**Behaving Properly Toward Outsiders**

Jesus taught us in the sermon on the mount that we were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In several passages of Scripture, the apostle Paul makes a distinction between those who are in Christ and those who are “outsiders” and shows us how to conduct ourselves in such a way as to be a positive influence on those around us. In a way, Jesus is using Paul to provide us with practical teaching on being good salt and effective light. Consider with me the three general principles Paul says should govern our interactions with those outside the body of Christ.

**Outsiders don’t need me to pass judgment.** The whole “judge not” issue is really confusing to a lot of people, but it is really pretty simple. Christians are called to exercise themselves in the use of the Scriptures to be able to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). Then we are taught to stand for what is right and expose evil (Ephesians 5:11). We are even commanded to confront fellow Christians who are living in sin to encourage them to repent (1 Corinthians 5). In all of that, we are to “judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). But Paul said, “what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

All of us alienated ourselves from our God when we sinned against Him (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1-2) and a person who has remained outside of God’s fellowship stands condemned by Him for all of their sins. It is not my place to try to shame the outsider over one of his poor choices, it is my goal to encourage him to be reconciled to God by having all his sins forgiven.

**We are to behave properly toward outsiders.** Paul states this pretty plainly in 1 Thessalonians 4:12, but he also offers some valuable insight into what proper behavior looks like. In verse 9, he says outsiders should see Christians loving one another. Jesus said that would be one way they would know we are His disciples (John 13:35). Paul also taught that we are to strive to live quiet lives and mind our own business (v. 11). Drama and turmoil are not attractive. Finally, he emphasizes the importance of being productive members of society (v. 11). Not only will that contribute to our being honest and trustworthy, it will provide the financial resources our families need (v. 12). The bottom line is that we have chosen to wear the name of Christ; outsiders may not agree with everything we believe, but they should at least respect us for our consistency of character.

**We are to conduct ourselves with wisdom toward outsiders.** I believe Paul’s emphasis in Colossians 4:5 is evangelistic. We should love the souls of others enough to pray for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ (vs. 2-3). We are to make the most of those opportunities as they come our way (v. 5) by saying the right things in the right way (v.6). Peter emphasized this as well in 1 Peter 3:15: “Always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

What non-Christians think of Christians is important, mainly because our Lord calls on us to be a positive influence in the world. Outsiders should see sincere disciples of Jesus Christ who derive their values from His teachings, who put those values into practice in their lives and who lovingly share the good news of His grace with others. God doesn’t want anyone to stay on the outside – He wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

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