

Should We Name False Teachers?

Here is a question for you: is it right or is it wrong to call out false teachers by name? In the world today there are many people who call themselves Christian leaders but actually teach dangerous, heretical doctrines. Some simply reject the Bible outright and claim that we need to look elsewhere for truth. Others teach things that are contrary to the Bible or twist the Scriptures to their own ends. For example, there are those who deny the virgin birth, the resurrection, the identity of Jesus as God, the reality of Hell, and that salvation comes only through Jesus – just to name a few common heresies! Such people abound in today's world and have led a great many astray.

The question is, what should be done about it? Some people believe that it's wrong to even call people false teachers. They say that calling someone a false teacher is the same thing as judging them, and Christians “aren't supposed to judge people.” In their opinion the best thing to do is to ignore them entirely. They may not say this directly, but they do recommend not responding to them, and not responding to someone is exactly the same as ignoring them. At most they might address the false teaching, but they never address the false teacher.

Others say that we should live by Thumper's motto. The rabbit from Bambi famously said that “if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.” I have heard people seriously suggest that this philosophy should guide everything we say. In other words, if we don't have anything nice to say about someone then it's best to keep silent. Calling someone a false teacher isn't nice, so we shouldn't say it. Once again, I'd like to point out that failing to deal with a situation is no different from ignoring it. The results are the same.

All of this brings up another question: what did people do in the Bible? Is this policy of ignoring false teachers actually Biblical? It's an excellent question, and fortunately it's easy to answer.

First of all, Jesus Himself made it quite plain that He had no interest in Thumper's motto. The Lord did not hesitate to condemn people in the strongest possible terms:

Matthew 23:27: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. ...

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

You can see that Jesus did not mince words! He called the Pharisees hypocrites and a generation of vipers, and He did it *while they were standing there listening to Him*. There was nothing remotely nice about what He said. He actually told them, to their face, that they were unbelievably wicked men and were headed straight for Hell. The Lord *definitely* confronted both the false teaching *and* the false teacher.

Of course, Jesus was God, and that is an important distinction. Jesus has a right to judge everyone, and one day we will stand before Him and be held accountable for the way we've lived our lives. God has every right to judge mankind, so the fact that He exercises that right should not come as a surprise.

So let's look at another example. What did the apostles do when they were confronted with this sort of situation? Did they believe that confronting false teachers was wrong? Did they live by the “be nice at all costs” motto? Actually, they did not. For example, Paul had quite a bit to say about someone named Alexander:

1 Timothy 1:19: “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

2 Timothy 4:14: “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:”

These are remarkable statements! Not only did Paul call Alexander out by name as an evil person (which is not a nice thing to say!), but he said that he *delivered him over to Satan*. Before you panic, I'd like to point out that the reason Paul did this was so that Alexander could learn not to blaspheme. Paul hoped that by doing this Alexander would come to regret what he'd done and would repent of his sins. However, Alexander apparently didn't learn anything because in 2 Timothy Paul once again mentioned the wickedness of Alexander and asked God to avenge Paul for all the evil things that Alexander had done do him.

So we see that the apostle Paul called out two false teachers by name (Hymenaeus and Alexander). Paul didn't restrain himself to just addressing the false teachings themselves, and he didn't say “Well, let's be nice about it.” You don't see Paul saying anything remotely like “Even though some people are teaching false doctrines, it would be wrong and judgmental to call them out for it. We need to get along with such people and be nice to them.” No, Paul is pretty direct in saying that Alexander is evil and people need to be aware of who he is and what he's doing.

This is far from the only example that we find in the Bible. There are many more cases where the apostles called out someone for being a false teacher or evildoer:

Galatians 2:11: “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.”

2 Timothy 4:10: “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.”

III John 1:9: “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.”

This is not just limited to the New Testament; one finds the same thing in the Old Testament as well. For example, Nehemiah names quite a few names:

Nehemiah 13:7: “And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

8 And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber.”

Nehemiah 13:28: “And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.

29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.”

Another place where you can find this in abundance is in the Psalms. In fact, there is a whole class of Psalms called imprecatory Psalms, in which the psalmist asks God to avenge him for some evil that was done to him. For example, one psalmist wrote this:

Psalm 69:22: “Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.

23 Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake.

24 Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.

25 Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.

26 For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.

27 Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness.

28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”

That is some pretty harsh language! Now, lest we think that these verses are simply the ravings of a lunatic, it's worth noting that we find the same thing going on *in Heaven*. Take a look at Revelation:

Revelation 6:9: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

Revelation 11:16: “And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.”

Revelation 16:5: “And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”

I realize that we've strayed a little bit from the original topic, but there's an important point here. The modern church has been infiltrated with the idea that its primary role in life is to be *nice*. Calling out false teachers for heresy isn't nice, so many people say we shouldn't do it. Condemning sins like homosexuality, adultery, and abortion isn't nice so we shouldn't do that either. Asking God for

vengeance is *especially* not nice. It's the Thumper approach to life: be nice at all times and never say anything that isn't positive and uplifting.

If you look at the Bible, however, it becomes obvious that the Thumper philosophy isn't the least bit Biblical. We aren't called to be nice; we're called to be loving, and that is an entirely different matter. There is nothing loving about refusing to tell people that certain actions are sin. After all, the wages of sin is death. If you don't call sin out then you're allowing it to continue to claim life after life. Calling it out and urging people to repent of it is the only way to save them from its terribly destructive consequences. We *must* call it out.

Likewise, there is nothing loving about refusing to confront false teachers. Life isn't just a game where everyone goes to the same place after death and receives the same meaningless prize. We are playing for keeps, and the reward is either everlasting life in paradise or everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire. There is no middle road or neutral ground. False teachers are denying everlasting life to millions of people and sending them down the road to Hell. They're like angry bears roaming in crowded neighborhoods, looking for the weak and disabled so they can tear them limb from limb. If there was a rabid bear in your neighborhood you wouldn't ignore it on the grounds that we should be nice to bear; instead you would hide your children and then call animal control so they could capture the bear before it hurt anyone.

Refusing to name false teachers is devastating for many reasons. If no one confronts them then how will they learn that they're wrong and need to repent? If no one names them then who will tell those who are weak or new to the faith that they should be avoided? There's nothing loving about refusing to warn people against men like Rob Bell, who teach that there is no Hell or judgment for sin. How many people are going to walk into a bookstore, buy his books, and go away deceived because no one warned them against him? How many souls will be lost forever because those who knew better refused to do something about it?

The call to be loving means that sometimes we have to engage in behaviors that aren't nice at all. Paul really did turn Alexander over to Satan, but the reason he did it was in the hope that Alexander might learn the error of his ways and change. Would it really have been better if instead Paul had done nothing and let Alexander continue down the road to eternal damnation?

Now I realize that the imprecatory Psalms are a bit different. The key there is to realize that while God forbids *us* from taking revenge, He does *not* rebuke our thirst for justice. All He says is that when we've been wronged we should allow the Lord to take care of it. Those who have been brutally murdered for the cause of Christ *do* thirst for justice to be done, as we saw in Revelation 6:9-10. The Lord does not rebuke this but instead promises that justice *will* be done. One day He will avenge His children, but that is a topic for another time.

Refusing to confront false teachers may be “nice”, but there is nothing loving about it. I fear that our refusal to combat false teachings *and* those who teach them only makes it that much easier for false teachers to guide millions down the road to Hell. After all, if you refuse to tell campers that a vicious wolf is roaming their campground, what do you think is going to happen? Is being nice really worth all the lives that are going to be lost?