

## Confronting Error With Truth

We are to be friendly to all as we try to convert people. At the same time, we must be true to our calling. So we are to teach God's truth so the lost can be saved (1 Corinthians 9:16). Christians absolutely must realize that we are at war against Satan and therefore sin and error both within themselves (Ephesians 6:11-12) and within others (2 Corinthians 11:12-15).

Every Christian who tries to teach the lost will face a choice: spare the person's feelings (by softening the blow of truth) or expose their sin with truth so they have the option to choose salvation. The temptation can be great! The issue is really one of truth and error, of salvation and damnation. It is not primarily an issue of methods, tact, or diplomacy, although these are a part of teaching.

The premise of these considerations must always be that truth, when spoken straightforwardly in love, will not turn the good-hearted away, it will save them. They will be like the good ground "which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

Much like everything in life, we can learn how to act appropriately by following the example of Jesus. If we can see how He reacted toward sin and error, then we will know how to react toward sin and error. John 2:13-17 shows that Jesus had righteous indignation toward sin. Jesus took these evil actions as insults against God and He vigorously opposed them. It is most important to note that Jesus took the initiative in this situation at the temple.

As we try to teach people, seeing sin and its effects should cause righteous anger which promotes aggressive efforts to overthrow it. When we talk to someone about the Bible, do we overlook their error or address it from the scriptures? It is an obvious fact that we will confront error and sin only to the degree that error and sin upsets us! Does it upset you?

On other occasions, one can easily see that the Lord would not tolerate sin and error. In Matthew 15:1-9, He used the used truth to expose error and urge repentance. In Matthew 15:12-14, He stated that those who were offended by truth were to be let alone. Have we ever made a stand this strong against error? In John 4:16-18, Jesus brought the Samaritan woman face-to-face with her sin, and we will have to do that when we teach others. Will you "sweep it under the rug" for the sake of getting them to attend the assemblies, all the while being condemned to Hell? In John 8:6-11, without condoning sin, He urged obedience and repentance by urging the woman to "sin no more."

Not only can we learn from the Lord, but there are also lessons in the New Testament from Christians who confronted error as they taught the lost. For example, the apostles, even when threatened, boldly taught what needed to be heard (Acts 2:14-40; 5:27-32, 40-42). Stephen is also a great example. In Acts 6:8-10, the false teachers of the

synagogue could not resist the wisdom and the spirit by which Stephen spoke. We must speak as the “oracles of God” in order to defeat falsehood (1 Peter 4:11).

In dealing with Simon, Peter did not spare Simon’s feelings (Acts 8:17-24). In great boldness and plainness, he told Simon that what he had done was sinful. But Peter did not leave him in a discouraged state. He told him what to do to be restored. When we set out to spare the sinner’s feelings, we leave them lost in sin. That is not a compromise a Christian can be willing to accept. Paul, in Acts 13:6-12, sternly opposed the error of Elymas. He said to him, “O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10). We have to accept that when we sternly oppose evil and error, the evil-hearted will withstand us, but the good-hearted will believe. Why do you suppose Paul’s life was threatened everywhere he went? Was it due to how he preached or what he preached? Paul was even able to publicly (not privately) rebuke a fellow apostle because that apostle stood condemned (Galatians 2:11-14). Could we ever have the strong disposition of these men toward sin and error?

Now that we have seen how the Lord and godly men of old confront error, the question of what we must do when we teach the lost needs to be answered. First, love the sinner. In Romans 9-10, Paul’s heart went out to his kinsmen who had rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. It is evident that Paul had a great love for them and desired their salvation. Those who are mired in sin must have someone who compassionately loves them and wants to see them stand justified before God. Second, “hate every false way” (Psalm 119:104, 128; Romans 12:9; 2 Timothy 2:16-18). Examine your attitude toward error and avoid it — never coddle it! Third, trust the power of truth. Remember that truth, when spoken candidly in love, will not turn the good-hearted away, it will save them. When people “receive with meekness the engrafted word,” it will save them (James 1:21). When you teach someone, trust the power of scripture and use it to change someone’s life. Preaching “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) is the “power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). Fourth, avoid partiality (Acts 10:34-35; James 2:1). This invariably leads to accommodation and compromise of truth. The “feelings” of the lost sinner become more important than saving them with truth. We have all had people close to us who need to repent and that friendship colors our ability to stand for what is right. We cannot let that happen or both the sinner and the saint will be in jeopardy. Fifth, be “set for the defense of the gospel” (Philippians 1:17; 1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3). There will be times when you cannot put off teaching truth. You will have to do it right then to be effective. Therefore, you need to diligently prepare yourself with a right heart and with the knowledge of scripture.

Proverbs 23:23 says, “Buy the truth, and sell it not.” When you teach the truth evil men will charge you with evil, but good-hearted men will love you because they have learned to love truth. Prepare yourself and teach it to save the souls of men, not to spare feelings.

Kyle Campbell