

No Offense Taken

One of the things that surprises me when I discuss the Bible with people is how quickly some folks take offense when someone disagrees with them. Perhaps this reaction can be traced back to the old saw that we are not to discuss politics or religion. In the minds of many, spiritual matters are better left untouched as each person should be allowed to determine his or her own way to heaven. While it is true that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), this does not mean that we have been given Divine license to preach and practice whatever we like. There is but one way to heaven (John 14:6; Matthew 7:13-14) and that way has no side roads. That being the case, is it just possible that some might be wrong in their views of eternal matters? As far as that goes, is it just possible that I myself might be wrong?

The fact is, there are people who teach false doctrine. Even if there were no examples of false teachers today (and there are plenty of examples), the Bible records an abundance of occasions in which individuals taught error. When confronted, some obeyed (Acts 18:24-28) while some became quite offended and even turned violent (Acts 7). Others merely sloughed off the correction and continued in their error, most likely figuring that "it's just their opinion and doesn't really matter" (Acts 17:32).

There are also Bible examples of those whose practices were in violation of God's Word. In Matthew 15:1-9 Jesus addressed the scribes and Pharisees regarding the dishonoring of their fathers and mothers. He said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." (Matthew 15:8). Following this, Jesus' disciples approached Him and asked, "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?" (Matthew 15:12). Jesus' response in the two verses that follow shows that He was aware that they had taken offense but that their reaction to the truth was not going to cause Him to stop teaching it. Today we are supposed to "live and let live" and not say anything about the sinful lives that people lead. Granted, we cannot force people to obey God but were we to keep silent regarding sin for fear of offending, we would be like the watchman on the wall in Ezekiel 3:17-21 who would have endangered his own soul had he not alerted his fellow citizens to God's warnings regarding their sins.

One of the more interesting responses of folks today when they are confronted in their error is how taken aback they are that anyone would dare to suggest that they are in error and thus in danger of losing their souls. The person who does the correcting is considered mean-spirited and unloving. Sometimes the one being addressed refuses to speak to the one who has sought to correct his or her error. In short, there is a major chip on the shoulders of many who call themselves "Christians" and they take considerable offense if someone even hints that they are not following God according to His will.

I'm not going to tell you that I never get offended. Like most people, my first reaction when corrected is much too frequently to go on the defensive. When it comes to spiritual matters, though, should not our first reaction when someone disagrees with us always be, "Show me from the Bible where I am wrong"? If we can be shown from a proper usage of God's Word that we are in error, should we not take the correction and change our ways? Granted, someone could present the truth to us in a harsh manner and, at times a direct approach is actually necessary (Jude 22-23), but should we not take the time to go to the Bible to consider whether or not the correction is founded in God's Word? If it is, should we not knock the chip off of our own shoulders and submit ourselves to God's will?

I don't know if it's always been like this or if our society just enjoys having to walk on egg shells around each other, but souls are at stake. A fear of offending others and an approach to sin that borders on apologizing for teaching the truth are formidable hindrances to the spreading of the Gospel. We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). We're also instructed to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (II Timothy 4:3). In fact, reading on in that passage in II Timothy 4, we find Paul saying that there would be some who would come along who would not want to hear the truth. They would only want to hear what made them feel good. Even in this context, we are to teach the truth.

Even when speaking from the most sincere motives and in the most gentle tones, we will find that some don't like to hear God's Word. Regardless, our role is to teach the truth that can convert the receptive heart (I Corinthians 3:6). May we do so lovingly but with conviction, remembering "that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:20).

