

Jesus, Thou Art the Sinner's Friend

Richard Burnham (ca. 1749–1810)

Jesus, Thou art the sinner's Friend;
As such I look to Thee;
Now, in the fulness of Thy love,
O Lord, remember me.

Remember Thy pure word of grace,
Remember Calvary's tree,
Remember all Thy dying groans,
And then remember me.

Thou wondrous Advocate with God,
I yield my soul to Thee;
While Thou art pleading on the throne,
Dear Lord, remember me.

Lord, I am guilty, I am vile,
But Thy salvation's free;
Then, in Thine all-abounding grace,
Dear Lord, remember me.

Howe'er forsaken or despised,
Howe'er oppressed I be,
Howe'er forgotten here on earth,
Do Thou remember me.

And when I close my eyes in death,
And human help shall flee,
Then, then, my dear redeeming God,
O then remember me.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

One of These Things...

Kevin T. Bauder

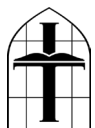
Let me introduce Gail. Gail is held in the grip of an idea. Even though Gail was born with male sex organs, Gail identifies as a woman. Gail receives hormone injections and has received some implants, and these have resulted in bodily changes. Gail competes on a women's basketball team where Gail dominates all other players. Gail's beliefs have become Gail's identity, and Gail tries to live them consistently, even in the face of prejudice. Gail has never professed to trust Christ or the gospel, but if Gail visits your church, Gail will wish to use the women's restroom.

Now let me introduce you to Aelfric. Aelfric is held in the grip of an idea. Aelfric claims to be an Identity Christian and a true Israelite. Aelfric believes that Celts and Anglo-Saxons are the true sons of Israel, while Jews are descendants of a Japethic people called the Khazars. Aelfric's body has been modified by tattoos that reflect Aelfric's perspectives, including a prominent Confederate flag. Aelfric's beliefs have become Aelfric's identity, and Aelfric tries to live them consistently, even in the face of prejudice. If Aelfric visits your church, Aelfric will not want to sit beside any people of color.

From a biblical perspective, both Gail and Aelfric hold bad understandings of themselves, of the world, and of God. Their perspectives and their conduct are both sinful and both strike directly against God's creation order. Neither has professed faith in the biblical gospel; both are lost. Both need the Lord, and both need a change of heart.

Aelfric and Gail both lack an objective, publicly available means of substantiating their claims. Both truly rely upon their "lived experience." Gail claims to feel like a woman trapped in a man's body and points to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Aelfric feels superior to peoples of color and points to stereotypes involving vice and crime.

Let us assume that both Aelfric and Gail mean well and that neither would willingly hurt another person. Nevertheless, both Aelfric and Gail are doing real harm. Aelfric's outspokenness emboldens certain white supremacists who would commit acts of violence against non-whites and Jews if given an opportunity. Gail's outspokenness emboldens certain biological males who prey upon women, and it gives those males unrestricted access to settings



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where women could previously feel safe. It also emboldens certain biological male athletes who cannot compete at the top tier against other males, but who can do well by competing against women. It also endangers some teens and preteens who are encouraged toward “Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria” through social media and social contagion, significantly raising the probability that those children will hurt themselves.

In one way, Gail’s situation is the direct opposite of Aelfric’s. A couple of generations ago, people who held Aelfric’s views on race were generally tolerated (and in some circles, celebrated). Now, however, any expression of Aelfric’s views will make one a social pariah. On the other hand, until very recently people who shared Gail’s perspectives on gender were seen as perverted, and they were pushed to the social margins. Now someone who expresses Gail’s views gains immediate and widespread sympathy and support. In a word, Aelfric’s sins are out of style, while Gail’s are the height of fashion.

What is interesting is to read and listen to recent evangelical attitudes toward people like Aelfric and people like Gail. Many—perhaps most—evangelicals might agree that both are sinning. Beyond that, however, the similarity ends. Faced with somebody like Gail, many evangelicals would opine that one cannot expect an unbeliever to live like a Christian. What we must do is to show great compassion to Gail, to build relationships, to foster sympathy in the face of whatever sufferings must have brought Gail to this point. Even very conservative evangelicals might feel obligated to express their non-rejection of Gail. They might even lament the attitudes that people like Gail would have encountered a couple of generations ago. They insist that our churches must become open and welcoming to people like Gail, and that any failure to do so is a failure to follow the example of Jesus and the teaching of Scripture.

On the other hand, evangelicals do not react at all that way when faced with somebody like Aelfric. They make no attempt to distance themselves from the caustic prejudices that are directed against Aelfric. Far from expressing their non-rejection of Aelfric, they will go out of their way to denounce him in the sharpest possible terms. They will accuse anyone who fails to denounce Aelfric of the very same sins that they accuse Aelfric of. With Aelfric, it seems impossible to distinguish the sin from the sinner. They do not want their churches to be open and welcoming to Aelfric. They do not want to understand whatever sufferings may have brought Aelfric to his particular situation. They do not want to build relationships with Aelfric or to demonstrate compassion toward people like him. They would never excuse Aelfric’s sins by suggesting that unbelievers cannot be expected to live like Christians.

Why do evangelicals speak and write about people like Gail and Aelfric so differently? If evangelicals were genuinely concerned for sinners as Jesus

was concerned for sinners, would they not treat all sinners in the same way? Jesus could show compassion to a woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11). He could reach out toward corrupt officials (Luke 19:1–10), and He included an ultranationalist racist among His disciples (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Jesus did not pick and choose among the kinds of sinners that He befriended.

This attitude is not reflected within the evangelical world. Run an internet search on “evangelical ministry to transgenders.” You will see a lot about understanding, befriending and sympathizing with transgender people. Now run an internet search on “evangelical ministry to white supremacists.” You’ll see a lot about stopping them, and quite a bit about how evangelicals are pretty much all white supremacists to begin with (even though hardly any evangelicals share Aelfric’s perspective). Notice the difference?

Christians make choices about who they will minister to. They also make choices about the kinds of ministry that they find acceptable. In evangelical circles it is presently acceptable to claim friends who are like Gail. It is not acceptable to admit to having friends who are like Aelfric.

The reasonable conclusion is that evangelical attitudes toward evangelism, caring, and confrontation are being regulated by something other than the example of Jesus and the requirements of Scripture. One begins to wonder whether the evangelical world isn’t prepared to denounce any sins except the ones that evangelicals aren’t currently being tempted to commit. One wonders whether social and moral fads rather than the teachings of the Bible have more to do with who evangelicals will befriend and who they are willing to marginalize.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
