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Graham on Transcripts: 'Profoundly Disturbing'

Associated Press

NEW YORK, May 28 — Evangelist Billy Graham said today he could "not but deplore the moral tone implied" in the transcripts of President Nixon's conversations concerning Watergate.

Graham, a long-time friend of the President, said in a statement that reading the material had been "a profoundly disturbing and disappointing experience."

"What comes through in these tapes is not the man I have known for many years," he said. "Other mutual friends have made the same observation."

He said the conversations indicate that "a nation confused for years by the teaching of situational ethics now finds itself dismayed by those in government who apparently practiced it. We have lost our moral compass. We must get it back."

However, he said Mr. Nixon remains "my friend, and I have no intention of forsaking him now."

"Nor will I judge him as a man in totality on the basis of these relatively few hours of conversation under such severe pressure. But I would be neither his friend nor God's servant if I did not point out what the righteousness of God demands at such a time as this."

Graham earlier this month had been involved in a crusade in Phoenix, and had declined comment on the transcripts until he had had time to read them. He said today he has spent several days doing so, and was deeply disturbed by them.

"Our repudiation of wrongdoing and our condemnation of evil, however, must be tempered by compassion for the wrong-doers," he said.

Many a stone is being cast by persons whose own lives could not bear like scrutiny. Therefore, we dare not be self-righteous," he said.

He said that "one cannot but deplore the moral tone implied in these papers, and though we know that other Presidents have used equally objectionable language, it does not make it right."

Saying the material indicated confused "situational ethics" in the White House — a view that principles should be modified to suit the situation — Graham urged renewal of a firm moral standard. But, he added, "it would be nothing less than hypocrisy to call for

a moral housecleaning at the White House unless we are willing to do the same at your house and my house."

As for the White House, he said the issues now are in the hands of judicial processes and "the law will take its course."

Graham issued the statement from his home in Montreat, N.C., shortly before leaving for Charlotte, N.C., where he is scheduled to play golf Wednesday with Vice President Gerald R. Ford.