

DID GOD REALLY SAY...STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH?

“When it comes to religion, I say, ‘Live and let live.’”

“Who am I to judge?”

“You believe what you believe and I’ll believe what I believe. No harm, no foul.”

“It doesn’t really matter what church a person belongs to, as long as it’s Christian.”

“It doesn’t matter what faith a person is as long as they have faith—all religions lead to the same place.”

“She doesn’t go to church but she’s one of the most spiritual people I know.”

“There is no absolute truth.”

It took me all of 30 seconds to come up with that list of sayings. How could I do that so quickly? Because all of those statements and philosophies are common today. I’ve heard them all. They summarize the attitude of tolerance that is prevalent in our society and our world. Almost all beliefs are to be accepted as fine options for people. It seems that the one thing people will not tolerate is a person who doesn’t accept the philosophy that anything goes when it comes to religion and faith. We are to make no judgments!

It may be that you also have partly adopted that attitude—or at least haven’t spoken against it. We may even sheepishly ask—almost as if we didn’t know the answer—

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God will show us today why it is wrong to adopt that worldly viewpoint and we may even find some other areas where we have sinned when it comes to the defense of God’s Word. He’ll also explain what he really has in mind for us to do as his representatives in the world and he will empower us to **STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH.**

You know how we will often—in texts, emails or phone calls—say to a person *“Say hi to mom for me”* or *“Say hi to everyone there”* or something like that? The Apostle Paul did that too. When he wrote his letters to different groups of Christians, he would typically include some *“say hi to so-and-so”* statements. When he wrote to the Christians in and around Rome, he did that more than in any of his other letters. Near the end of his letter, it sounded like this: **Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus... Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus...Greet Mary... Greet Andronicus and Junias...Greet Ampliatus...Greet Urbanus...and my dear friend Stachys...Greet Apelles** and so on.

In addition to their names, he gave descriptions of these people too—very personal, very heartfelt. It is immediately after this that he writes: **Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. (v .16)** And then comes our text: **BUT I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.**

The word “But” is there in the Greek but not in many translations. It’s kind of important though. It signals Paul turning the page—greet all the brothers and sisters in the faith **BUT** watch out for those who do not believe the truth! Paul gives his friends in Christ a warning and instructions on what to do.

Warning and instructions that you and I very much need today as God's people surrounded by many who hold to false beliefs!

The fellowship, the friendship, the common bond Paul had with them and they with each other was based on the teaching they shared, the doctrines that they all held to—the truth given by Jesus. If any of us thinks that specific teachings are not that important, we need to take special note of Paul's words here. He “urged” them and he “urges” us **to watch out**. Just like those Christians, we too are to be watching, to be looking, to be aware. Of what?

Those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. God's apostle says to beware of people who are believing and teaching things that are false, things that contradict what God's Word says. Understand that this is not worldly philosophies he's warning against, but religious teachings. And this is not people who struggle with one Bible teaching or another and are a little confused, but trying to figure it out. These are people who are determined in their beliefs which contradict what God's Word says. He calls their false teachings “obstacles.”

False teachings are obstacles to saving faith. If a church teaches that your salvation is at least in part dependent on what you do instead of totally dependent on what Jesus did with his life and death, then they are false teachers. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that. If someone believes that, it is an obstacle to saving faith.

If a church teaches that Jesus is not true God from all eternity who came to serve as the world's Savior, then they are false teachers. The Mormon Church teaches that. If someone believes that, it is an obstacle to saving faith.

One by one, we can compare the beliefs of any preacher, any church, any individual to the teachings of the Bible. And just like a participant on *American Ninja Warrior* dodging obstacles, you and I must pick our way around those who put obstacles in the way of our faith. Paul says to **Keep away from them**.

If someone brings a different teaching, he says “*Turn away!*” It's similar to what the Apostle John said, **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. (2 John 10–11)** It's really the same as what Jesus said: **“Watch out for false prophets. (Matthew 7:15)**

It is possible that we have grown way too comfortable with and tolerant of false teaching. We may think it's not that big a deal. When that's the case, we worship at any Christian church no matter how many false teachings there are. We want our church to participate in inter-denominational events or even inter-faith events. You know, the kind of things that bring Christians of all kinds together and they “just talk about Jesus” and other Bible teachings are off-limits for the sake of unity. Or the ones that bring together Christians and Jews and Muslims and everybody else to show unity. But those kinds of events are not real unity, are they? They're a sham. It's pretend. Whoever says the prayer at any event like that has the potential to offend most of the others.

Just imagine a Lutheran offering a prayer thanking God for working faith and forgiveness in the Word and in Baptism and the Lord's Supper! You won't find a Baptist who will agree. And no other Christians would agree if the Catholic offered a prayer to Mary that everyone was to join in with.

The answer of course is to not broach any potentially offensive teaching of the Bible. Well, that's ridiculous! We should be able to—and we should want to—at any time be able to share anything and everything God teaches in his Word! It is God's Word and we are his representatives. Participating in events like those—as an individual or as a church—is a sham and it is not standing up for the truth. It

cannot be pleasing to the God of truth to see those who DO hold to the truth stand side-by-side with those who do not and act as if everything is okay.

God could not be more clear! He doesn't say *"Join with those who teach falsely."* He doesn't say *"Ignore certain teachings so that you can get together based on some lowest common Christian denominator."* His words are easy for anyone to understand: **Keep away from them.**

He says of them, **For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.** If they were serving Christ, they would follow the Truth—Jesus' words are truth. If they have given in to reason and logic over the actual words of Scripture, then they are following what THEY want, not what Jesus says. It may almost become a different Jesus they are following when so much of what he taught is disregarded or changed. In the Great Commission Jesus said to "obey everything" he had commanded (Matthew 28:20).

Paul explains that **By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.** The sad truth is that people who hold to these anti-Jesus teachings deceive people, people who don't know any better and who end up believing what they say. When their teachings detract from Christ or deny him altogether, the souls of people suffer now and possibly eternally. They do not have the complete peace for their souls that God has in mind. And we should not be misled by the mass appeal of mega-churches or the popularity of a particular teaching. In fact, we should expect that to happen, that people would follow false teachers and false beliefs because when truth is not stood up for, God says false teaching spreads like "yeast" that works through an entire batch of dough (1 Corinthians 5:6), and like "gangrene" (2 Timothy 2:17).

This is why it is important to draw the distinction between a correct understanding of the Bible and false teachings. And for those of us who have bought into the tolerance climate of our nation and even the Christian community, God says, **"STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH."** Apparently the Roman Christians Paul was writing to were doing okay at this because he says: **Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.**

Our efforts to adhere to the truth of God's Word and stand up for it are not popular in our culture or even in the culture of Christianity today. Even our sinful nature finds it unpopular. How many of us just can't wait for the opportunity to explain our practice of Member Communion to someone? Mostly I hear about discomfort with explaining that. Should we feel like that? No. Why do we? Often it's because we think *"Who am I to tell someone that their Baptist belief about the Lord's Supper is wrong?"* Or *"Who am I to explain what the Bible says about Communion?"*

Who are you?! You are God's representative, instructed by the Holy Spirit through the Word so that you realize that the only way to take the words of Jesus and the explanation of the Apostle Paul regarding the Sacrament is to believe that the body and blood AND the bread and wine are really present there and that anyone who doesn't believe that eats and drinks judgment on themselves! Any teaching other than that—whether it is from the Reformed camp or the Roman Catholic Church—is NOT the truth!

It's sinful when we take the attitude that we are not to judge those things and that we shouldn't say anything. Jesus says to judge—read Matthew 7 if you don't believe me! If we don't do it, we are going against what Jesus tells us to do.

I can give you 3 good reasons to Stand Up For the Truth—and they all have to do with love. I find this very helpful. Are you ready?

1. We STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH out of love for God and his Word. God sent his Son to be our Savior, which causes us to love him so much that we want to respect him in every way. He gave his Word so that people could know of his love and their salvation. We treasure that Word and God tells us not to add to it, subtract from it or change it. (Deuteronomy 4:2, Revelation 22:18). We stand up for the truth out of love for God and his Word.

2. We STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH out of love for our own souls. We don't want to be taken in by false teaching and have our saving faith threatened. I don't want my sinful nature or the devil's scheming to lure me from the truth, so I stand up for the truth out of love for my own soul.

3. We STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH out of love for the souls of others. We want others to know the truth and to follow Jesus. Our Savior described what following him means. Jesus said: **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32)."** We stand up for the truth out of love for the souls of others.

So finally, if people around us don't understand Baptism or the Lord's Supper or what marriage is supposed to be or why we don't participate in church services where false teaching is present or anything else, we need to explain what God's Word says. It is one of the most loving things we can do—loving toward God, loving toward self and loving toward other people.

Do not buy into the false idea that if you don't accept all beliefs, you are not loving. Not surprisingly, sinful human beings have got it backwards. The unloving thing to do is to let people go on believing things that are wrong and are obstacles to saving faith and eternal life!

You may recall how perfectly loving Jesus was and how he defended the Scriptures and explained them. He taught them to the crowds. He opposed the false teachings of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Teachers of the Law. He corrected people who had wrong ideas about God, like the woman at the well. Over and over Jesus perfectly stood up for the truth.

Through that perfect defense of God's Word and will and his blood shed on the cross, he paid for all of our fears, embarrassment and unwillingness when it comes to standing up for God's truth. What a blessing it is to know that those sins are forgiven, that our salvation is secure in Christ, and that we have new opportunities, beginning right now, to gladly, boldly, and lovingly stand up for the truth! May the Holy Spirit empower us to do so through the power of that Word we defend. Amen.