

Big Issues:

# Who cares and why bother?



Peter Dodd

## What difference does it make?

Many years ago, I wrote an article for a Zimbabwean internet chat group entitled "*The right to be right.*" The article came after a discussion, sometimes heated, that evolved after an inter-denominational meeting that came to be known in Harare as "*The Great Debate.*"

The background to this formal discussion amongst the churches in Harare was complex, but the short version is that some American evangelists had visited the country and publicly prophesied various things, and urged people to do things in God's Name. Needless to say, these prophecies were spectacularly inaccurate, and the things done in God's name were culturally insensitive in our context, and contradicted scriptural teaching on the subject. Many churches were unafraid to take a stand and call out the visitors' prophecies and teachings as false. Yet some, albeit with international ties, strongly opposed those who made this stand, accusing them of "Breaking the Unity of the Spirit." Their idea was that there should never be any suggestion of disunity shown to unbelievers, further stating that disagreeing with them was inviting God's curse and judgement on the land.

A formal public debate was held to discuss the matter, (Which was actually kept secret by some churches) but predictably ended with no resolution being reached. Talking about it shortly afterwards, one young lady heatedly asked a pastor from the opposing side, "What gives you the right to be right?" This question and the idea behind it formed the seed of an idea that stuck with me for some time. To me, and several others, the obvious answer was, "Truth is self-evident," but given the emotional arguments at the time, I knew that the statement would have to be carefully addressed. My article, *The Right to be Right* was the result.

## Who cares, and why bother?

There is, however, another bigger question that needs addressing. Bigger than "Who gives you the Right to be Right?" is the question, "*But who cares and why bother?*" This I think is the primary or real question, and the answer partially answers the other question. Put another way, the question is, "What are the issues at stake?" Sometimes, the issues are relatively minor, sometimes much bigger. When looking at the issues, it always helps to see what the implications would be if taken to their logical conclusions. We also need to consider what scripture as a whole says about a subject. When Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," (Eph 4:3) we must note that Paul also wrote to the Corinthians in the very passage that provides us the basis of our unity,

Co 11:17-19 NIV

17) In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

18) In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

19) No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

It is the differences in the Church that show that not every activity or teaching that happens is approved by God. Hebrews 12:14 says “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” While living in peace with our fellow man is commendable, Holiness is the greater call.

Paul had already written to the Corinthians,

1Co 5:11-13 NIV

11) But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

12) What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

13) God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

Paul's concern was not with those outside the Church in this context, but rather with those inside the Church who would lead people away from Christ, or into error, so destroying their faith. So we see there is a definite reason to judge those in the Church if it will bring Christ or His followers into disrepute. The same goes for those who will bring Christ and His followers into disrepute by their teachings. As usual, Paul did not mince his words:

2Ti 2:16-18 NIV

16) Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

17) Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

18) who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

Paul further wrote to Titus, "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." (Titus 3:10)

It is clear therefore that for Paul, unity is based upon living a life in accordance with the truth already laid down in Scripture. Those who bring Christ, His followers, and the Gospel into disrepute were strongly opposed. For Paul, not to do so would give the idea that the issues were just not important enough to make a stand upon, and for him, the work of Christ in bringing salvation was certainly worth dying for. He spent most of his life preaching and teaching, developing ideas and correcting errors, and he was prepared to use the authority given to him by Jesus to ensure that it was delivered without being changed or corrupted by other people:

Gal 1:6-10 NIV

6) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

7) which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

9) As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

10) Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Yet there were other issues where Paul took the opposite stance

Rom 14:5-6 NIV

5) One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

6) He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

These were minor issues, not considered to affect one's salvation. For this reason, Paul left it up to the individual's own conscience. But there were also other issues in the middle; those that would not affect the individual, but might affect others perception of what was right and good. Regarding the easy availability of discounted meat that had come from animals sacrificed to gods and idols, Paul wrote,

1Co 8:10-13 NIV

10) For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

11) So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

12) When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

13) Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Paul's first concern was not for his own freedom to eat meat, but rather on what it may mean for those who saw him doing so- Eating meat sacrificed to an idol had implications in the First Century. It usually meant that one was seeking the blessing or protection of that god. Knowing that there is only one God gave him the freedom to eat the meat if he wanted meat, but knowing that it might confuse others who believed in many gods, he elected not to give them any cause to sin by misunderstanding what it meant.

## And so we again ask the question, “Who cares, and why bother?”

The answer is that *we* must care first of all. We must care that Christ’s name and reputation are honoured in, and by what is happening, or by what is taught. We must consider the implications of the action or teaching- will it lead to, or away from established Biblical truths? The sad reality is that there are many outside the Church who do care what goes on inside the Church, or more accurately, take pleasure in exposing the happenings in individual churches. Because of the deviant actions of some, no minister of God is looked at the same way anymore. Because of the antics of some prominent televangelists, any appeal for funds is treated with suspicion. And so the reputation of Christ and His followers is tarnished.

Worse are those who preach that the death of God’s Son was to make us rich and prosperous in this life. When things have not gone according to plan, the faith of many has been shipwrecked in the storms of life. Still many more have been left with unwarranted feelings of guilt when their faith has not produced the things or situations they desired.

So, we care because we are His. We care for the character and reputation of our God, and His people as any family member would. We care if people get the wrong idea about who God our Father is. We care if people make false promises in God's Name. We care if his people hurt, or hurt others, however inadvertently. In today's Post-Modern world, there are many who don't care if something is true or not, as long as it does not affect them directly. We, however, should care for the truth *because* it is the truth, and we care that people have the opportunity to see the truth. (It was Jesus Himself who said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.") We should care enough to come alongside those who are on a wrong track and offer correction- for their sake and our Father's. We should care enough for those who are in doubt to make a stand on the Truth and confront those who are bringing error into the Church. We should care enough to be able to make a stand when the need arises. Who cares and why bother? We care and we bother because that is showing love to others, and the world will know we are Jesus' disciples if we love one another.

Not caring or bothering is just not an option.

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