

“GOD’S LAW” AND MARK SANFORD’S DIY CONSEQUENCES

Eric Erickson tries to recover from Blue Texan’s sound thumping of him yesterday by excusing Mark Sanford’s adultery and lying because he has no Bible Study group:

We live in a fallen world and we ourselves are fallen. I am disappointed in Sanford, but not angry. The default for politicians seems to be unchaste. All we can do is work for ideas and try to find men of good character to fight for those ideas.

I think one thing I have noticed in the past five years is that Democrats and Republicans tend to elevate politicians to such a level that there is no accountability. It is insular. **There is no support group, no small group of friends, and no authority that can guide, admonish, and correct politicians privately.**

We have each other. I’m off in a bit to hang out with friends from my Bible Study. Sanford probably has none of that. I’m sure John Edwards did not. Nor Bill Clinton. Nor John Ensign. [my emphasis]

What he appears to have missed—even from Sanford’s own press conference—is that Sanford does have a Bible Study group.

Did your wife and your family know about the affair before the trip to Argentina?

Yeah. We’ve been working through this thing for about the last five months. I’ve been to a lot of different—I was part of a group called C Street when I was in Washington, it was a Christian

Bible study of some folks that ask Members of Congress hard questions that I think were very very important. I've been working with them.

Problem is, it is populated with a bunch of other sanctimonious Conservatives who believe that their power matters more than the empty vows they mobilize to wield that power. I'm just waiting to see who's the next member of "the Family" to tearfully confess to being a complete moral hypocrite while condemning others. Who will it be? Sam Brownback? Tom Coburn? Jim DeMint?

Which brings me to—far and away—the most annoying part of Sanford's press conference: his attempt to validate his moral absolutism even while confessing he fell afoul of it.

But I am — I am here because if you were to look at God's laws, there are in every instance designed to protect people from themselves. I think that that is the bottom line with God's law — that it's not a moral, rigid list of dos and don'ts just for the heck of dos and don'ts. It is indeed to protect us from ourselves. And the biggest self of self is, indeed, self. That sin is in fact grounded in this notion of what is it that I want, as opposed to somebody else.

[snip]

But I — I guess where I'm trying to go with this is that **there are moral absolutes, and that God's law indeed is there to protect you from yourself. And there are consequences if you breach that. This press conference is a consequence.**

[snip]

And as a consequence, I hurt her. I hurt you all. I hurt my wife. I hurt my boys.

I hurt friends like Tom Davis. I hurt a lot of different folks. And all I can say is that I apologize. I – I – I would ask for your – I guess I'm not deserving of indulgence, but indulgence not for me, but for Jenny and the boys. You know, there are a team of cameras and crews and all those sorts of things camped out down at Sullivan's Island. **And I would just ask for a zone of privacy, if not for me, for her and the boys.**

As we go through this process of working through this, there are going to be some hard decisions to be made, to be dealt with. And those are probably not best dealt with through the prism of television cameras and media headlines.

[snip]

You know, I've tried to think of...one of the first steps is clearing out more time as we go through this process of reconciliation and figuring out what comes next. I'm going to resign as Chairman of the Republican Governors Association. I'm going to tender my resignation – one, because I think it's the appropriate thing to do given other governors across this nation and my role as Chairman of the RGA, and two frankly just from the standpoint of time. You know if I think about this process, now it doesn't begin at a family level it begins with a family of South Carolinians, and so that means me going one by one and town by town to talk to a lot of old friends across this state in what I've done and be asking their forgiveness, and that'll take time, time I probably can't devote to the RGA. [my emphasis]

There is such a thing as "God's law," Mark Sanford says. For other people—for two men who

love each other deeply, for example—it means they cannot live together, even if that means the opposite of what Sanford defines as sin, selflessness. But for Mark Sanford, the kind of guy with his own Bible Study group of adulterers who hold power through invoking moral absolutism, here's what "God's law" means, in terms of consequences:

- An uncomfortable press conference—though if you're a good forgiving Christian, you'll give his family (and by association, him) a zone of privacy from this point forward
- Inflicting pain on his wife and others
- Resignation from the Chair of the Republican Governors Association (though, to be fair, he doesn't identify it as a consequence for his actions)

The consequences for two men who love each other under God's law? They must do without love, no matter how selfless, as well as suffer the status of second class citizens.

The consequences for Mark Sanford (South Carolina's existing law against adultery notwithstanding, because unlike prohibitions on gay marriage, no one seems to want to talk about that law)? A painful press conference (but please! a zone of privacy from here on out!), the suffering of others, and a setback to his personal career. But if you ask him whether those consequences would include his present livelihood and power, he'll just walk away as if it's out of the question.

To make it worse, Sanford is one dripping schmaltzy romantic:

I better stop now least this really sound like the Thornbirds – wherein I was always upset with Richard Chamberlain for not dropping his ambitions and running into Maggie's arms.

Sanford believes in the primacy of love, in the mini-series law that love should take precedence over all else. Just not for everyone.

If you're a member of "the Family," you see, you apparently get to decide when life should be like the Thornbirds and when it shouldn't. You get to decide the consequences for love under "God's law."

Erick Erickson thinks that Sanford just needs a nice Bible Study group, where he can have some private accountability, where Governor Sanford can pay consequences he believes in inside a zone of privacy.

But this DKos diary has it right, IMO.

I can't imagine the coverage of Mark Sanford's affair makes you feel very good. A recent hysterical and childish rant on your site screams at us that we don't get to judge Sanford for his adultery. But you know something? We're not.

We couldn't care less about Sanford's affair. It's none of our business. We hope the media leaves his family alone, and we don't relish their pain one bit. They have our sympathy.

Gov. Sanford, on the other hand, does not have our sympathy. Not because of his adultery, but because of his hypocrisy. You want the gloating to stop? **Then get your fucking noses out of our bodies and our bedrooms.**

[snip]

As long as you guys think it is your

business and your right to try to force the rest of us to conform to the sexual mores of your particular perversion of Christianity, you can expect to get your noses rubbed in it with relish and glee every time you show that you don't think the rules you want to apply to everyone else should apply to you.

Mark Sanford wants to reinforce his own sanctimonious power, even in his moment of shame. And the Erick Ericksons of the world want to enable that, with private accountability rather than moral consistency.

All the more reason to refuse to let that happen.

Update: Susie's friend makes a good point.

But this whole 'seeking forgiveness thing' needs to be cast in a larger, more meaningful context.

In all the 'did he stand up like a man and admit his sin" and 'did he get forgiveness from Christians with regard to breaking one of God's absolute laws', I predict **we will see far too little about how this sinning Christian takes positions that do actual damage to other human beings who, to him, are mere abstractions.** That is a bigger sin than adultery ... a bigger transgression of 'god's absolute laws'. He has cast vile, evil and dire consequences on 'the least among us"... **but where were the media then, where are they now on this horrendous sin?**