

Speaking the Truth in Love

It is not always our first inclination to speak graciously to those with whom we strongly disagree. Christians and non-Christians alike can be extremely passionate about the issues that are facing us at this moment in history. Sadly, we often see expressions of anger and negative speech in the political realm as opponents on both sides of the aisle seem to have forgotten how to speak respectfully about the issues. The question that I want to raise in this article is, 'How are Christians to speak passionately to the issues of the day while doing so in a way that honors Jesus Christ?'

The scriptures give us much needed clarity in this area. The apostle Paul teaches us in Ephesians 4:15 that we are to, 'speak the truth in love' and yet, when we tell others the truth it sometimes comes across in angry tones and gestures. To speak the truth in obviously unloving ways will never point positively to Jesus Christ and the gospel. Christians must always keep in mind that we are called to be, 'ambassadors for Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador is someone who speaks on behalf of another. In this case, God makes an appeal for the gospel of grace through us. What an awesome blessing and responsibility! We dare not take this lightly. Jesus himself, warned us that on the Day of Judgment '...people will have to give an account for every careless word that they speak' (Matthew 12:36). Every word that we speak either brings blessing or harm and every word that we speak reveals our own heart (Luke 6:43-45).

We may find ourselves having conversations about the political issues of the day with those who are of enemies of God's truth. Jesus spoke to this issue as well. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-45). Interestingly, Jesus goes on to say, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same?"

Tax-collectors were some of the most hated people in first century Judaism. A tax-collector would contract with the Roman government to collect taxes from his fellow Jews. He would then collect more than was owed and keep the remainder for himself (all of this was fully supported by the Roman government, backed by their military if needed). Not only was he

often getting rich (Luke 19:2) by robbing his fellow countrymen, he was working for the 'unclean' Roman government who were guilty of oppressing the Jewish people. Jesus is saying in effect, "Even a despised tax-collector can love those who love him. You are called to a higher calling. If you say you are 'sons of your Father in heaven' then live like it."

Even though our opponents may vehemently disagree with us as we seek to stand for the truth of God's word, we are called to treat them with 'gentleness and respect' (1 Peter 3:15). They, like us, are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We will never be able to be 'salt and light' (Matthew 5:13-16) to the non-Christian culture around us if we fail to heed the biblical call to be gracious in speech and action. The apostle Paul writes in Colossians 4:5-6: "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." May it be said of us that our desire is to always speak graciously—to or about those with whom we disagree—to the glory of Jesus Christ.

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