

“Being Right” versus “Helping Others Become Right”

In most cases, the reasons we act (or don't act) matter tremendously. Our motivations and intentions often determine how we act, even if the decision to act has already been made. Hebrews 4:12-13 makes it clear that God recognizes and judges our thoughts and motives as well as our actions. Jesus makes the same point (including also our feelings/emotions) in Matthew 5:21-48.

I often write and preach things which are “corrective” in nature- lessons which seek to address commonly held misunderstandings and misapplications of God's Word. I don't do this to be different, or to attract attention. Neither is my purpose to prove that I'm right and others are wrong. God's Word is “right” and “true” whether or not I am. Instead, the purpose I try to always keep in mind is to help others become right according to the Word. It is for this reason that I attempt to “*contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints,*” Jude 3. Certainly, we should all be diligently “*handling accurately the word of truth*” that we can be “*approved to God as a workman*” who does not need to be ashamed, 2Timothy 2:15; but we should also be just as concerned with helping others to be the same. If we are primarily concerned with just “proving ourselves right” in our contending for the faith, without regard for the resulting impact on others, our motives and efforts are just plain wrong.

In writing to the young preacher Timothy on how to carry out his mission of preaching the Word, the apostle Paul gave these inspired instructions, “*instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering God's provision which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions,*” 1Timothy 1:3-7. See? The motives matter. Preaching, teaching, and discussing the Bible is not supposed to be about proving yourself right and others wrong- it is about “being right” **with God** and helping others to “be right” **with God** also! Faithful *contenders for the faith* are trying to produce in others the “***love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith***” of which Paul wrote. If this is not our objective, then we are just wrong, and wrongly motivated.

Hopefully, these points will help to explain a few things. I press hard for “*accurately handling the word of truth*” (again, from 2Timothy 2:15) because the truth matters- in fact, nothing matters more because it is only through the truth of His Word that Jesus sets us free from sin and its eternal consequences, cf. 2Thessalonians 2:10. However, “the truth” does not “makes us free” unilaterally, despite being often misquoted that way from John 8:32. One can possess the truth without being made free by it. Most everyone has a Bible, or at least access to one. Does such make them “free” from sin and its consequences? Of course not! The rest of the verse, which is typically omitted, is, “***and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***” Having a Bible doesn't make you a Christian anymore than owning a scalpel makes you a doctor. One has to know how to accurately use and apply the Truth to be made free by it, or to help others to be made free by it! Don't get me wrong, one need not possess a PhD in Divinity to “*handle accurately the word of truth*” to his own and others' benefit. But he must have accurate knowledge of the biblical text, and the right motive and purpose in mind for its use.

Truth matters. And the purpose and motivation for our use of it matters too. The Truth is able to make all people free from the shackles of sin and destruction if we understand and handle it accurately, and it is believed and applied correctly. Please study the passages mentioned (as well as the rest of the New Testament!) and think on these things. If you find them to be true, do them- not because I wrote them, but because you found them to be true according to God's Word. If they're not true, please let me know because I want to know, practice, and teach only “the truth” so that I and as many as possible can be saved, see 1Timothy 4:16! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)