

Is It Wrong To Call Names?

Many people say it is wrong to call names from the pulpit or in a bulletin or periodical. They say it is "unchristian," mean-spirited, and unnecessary. To them, it is anathema. Such people walk by sight, not by faith (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). They do not get their attitude from the Bible, but the world--since faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

The Bible authorizes the calling of names, that is, specifically identifying certain men by name along with their teaching or actions. Jesus called the names of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers (Matt. 23:13; 16:6, 11; Lk. 11:46, 52). He called them names as well, like "hypocrites" and "serpents" (Matt. 23:29, 33).

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the Jewish denominations. May we follow the Lord's example and identify the denominations of our day? May we indict the leaders of such denominations as hypocrites? If not, why not?

The apostles called names of groups and as well. John, by direction of the Lord, identified seven churches in Asia by name (Rev. 2, 3). Much of what he wrote was "negative." Paul named those of the "circumcision" and said they were "insubordinate...idle talkers and deceivers" (Titus 1:10). He derogatorily referred to this group of brethren as "the mutilation" and said they were "dogs" and "evil workers" (Phil. 3:2).

The circumcision was a faction among first century Christians. They did not deny the Lord, baptism, or the church. They morally corrupt. Yet, Paul referred to them in strong, sharp language. May we do the same today? May we identify factions among brethren such as institutional liberals or those who accept unity-in-doctrinal-diversity? If not, why not?

Individual men are identified in the Bible. Paul warned Timothy to beware of Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14, 15). He told him of Demas' apostasy (2 Tim. 4:10). Can we follow his example and warn others of false teachers? If not, why not?

Rather than being unchristian, mean-spirited, or unnecessary, the calling of names is condoned and supported by the Bible. It is a vital part of teaching the truth and warning against error (Rom. 16:17, 18). Those who deny this, walk by sight, not by faith.

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