

Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



Black Hills Information Security

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Helping God's People Shine in Hate-Filled Times

There is tremendous turmoil, bitterness, division, and hostility in our country right now. It is easy to get swept up in it, partner with the enemy (Satan), react harshly, and think we are doing it for God. We need discernment more than ever when it comes to ruling our emotions by the Spirit.

It is not just what you say, but how you say it.

There is something important God's people need to learn from the past two election cycles and all the hostility associated with them. Most of what has been stirred up on both sides was caused not so much by WHAT WAS DONE but HOW IT WAS DONE. God's people have reacted in awful ways thinking that people were opposing them because of persecution.

It is one thing to be persecuted because of your walk with Jesus, it is a problem if you are persecuted for your "walk in the flesh." You can be persecuted for being a Christian or for being a jerk. One is because of Jesus, the other because of you.

How people speak, make arguments, and refer to the other side of any issue has added to the demonic hostility. We are called to live above this and avoid participation in the work of the enemy by following God and His word. There is an important truth we must remember that both the Bible clearly declares and people instinctively know.

It isn't WHAT YOU SAY, but HOW YOU SAY IT that determines God's favor and/or your partnership with darkness. It is a clear Biblical truth that the motive behind what we do determines its effect.

The "wisdom of this world" believes that it doesn't matter HOW something is said or done, only WHAT was done. Yet deep inside people know this isn't true. During the past four years, Christians have argued that President Trump is no schoolboy, he is a guard dog. He enacted good things so the way he did them or the way he lives doesn't matter. Be careful with that logic when it comes to followers of Jesus.

Consider 1 Corinthians 13. Paul lists the four big things that all Christians aspire to walk in, moving in the gifts and power of the Spirit, possessing mountain-moving faith, living out the extreme personal sacrifice, and moving in extreme benevolence. In each of these areas, the actions didn't constitute whether it was good or pleasing to God. The thing that God evaluates is the motive behind them and the way they are done. If love wasn't in them, they weren't good or profitable, "without love they profit nothing."

- *1 Corinthians 13:1-7 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.*

Not only does it say that love is the factor that makes something good, he goes on and tells us what it looks like so we aren't confused, "Love is patient, kind, not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable. Keeps no record of being wrong. It does not rejoice about injustices but rejoices whenever truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Most of the reactions we see from both sides of the political aisle are reactions to how things are said. Rude, condescending, and hate-filled bullying immediately brings a reaction that what was said wasn't good. By doing so they may think "we are draining the swamp" but from God's perspective, you are filling it with demonic hostility based on bitterness, self-righteousness, and hatred.

Learning from Peter

Peter is one of the disciples we can learn from about this phenomenon. He was famous for his quick reactions and confidence in his abilities to which he was humbled many times. Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22 record the incident in the garden of Gethsemane that has similarities to the problems we face today. It was a tumultuous time for Jesus in which "He began to be deeply distressed and troubled" and told the disciples "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch." (Mark 14:33-34). That is pretty severe grief, "to the point of death." It later said, "His sweat became like drops of blood" (Luke 22:44).

At the same time, there were certain Messianic predictions among the disciples based on both the Old Testament prophets as well as traditions of what Jesus coming was to look like. It included judgment,

routing their enemies, and breaking the rule of the oppressors off of God's people. It had very clear effects of judgment and violence to the enemies of God and His people.

Peter and the others became lethargic, falling asleep while Jesus pleaded in anguish to God nearby. Three times Jesus returned to alert them to "watch and pray" but they simply fell back into tiredness and lethargy. The problem Peter, and we face today is we are routinely awakened with shocking ideas from our partisan news feeds and social media posts. We are stirred about impending doom and crisis with every interview of a political figure. If we aren't alert in prayer we will react like Peter.

How did Peter respond, he drew his sword and began to fight, cutting off one of their ears (Matthew 26:36-56, John 18:10-11)? When I was an unbeliever, we had a phrase when we were confronted with an impending fight, "ITS ON NOW." It was a trigger that enabled us to act in physical and emotional rage to destroy our opponents. After all, Peter had scriptures and teachings about the great destruction Messiah was going to bring on the land to make things right. God's people have similar apocalyptic teachings and conspiracy theories from people we don't know to bring us to the shocking point, "ITS ON NOW, LET'S GO!!!"

Jesus responded in anger at Peter, instead of the mob who came to arrest him, "STOP, NO MORE OF THIS!" (Luke 22:52), "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword!!!" (Luke 22:52). Jesus later said a similar thing to Pilate about His non-reaction, which gives insight to how we are to react, "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD. IF MY KINGDOM WAS OF THIS WORLD MY SERVANTS WOULD BE PHYSICALLY FIGHTING" (Matthew 18:36).

The current round of cultural hostility is evoking similar questions among God's people. "Don't we need to take a stand, after all our country has stood the test of time by God's people taking a stand with violence and fighting for the truth?" Some may draw physical swords while others draw swords with what the Bible calls "rash words like the thrusts of a sword" (Proverbs 12:18-20).

Remember what Mike Pence said, "I am a Christian first and a Republican/American second." Jesus said over and over that we would be known as His disciples not by the angry words spoken from "the right perspective" but by our love for His people (John 13:35). The rash words thrusting like swords do not mix well with our testimony.

Peter changed and learned a valuable lesson

Peter changed and we need to as well. We see in his later writings God's prescribed response to hostility and opposition.

- *1 Peter 3:8-11 Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. 9 Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing...10 For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. 11 Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. 12 The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil." 13 Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. 15 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer,*

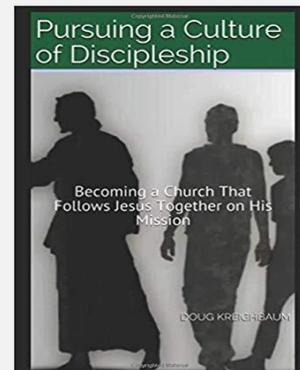
always be ready to explain it. 16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. 17 Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! 18 Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

Ouch!!!! If people despise us and we are forced to give “explanations of our beliefs” we are to do so “gently and respectfully.” He also said regarding our attitude and words towards the government over us (remember he was speaking about awful bloodthirsty Roman emperors like Nero who killed him not long after saying it).

- *1 Peter 2:13-17 For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, 14 or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. 15 It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. 16 For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. 17 Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.*

5 Essential Ways of Responding and Instructing God’s People to Respond

- **Start with humility in which you realize God is “All-Knowing” but you aren’t.**
- **Truly listen to each other rather than doing all the speaking.** James wrote something amid hostile divisive times among the church that we need to heed today. *James 1:19-20 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters (MSG “Post this at all intersections”) You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. 20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.*
- **Always seek and express love.** Love’s first trait listed in 1 Corinthians 13 is patience so start there. Jesus commanded, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27, 35).
- **Ask God what He may want to teach you or do in your life through this person.** It may be looking at things from another perspective or learning how to love an enemy by denying your self-centeredness.
- **Don’t use condescending words to belittle the person or their perspectives.** This only stirs up the work of the enemy. When presenting your perspective and/or God’s truth do it like Peter said, “Do this gently and respectfully” (1 Peter 3:15).



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Let’s make sure we pursue the things that will help us shine brightly in these dark times and help guide God’s people to do the same.

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