

Should We Name False Teachers?

Here's a question for you: is it wrong to call out false teachers by name? In today's world there are many people who call themselves Christian leaders but teach false and heretical doctrines. Some reject the Bible outright and claim we need to look elsewhere for truth. Others teach things which 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 divinity of Jesus, the reality of Hell, or 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.

What should be done about this? Some people believe it's wrong to call anyone a false teacher. They say 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 either ignore them entirely, or confront their false teaching without ever mentioning them by name. At most they might address the false teaching but not the false teacher.

Others say 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've heard people seriously suggest that this philosophy should guide everything we say. 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.

But 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, Jesus Himself made it quite plain that He had no interest in Thumper's motto. The Lord didn't hesitate to condemn false teachers 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?"

Jesus didn't mince words! He called the Pharisees hypocrites and a generation of vipers, and He did it *while they were standing there listening to Him*. Jesus told them, to their face, that they were wicked men who were headed straight for Hell. The Lord confronted both the false teaching *and* the false teacher.

Of course, Jesus is God, and that's an important distinction. Jesus has a divine right to judge everyone. One day we will all 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 shouldn't come as a surprise.

Let's look at another example. What did the apostles do when they were confronted with this sort of situation? Did they believe confronting false teachers was wrong? Did they live by the "be nice at all costs" motto? Nope. The apostle Paul had quite a bit to say about someone named Alexander:

1 Timothy 1:19-20: "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: 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 copper-smith 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, but he *delivered him over to Satan*. The reason Paul did this was so Alexander could learn not to blaspheme. Paul hoped that 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 him for all the evil things Alexander had done do him.

We can see that the apostle Paul called out two false teachers by name (Hymenaeus and Alexander), and he didn't restrain himself to just addressing their false teachings. Paul never said that even though some people were teaching false doctrines it would be wrong to call them out for it. No, he said that Alexander was evil and people needed to be aware of who he was and what he was doing.

This isn't the only example we can find in the Bible. There are more cases where the apostles called someone out 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 1:9-10: “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 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.”

Paul was even willing to call out another apostle by name! This also isn't limited to the New Testament. For example, Nehemiah names quite a few names:

Nehemiah 13:7-8: “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. And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber.”

Nehemiah 13:28-29: “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. 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's 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:

Psalms 69:22-28: “Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy

wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”

That's some pretty harsh language! Lest we think these verses are simply the ravings of a wicked person, it's worth noting we can find the same thing going on *in Heaven*. Take a look:

Revelation 6:9-10: “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: 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 11:16-18: “And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 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. 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 16:5-7: “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. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”

I realize we've strayed a little bit from the original topic but there's an important point here. Some Christians believe that their primary job in life is to be *nice*. Calling out false teachers for heresy isn't nice so people say we shouldn't do it. Condemning sins 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 this philosophy isn't Biblical at all. We aren't called to be nice! We're called to be *loving*, and that's entirely different. There's nothing loving about refusing to tell people that certain actions are sinful. After all, the wages of sin is death! If churches and preachers refuse to condemn sin then they're allowing it to continue to claim one soul after another. Calling sin out and urging people to repent of it is the only way to save them from its terribly destructive consequences. Sin *must* be condemned!

Likewise, there's nothing loving about refusing to confront false teachers. Life isn't a game where everyone goes to the same place after death. We're playing for keeps, and the reward is either everlasting life in paradise or everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire. There's no neutral ground. False teachers are denying everlasting life to millions of people by sending them down the road to Hell. They're like angry bears roaming around 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 call animal control so they could capture the bear before it killed 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 who teach that there's no Hell or judgment for sin. How many people are going to go away deceived because no one warned them against false teachers? How many souls will be lost forever because those who knew better refused to do something about it?

God's command to be loving means that sometimes we have to engage in behaviors that don't seem very nice. Paul really did turn Alexander over to Satan, but the reason he did it was so that Alexander might learn the error of his ways and repent. Would it have been better if Paul had done nothing and allowed Alexander to continue down the road to eternal damnation? I don't think so.

I realize that the imprecatory psalms can be hard to read. The key is to realize that while God forbids *us* from taking revenge, He doesn't rebuke our desire for justice. Instead He says that when we've been wronged we must allow the Lord to take care of it. Those who have been brutally murdered for the cause of Christ *do* long for justice, as we saw in Revelation 6:9-10. The Lord doesn't rebuke this but instead promises that one day justice *will* be done. One day He will avenge His children, just as He promised.

Refusing to confront false teachers may seem like the nice thing to do but there's nothing loving about it. I fear that people's refusal to combat both false teachings *and* those who teach them only makes it 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 worth all the lives that are going to be lost?