

The Truth Will Cause Many to Hate You

A leading ministry stated that its vision was “creating churches that unchurched people love.” This is a highly commendable goal.

Let us present the real Jesus, the Jesus to whom the crowds swarmed, the Jesus who ate with despised tax collectors and prostitutes. And let us demonstrate real, New Testament love, the kind of love that embraces the outcasts and meets people where they are. After all, Jesus said that He came “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10, NIV).

By all means, let us have this same philosophy, avoiding religious hypocrisy, self-righteousness and “holier than thou” attitudes. Every community of believers should strive to live this out, be it in home Bible studies, on our jobs, in our neighborhoods or in our corporate church gatherings.

Let us not be known as the haters and the bigots because we are nasty people who look down their noses at others, the people who are “too good for you.” And let us be better known as followers of Jesus than as members of a political party, as born-again believers more than rightwing (or leftwing) ideologues.

As Jesus Himself exhorted us, “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16, NIV) Or, in the words of Peter, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (1 Peter 2:12, NIV).

Let us be known for our good works, for our kindness and compassion, for helping the poor and the needy, for standing for righteousness, for opposing injustice. By all means, let

us live this out for the glory and honor of God and for the good of a hurting world.

But let us not deceive ourselves. The same world that hated Jesus will hate us also. The same humanity that chose darkness over light in Jesus' day will gravitate to the darkness today. Do not be deceived.

As Jesus said to His disciples, "Students are not greater than their teacher, and slaves are not greater than their master. Students are to be like their teacher, and slaves are to be like their master. And since I, the master of the household, have been called the prince of demons, the members of my household will be called by even worse names" (Matt. 10:24–25, NLT).

And this: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed My teaching, they will obey yours also" (John 15:18–20, NIV).

That means that some people will love us because they see our lives, because they are drawn to Jesus and because they too have opened their hearts to Him. Others will hate us, repelled by our godly lives, turned off by our moral standards and dead set against receiving Jesus as Lord. No matter how gracious we are, they will brand us as bigots and haters and worse.

On a practical level, that means that the young, drug-addicted, non-believing couple living together out of wedlock should feel welcomed and loved when they walk into one of our services. They should encounter people who have joy, who are thrilled to see new faces and who treat them as if they were family.

At the same time, if the gospel is being preached and the Holy Spirit is moving, at some point they will become conscious of their sin and will be called to repent and receive mercy and grace through the cross.

If they can continue to come week in and week out, never feeling uncomfortable, never feeling conviction, never encountering both the holiness of God and the love of God, then something is wrong with those meetings.

As Jesus also said, the Holy Spirit has come to “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8, ESV). The Holy Spirit will make us uneasy in our sin. The Holy Spirit will invade our hiding places. The Holy Spirit will reveal what is wrong so that we can be made right.

Again, on a practical level, that means that a gay couple attending our meetings should be greeted just like the couple living together out of wedlock—with love and with grace and with hospitality. But if they continue to attend our gatherings, if we are preaching the Word, giving place to the Spirit in our worship and living godly lives ourselves, they will recognize that God is not pleased with their union. They will be confronted with grace and truth and will have to decide how they will respond. Will it be with contrition and confession or with disobedience and defiance?

This reminds me of what an ex-gay Christian said when he was asked if you could be gay and Christian (meaning, practicing and/or affirming homosexuality and following Jesus at the same time). He responded, “Not for long!”

 In light of this, I have to question what a pastor is teaching when a wealthy strip club owner could be a longtime, tithing member of his church without either coming under church discipline or Holy Spirit conviction. Something very fundamental is wrong with this picture. (For the record, this is a real-life example. The church claimed to

be a Bible-believing, evangelical congregation.)

So, let us do our best to have churches and communities that the unchurched will love, but not at the expense of speaking the truth, with both clarity and compassion. And let us remember that if we are true to Jesus, true to the Word and true to the Spirit, some will love us and others will hate us. It is inevitable and unavoidable.

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