

What's More Important, Truth or Niceness?

[2 Peter 2:10-16](#)

2 Peter, Day 9

"especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness."

- 2 Peter 2:10-16, ESV

Last time, we considered how the wrath of God has fallen out of fashion in the church, and what a shame this is, because this is such an important doctrine. Doctrine has an impact on life, and Paul told Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself [or, "your life"] and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:16, ESV) Paul knew these two issues - our lifestyle and our doctrine - are intertwined.

As the wrath of God has fallen out of fashion in the contemporary church, a shift has happened in our values, too. We have de-emphasized the importance of truthfulness and plain honesty and have instead emphasized the importance of being nice. So, instead of telling people plainly what we believe and why, we tend to dance around the issue, trying to be as nice as possible and not offend the other person.

I'm convinced that both of these changes - in doctrine and in life - have been made because of mounting anti-Christian cultural pressure. Our culture has been calling us narrow-minded, hateful, intolerant bigots in an effort to silence our proclamation of the moral law of God and our witness to the truth of the Gospel. And we have largely caved to the pressure. Now, we think the Christian way to treat anyone with whom we disagree is with loving acceptance and niceness.

Have we forgotten that our Lord Jesus Christ turned over the tables of the money-changers and drove the animal sellers out of the Temple with a whip? Have we forgotten that He called the scribes and Pharisees "white-washed tombs" and "children of the devil"?

Because we have exalted niceness to the highest place of honor among the Christian virtues, passages like 2 Peter 2 make us very uncomfortable. We honestly wish these harsh words weren't in the Bible. Couldn't Peter have been nicer to these men with whom he disagreed? No, he couldn't. And why not? Because he didn't view these false teachers as people with whom he had a sincere disagreement. No, he saw them for what they were: a grave spiritual threat to the people of God.

These false teachers were those who "indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority." They were bold blasphemers. They had "eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin" and "hearts trained in greed." To be clear: This was not some in-house debate between sincere Christians of good will over issues like baptism and spiritual gifts and varying models of church government. No, these false teachers looked at the church as a ripe field for sexual immorality and financial exploitation. They were after sex and money, not the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some people certainly do run to the opposite extreme and attack everyone who disagrees with them with equal intensity. Knowing when to be kind and gentle and when to sound the alarm is a matter of knowing the difference between a friendly family debate and an attack by the enemy on Christ's church.

If I'm debating a Baptist about the mode and subjects of baptism, I need to be kind and respectful and gentle, for I am dealing with a sincere brother who loves the Lord. But if people come around teaching the Prosperity Gospel and also pushing ideas like "free love," then I need to be bold and clear and urgent in warning the church against them. Similarly on doctrinal issues: If you think the church should have bishops and archbishops who sit above local elders, we can have an energetic and yet friendly debate, but if you deny the deity or humanity of Christ, you stand condemned, and I must warn all Christians not to pay attention to your teaching, for it violates the essence of the Gospel.

Some people might respond to all of this by saying, "I thought the most important thing was just to love God and love others." And of course, that's right. But loving God means loving all of His truth, and loving others means loving them enough to tell them the truth clearly. May God grant us true love for Him, His truth, His church, and our neighbors.