

Should Preachers “Step on Toes?”

*"So then many of His disciples, when they heard this, said,
'This statement is very unpleasant; who can listen to it?'"*

(John 6:60, NASB)

Preface

- When a Bible teacher steps on people's toes, that means he is aware the audience will likely not receive his message very warmly or positively.
- Most people do not like when someone teaches something they disagree with or do not want to hear.
- Yet, delivering the truth - and the whole truth - of God's message is more important than the potential risk of raising the audience's ire, so preachers and Bible teachers should be willing to step on people's toes if the occasion calls for it.
- Unfortunately, many Bible teachers, when they know their message will not be received well, will choose to teach something they know will generate a more positive response.

Preface

- For example, when is the last time you heard a sermon on . . .
 - Women's absolute silence in the church assembly (**1 Cor. 14:34-35**).
 - If self-defense is ever authorized (**John 18:36; Matt. 5:43-44**).
 - The head covering (**1 Cor. 11:2-16**).
 - Length of hair (**1 Cor. 11:2-16**).
 - Women being keepers of the home (**Titus 2:3-5**).
 - Any similar "controversial" topic.
- I'm sure you have heard countless sermons addressing "Once Saved, Always Saved," "Total Depravity," etc. though.
- By skimping on these subjects and similar not-so-positively received topics, Bible teachers wind up feeding into exactly what Paul condemns in **2 Tim. 4:3-5**.

Preface

- If our audience has the right attitude toward God's Word, then they should always love and appreciate when the truth is taught.
- However, if all we hear from our audience is how much they love what we preach, then that likely means they have already heaped us up as their teacher, and woe to us (**Luke 6:26**)!
- We need more people willing to speak the truth who do not neglect to declare the "*whole counsel of God*" (**Acts 20:27**), regardless of how the audience might respond.
- Instead of speaking "*smooth things*" that will be received well (**Isa. 30:10**), we ought to preach what is needed rather than what is wanted (see again **2 Tim. 4:3-5**).

Preface

- To be clear, preachers and Bible teachers certainly should never go about trying to make enemies with people by simply preaching the truth.
 - The truth should always be spoken "*in love*" and from a desire to bring others to God (**Eph. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:11**).
- That being said, God's Word tells us that we may very well make enemies with people by standing for the truth.
 - "*Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" (**Gal. 4:16**).
- It is a very real possibility that we may lose friends, offend family, and cause others to think negatively of us by taking the proper stand for the truth, but we all should be willing to accept whatever repercussions may come our way (**Luke 12:51-53**).

We have many approved examples in the New Testament showing how we ought to preach the truth - and the whole truth of God - regardless of the consequences. Let's consider a few . . .

John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29)

- Do you remember why the John the Baptist died? He died for speaking the truth even though he likely knew that truth would not be positively received.
- John could have preached all manner of subjects to Herod, but he instead chose to preach against Herod's unlawful marriage by saying, "*It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife*" (Mark 6:18).
- How many people would be willing to tell their governmental leader he is in an unscriptural marriage that God requires him to terminate? John did that very thing and the result, of course, was his beheading.

Stephen (Acts 7)

- Stephen could have preached all manner of subjects, but instead he rebuked his audience for their stubbornness, calling them "*stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears,*" resistors of the Holy Spirit, and betrayers and murderers of Christ (v.51-52).
- What was the result?
 - They gnashed their teeth, covered their ears, yelled, cast Stephen out of the city, and stoned him to death (v.54-60).
- Yet, in spite of the persecution, Stephen was not dissuaded from preaching the part of the truth his audience needed to hear.
- Stephen was not just "*faithful unto death*" (Rev. 2:10), but he also faithfully taught the truth in its entirety unto death.
 - Could the same be said of us if we were in Stephen's shoes?

Peter (Acts 5:12-42)

- Peter and some of the other apostles were imprisoned and specifically warned to stop preaching the truth because their teaching caused people to feel guilty and uncomfortable.
- In spite of these warnings, Peter said, "*We must obey God rather than men*" (v.29), then he and the apostles "*left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus*" (v.41-42).
- Peter counted it worthy to suffer for the sake of teaching the truth of God in its entirety.
 - Can the same be said about us?

Paul

- In his farewell speech to the elders in Ephesus, Paul said, *“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God”* (Acts 20:26-27).
- Paul shared *“the whole counsel of God”* amidst great opposition.
 - *“I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents”* (Acts 20:19).
- Yet, this opposition did not cause Paul to pause for one moment in teaching the whole truth of God's word.
 - *“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus”* (Acts 20:20-21).

Paul

- The result of Paul's "helpful" teaching would lead to numerous scourges and imprisonments over the course of his life and ultimately his death (2 Cor. 11:22-33).
- Just think, Paul could have avoided all that trouble if he would have just taught on less "controversial" subjects, been a little less "rigid" and "narrow" in his doctrine, and stopped being so "argumentative."

Jesus

- Jesus is well-known for His "positive" preaching, and it is certainly true that His earthly ministry was filled with much of this type preaching. However, it is also an undeniable fact that the Messiah was simultaneously one of the most "negative" preachers in history.
- Using the logic of so many brethren today, Jesus should have just stopped being so "controversial" and "argumentative." After all, if Christ would have simply chose more "positive" sermons to preach, He surely would never have been crucified.
- Yet, God's will included - and still includes - both "positive" and "negative" teaching, the latter of which contributed to Christ's persecution and death.
- All Christians are required to follow our Lord's example (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 John 2:5-6).
 - Are we following His example in how we teach, regardless of the consequences?

Conclusion

- Today, those who are courageous enough to preach the truth when they know people will disagree are often called argumentative, divisive, quarrelsome, sowers of discord, and a whole range of similar pejoratives (**see 1 Kings 18:17-18**).
- We need more people like John the Baptist, Stephen, Peter, Paul, and Christ Himself, all of whom were willing to fulfill their ministries by being watchful in all things and not just the parts in which we already agree.
- We must teach "*anything that would be helpful*" to our audiences (**Acts 20:21**), meaning we teach any and everything helpful for obtaining salvation and pleasing God, even if that means speaking some things that the listeners might not enjoy.