenous flags are not flown during First Nations History Month, which is June, by the way. Muslim flags are not flown during Ramadan, and Christian flags are not flown during Christmas and Easter. Public Schools do not treat this flag the same as other flags that represent other people groups, rather it is treated like a sacred symbol, and given more honour than other such symbols.
- Every major corporation flies the flag in June and many of them have the Pride flag posted in the entranceways of their establishments year-round.
- In Quebec, where religious symbols have been banned from all government workplaces, the Pride flag is proudly flown. Again, this is the opposite of inclusion and the very definition of religious ideology – one symbol is given special status while other symbols are censured.
- Sidewalks and crosswalks are painted as a Pride flag all over Canada, and if you squeal your tires on such a crosswalk you can be charged with a hate crime.
- The Catholic District School Board was heavily criticized this year for not flying the Pride flag in some of its schools and many people openly protested them and called the Catholic School Board homophobic and there were calls to defund the Catholic School system in Canada because they didn't fly the flag.
- In a public school in Alberta and in Ontario a teacher reprimanded a Muslim student and told him he was not a good Canadian because he did not attend the Pride flag raising ceremony at his school. In Ontario the teacher told the students that their parents engaged in a “disgusting act of hate” because they kept their kids home.
- For the Month of June Prime Minister Justin Trudeau replaced the Canadian flags outside of the office of the Prime Minister with Pride Flags.
- Today, you can click on the CBC children's website and view a page that teaches children to “know our Pride Flags.”

*“June is Pride Month, so you may see more rainbows and flags flying! But we can fly the Pride flag all year round! People, places and businesses display these flags as a symbol of hope and acceptance.”*

Today, you can be charged with a hate crime if you vandalize the Pride flag, not harming a person, vandalizing the flag. And while I don't think I need to say this, but for the sake of clarity, no one in Canada, or anywhere else for that matter should have to live under the threat of harm. Harming someone for any reason is criminal and wrong. I'm not talking about that this morning. I'm trying to explain how we can share Christ in a culture that has adopted a new religion, a new ideology, and a new symbol. And just like the days of the Roman Empire, when there were many gods and you could worship any of them you wanted, as long as you also worshiped the Emperor, Pride doctrine says you can be a Christian or a Muslim or Hindu or what ever as long as you also accept the Pride flag. Not accepting it is, well, not acceptable.

It's important to say that burning a Bible is not a crime in Canada, neither is it a crime to burn the Canadian flag, but when a Pride flag is burned or defaced most often the hate crimes unit of the police is dispatched.

Something is very different about this image, and as a religious leader of a local Christian church, as someone who has studied the Bible and religion all his life, I believe the best way to describe this symbol is with religious terms. The flag is protected like a religious symbol, it is spoken about as if it was a religious symbol, it has flag raising ceremonies attached to it, and it carries with it the language and doctrines of a religion. And it's much bigger than a religion about sexuality. The Pride flag has come to represent the religion of Humanism itself, an ideology that places highest value on human beings, their happiness, their rights, their autonomy, and their personal well-being. Today, the Pride flag encompasses all of those idols.

**The Bible as our Guide for Interfaith Evangelism:**

Now, this is good news for those of us who want to share our faith in the culture of Pride, because if it has the markings of a religious idea, then we have a great deal of examples in the Bible of people who lived out and shared their faith in the shadow of pagan idols. Once again, the Bible is our guide, and is filled with examples as to how we can witness. Let's begin with the four most famous – we find them in the book of Daniel.

### **Living in the Shadow of an Idol: Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego**

Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego were four men who had their culture and their world pulled up from under their feet. Babylon had come and conquered Jerusalem and taken them away as captives. From their story we can learn a great deal about how we can live and share our faith in a world where everyone is worshiping idols. And just so we understand how difficult their situation was, here are three things that changed in their lives overnight:

#### **They were given new “foreign” names. Dan. 1:6-7**

Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

#### **They were put into the service of the King. Dan. 1:19-20**

The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

#### **Their lives were always in danger. Dan. 2:18-19**

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven.

**So, how did they both live out their faith and offer an effective witness?**

- They honored earthly authority and served the king faithfully.
- They made their faith public no matter what the cost.
- They made their faith valuable by showing others that their faith made them useful and strong.
- They made their faith nonnegotiable even in the face of death.
- They made their faith attractive because of their integrity.

In the end, these men found a way to live in the shadow of idols and yet never compromised their faith. In fact, they made a profound difference in the lives of those they served because they didn't compromise.

The pages of the Bible are filled with examples of God's people living in the shadow of an idol, and He expected them to remain faithful, He expects the same from us.

**Esther** – Queen Esther, fully immersed in Persian Culture, remained faithful and while she was bold she was not foolish, she understood that the battle between God and idols was a spiritual battle, so before she approached the king in order to save her people, she first had all the people fast and pray.

Esther 4:15-16 “Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.””

**Paul** – He almost single-handedly shut down the idol making industry in Ephesus, not by protest, but by preaching that Jesus was the son of God.

Acts 19:23-26, “About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not

only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.”

**Jesus** – He stood before a temple and proclaimed God’s victory. The temple was a pagan temple in Caesarea Philippi, and he went up there to declare publicly that He was the son of God.

*Matt. 16:13*, “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?””

So, what can we learn from all of these people including our Lord about witnessing in the shadow of an idol and how can we apply this strategy to sharing our faith in the shadow of the Pride flag and its Humanist ideology.

1. Honour those in authority, with respect and obedience. 1 Peter 2.
2. Make your faith public. Daniel opened his window and prayed.
3. Make your faith valuable. Publicly give God the credit for every good thing you do so that those you serve want you in their world and so that they know you truly believe that any blessing you are to them comes from God.
4. Make your faith nonnegotiable. (Respectfully disagree) And face the furnace if necessary. For me, this would be like the Muslim families that kept their kids home from a Pride ceremony at public school. While we should live in peace, we should not partake in such things.
5. Make your faith attractive. Show the world that their idea of love, acceptance and freedom is just a shadow of what God’s love acceptance and freedom is.

In the end, we do all this with the same pattern laid out in the previous sermons: Compassion, Truth and Judgment.

**I want to thank Kathy Bousquet for this article she sent me written by a woman named Rosaria Butterfield. In the article we learn how compassion and truth saved a lesbian woman from the judgement of God.**

Rosaria Butterfield wrote the following about her introduction to Christ: “I was 35 years old, called myself a lesbian, and worked as an activist and English professor in New York when I first encountered these words from Romans chapter 1. The Bible first confronted me in the welcoming living room of Ken and Floy Smith, a pastor and pastor’s wife who befriended me as their neighbor. Floy has gone on to be with the Lord, but Ken continues as my father in the Lord, offering frequent counsel and encouragement.”

Today, Rosaria shares a ministry with her husband and both writes and speaks on how God can save people from a lifestyle of homosexuality.

We can’t remove all the Pride flags from Canada, but we can share the gospel, and there is no better weapon against a false idol than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I don’t know exactly what the tidal wave of Pride in our culture is. I understand where it came from, Critical Theory which breaks down Christian ideas and norms, the sexual revolution that unhinged human sexuality from God’s law, and bubble wrapped victim culture that says you can’t tell someone they are in error, or you hate them. I understand that it is an ideology created by sinful, fallen people and so, it represents a spiritual battle that we must not take lightly.

But I’m not sure what this all really is.

I think though, it best resembles a religious movement, and I believe the best way to share our faith with those in our culture that accept the ideology of Pride to treat it like interfaith evangelism.

Live quietly among them, serve them as you would the Lord, like Daniel, let your faith be known and let it be clear what you believe. And in the end, hold conversations with individuals, not crowds or groups, you won’t change a crowd or a group, you won’t rewrite the laws tomorrow but if you live like Daniel, Esther, Paul, or Jesus, the opportunities will come, and every once in a while you will meet someone whom the Holy Spirit has prepared to hear the good news, and if you are ready, you might just bring someone out of darkness into the light of God.

