**Civil Discourse**

Unfortunately, the ability to have a respectful discussion about a controversial subject seems to be a dying art. Whether the topic is related to religion, politics or social issues, any expressed position is most often met with vicious attacks and name-calling. The natural reaction of many is to vilify anyone with the audacity to disagree with them.

I would like to be able to say that this tendency is unique to non-Christians but, sadly, that is not the case. The Scriptures clearly prescribe the proper attitude and approach Christians are to exhibit toward others but some fail to make personal application of Christ’s principles. Several important passages come to mind.

“Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Colossians 4:5-6).

It takes a healthy dose of humility and self-control to maintain that kind of kindness and grace when the other person clearly does not. “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18). The humble person will be “quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger” (James 1:19). The humble person will recognize that the objective is not proving their rightness, but rather to better understand others and to determine truth.

When two reasonable people discuss a subject from a position of mutual respect, one may persuade the other of the validity of their position or they may continue to disagree when they go their way. In either case, they both will have learned something by truly listening to another point of view. News flash: The fact that someone disagrees with you doesn’t automatically make them an evil person. There is no need to try to destroy their lives.

So what do you do when you encounter a person intent on running rough-shod over you and everything you have to say? Jesus said that if you give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls before swine, “they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6). Looks like cancel culture was alive and well in Jesus’ day too. Sometimes you just have to “shake the dust off your feet” (Luke 9:5) and walk away.

We should learn to master the art of civil discourse and teach it to our children as well. We all will be the better for it.

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