

The Necessity of the Negative

None of us wants to hear bad news about ourselves. Some enjoy hearing bad news about others, which is an unloving and ungodly way to be (1Cor. 13:4-7), but none of us wants to hear bad news that affects ourselves or our loved ones. All of us would rather hear that everything is good, peaceful, pleasant, and right in our lives.

However, nothing is more necessary and helpful to us than to hear the truth regardless of whether the truth is pleasant or unpleasant. Only the truth connects us with reality and prevents us from making wrong decisions based on misunderstandings and falsehoods. The truth forces us to face our problems and to work to find solutions. Those who choose to be ignorant of the truth and are unwilling to deal with their problems will fail, for their choices prevent them from making corrections, improvements, and reparations. A person who lives in ignorance of everything that is wrong in his life may think that he is happy, but he has chosen a course that can only end in misery.

Sometimes it is necessary to be negative. Jude understood this, for he altered his pleasant message about salvation in favor of an unpleasant but necessary message about false teachers. Notice Jude 3-4:

³Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Certainly, it is more pleasant to read about our common salvation, but it is more necessary to be informed of the threat against “the faith” that could hinder our common salvation. Jude could have chosen to be silent about the matter of false teachers so that his brethren would not be disturbed, but he knew that they were in danger of being led astray, and so he delivered a most unpleasant message.

It takes a true, loving friend to deliver an unpleasant, negative message of truth to another. Consider the words of Proverbs 27:5-6:

⁵Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. ⁶Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

Notice how this passage shows that an “open rebuke” is a revelation of love. It is important that we recognize open rebukes and “the wounds of a friend” as expressions of love from those who are truly concerned

for our wellbeing. Too many times, people reject such unpleasant expressions of love and prefer the pleasant “kisses of an enemy.” They reject their true friends and consider them as enemies because their friends tell them the unpleasant truth (Gal. 4:16).

Sadly, there are many deceivers who will gladly tell us pleasant lies and lure us into their false comfort. Their so-called “positive mental attitude” psychology goes too far and causes their followers to live in denial of the truth. They choose to “accentuate the positive, and eliminate the negative,” which is a commendable goal, but that goal cannot be achieved at the expense of the truth. Many megachurches such as the Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, have eliminated any mention of sin, repentance, or judgment from their messages. The so-called “pastor” of Lakewood, Joel Osteen, says:

“I think for years there’s been a lot of hellfire and damnation. You go to church to figure out what you’re doing wrong and you leave feeling bad like you’re not going to make it. We believe in focusing on the goodness of God.” (Religion Gets Supersized at Megachurches, Fox News, 2/3/04)

Empty messages and half-truths such as those preached by Osteen are reminiscent of the false prophets and priests of Jeremiah’s time. God said of them, “They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ but there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11).

It is not easy to be the bearer of bad news, but it must be done as a service of love. Those who come to us in love with an unpleasant, negative message of truth should be received and thanked as friends rather than rejected as enemies. In the same way, when we have unpleasant truth to tell others, we must do our duty as true friends in the spirit of love. Let us remember that Jesus had many unpleasant things to say to those who were estranged from God, but it was only through the truth that they could be reconciled. He said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32). Surely, we all want the freedom that comes through the truth of Jesus Christ, even when the truth hurts. Therefore, let us hear the truth, tell the truth, and live by the truth whether it is positive or negative.

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