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Helping Others – To Heaven or to Hell

by Greg Gwin

We know that preparing for judgment is the most important thing in this life. Jesus taught that if we were to “gain the whole world, and lose our own soul” we would be making a terrible trade (Mark 8:36-37).

Knowing this to be true, we should earnestly seek to convince others - especially those closest to us - of the urgency of obeying the gospel. Everything we do and say should be calculated to produce the salvation of their souls.

It is a sad thing to see some Christians who don't seem to understand that they are negatively impacting these people who should be most important to them. When unbelievers (even our own family and close friends) can observe us compromising our spiritual priorities (including forsaking the assemblies) in order to engage (oftentimes with them) in other activities (such as ballgames, parties, secular organizations, etc.), we have given them a firm push in the direction of hell.

Paul urged Titus to “show thyself a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:7). And he told Timothy to be “an example of the believers” (1 Timothy 4:12). It is clear that the apostle understood that the teaching and preaching of these two young evangelists would be either helped or hindered by the kind of personal examples they portrayed. Surely it is the same with us.

If we are genuinely concerned about the souls of others, common sense dictates that we should never let them see us compromise our faith or priorities. Think about it Christian. Are you helping others - especially those closest to you - to go to heaven or to hell?

PROCLAIM THE UNKNOWN

by Payton Miller

“Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:23-26)

Quarrels should be avoided. Truth should be taught. On the surface, this passage presents two Christian endeavors that seem to be difficult to live out in our world. How does the Lord's servant make sure that he is not considered quarrelsome and yet is still able to teach and correct his opponents? We may be tempted to consciously avoid any and all conflict that *could* turn into a “foolish, ignorant controversy” (v. 23). However, in our effort to avoid conflict, we can easily miss opportunities to defend the truth and thereby decrease the likelihood for people to “come to their senses” (v. 26). Paul is trying to communicate to Timothy (and to us) that there is a way to teach the truth, and even correct one's opponent, without earning the label of being “quarrelsome.”

I probably do not have to tell you that our social media age has made it extremely difficult to strike this delicate balance. Often times, the result is the worst of both worlds—a quarrel in which truth is noticeably absent. In his essay entitled “Please, Ask Me Why,” Peter Heck, columnist and editor of *Not the Bee*, makes this observation: “There are plenty of pop culture tendencies that manifest in our overly-connected world of social media that are both obnoxious and obtuse. Chief among them perhaps is the habit of pseudo-intellectuals posting a premise or claim, only to exhibit indignation when someone dares to question or challenge it.” It takes little imagination to see how presenting an alternate viewpoint to people who think they know everything would result in an argument.

How do you respond when your belief about {insert any moral/spiritual/doctrinal issue here} is challenged? Often times, our instinct is to summarize our beliefs in such a way that prematurely ends the debate. For example, “I am pro-life because abortion is murder. End of story.” This type of response to those who clearly believe the opposite will only cause them to further dig their heels in and respond in kind, “You anti-choice, women-hating, clump of cells.” Do you sense a back-and-forth quarrel arising from this encounter? Our reluctance to fully explain ourselves can potentially be attributed to our own insecurity about the position which we are defending. Perhaps we need a reminder that, if our position is the truth, we should have no fear of opposition. As the saying goes, “Truth does not mind being questioned. A lie does not like being challenged.” Our reluctance to fully explain ourselves can also potentially be attributed to our lack of patience with those who we believe should already know better.

In Acts 17:16-34, Paul provides us with a good example of how to respond when our beliefs are challenged. After reasoning with Paul, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers responded with some notable questions: “What does this babbling wish to say?... May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean” (vs. 18-20). Paul could have easily taken offense at being called a “babbler” or his preaching being labeled “foreign.” He could have easily thought that if Jesus and the resurrection are “strange things to their ears” (v. 20), then there is not much hope for these people and dismissed altogether the inquiries. He could have easily summarized the gospel message in a way that made sense only to him given his prior knowledge and expected people without his worldview to understand it or be condemned.

Notice that Paul did not take any of those routes. He was prepared with a lengthy, patient, and confident response to address their questions. He established common ground with his opponents (vs. 22-23). He explained that his beliefs about current day events were ultimately rooted in his belief about what happened at the beginning of time (vs. 24-26). He pointedly called on the audience to change their behavior by identifying man’s responsibility towards the Creator (vs. 27-30). He concluded his message by warning his opponents of what will take place if they fail to heed the truth (v. 31). He did not overreact when the audience responded in distinctly different ways: mocking, interest, belief (vs. 32-34).

The world needs Christians who can, as Paul did, explain fundamental, self-evident truths by pointing people to our Biblical worldview (1 Pet. 3:15). The world needs Christians who are eager to share their decision-making rationale because every meaningful decision we make ought to provide a perfect segue into discussion about God (Matt. 5:16). The next time you are questioned about one of your beliefs, remember that the person with whom you are conversing may not have gone through the mental exercise necessary to arrive at your fundamental conclusion. Instead of being angry with people who disagree with you, re-frame your mindset and be excited by an opportunity to share the truth with someone who needs to hear it. God may be putting you in that conversation to help “lead them to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). Someone had to teach you and probably did it most effectively by sharing the *why* behind his/her beliefs. Be that person for someone else and proclaim the unknown! (Ac. 17:23).

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