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July 2015 "When Do We Mark Them?"

Dear Friends,

The government in the State of Ohio has established a sex offenders list. People who are convicted of sex crimes (rape, molestation, child pornography, etc) are added to the list and their crimes are identified. Anyone can use the internet to access this list for the purpose of completing a background check on someone prior to employment or, literally, for any other purpose. The reason this list exists is to help protect people of any age from those who may pose a threat.

While many citizens may be very glad such a list exists, there is another side to how it could be perceived. Just imagine how the friends and family members of those on the list might feel knowing they are identified with a convicted sex offender. How embarrassing it must be for the wife and children of a sex offender to know their husband and father is now revealed to the world as a criminal. I would guess that some might think, "He spent his time in prison and paid his debt to society. Now that he's been released from jail, take his name off the list!" On the other hand, some people may believe that a person who has committed such crimes needs to be identified as long as the law demands.

A variation of what I have described concerning the sex offender laws in Ohio exists in scripture,

¹⁷Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. ¹⁸For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

(Romans 16:17-18)

This is one of the most powerful passages in all of scripture. Here, the Apostle Paul is declaring - by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - that anyone who preaches something which contradicts what the Apostles originally taught is to be "marked," or publicly identified to other Christians. The reason is because their teaching is very effective and persuasive, deceiving "the hearts of the simple." The word "simple" speaks of Christians who are still somewhat spiritually immature and innocently sit in services gullibly accepting whatever they hear (an example of this are those Believers who run from camp meeting to camp meeting, conference to conference, and listen to any and all preachers on Christian television).

This is a very serious charge. Through Paul, God is telling us that we have a *responsibility* to mark those who preach error. In doing so, we are helping to protect our brothers and sisters in Christ from doctrines which could hinder their walk with Christ or even lead them away from trusting in Him. Here are some examples from scripture of how certain people were marked:

¹⁸*This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; ¹⁹Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: ²⁰Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:18-20)*

¹⁵*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ¹⁶But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. ¹⁷And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; ¹⁸Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. (2 Timothy 2:15-18)*

¹⁴*Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: ¹⁵Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. (2 Timothy 4:14-15)*

⁹*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. ¹⁰Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. ¹¹Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. (3 John 1:9-11)*

¹¹*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. ¹²For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. ¹³And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. ¹⁴But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? ¹⁵We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:11-16)*

If God wanted preachers of doctrinal error identified in scripture, why should we think He would not want the same today? Error is error, no matter in what generation it is preached. If incorrect teaching could lead people astray during the days of the Apostle Paul, then it will do the same today. If Christians needed such preachers identified 2,000 years ago, they need the same today.

Someone might comment, "Yes, but we have the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth. He releases an anointing that will help protect us against error. Therefore, we

don't need to mark people today." Only half of that statement is true. Yes, we do have the Holy Spirit available to us to do those things, but so did the Christians back in the days when Paul was writing his letters and marking preachers. Subsequently, it goes without saying that identifying teachers of error should be continued even in our present age.

"But Brother Martin, if you identify people by name you could embarrass them. That's not right." Here is another way to consider this: If the Holy Spirit has been sent to teach us all things and guide us into all truth, does He not try to do that with preachers before they stand up and teach error? That being so, would it not stand to reason that those preachers ignored the prompting of the Holy Spirit Who was trying to get them to correct their doctrine? Furthermore, since the instruction to mark people came from God, it would seem that He is more concerned about a person's embracing of truth than He is their feelings of embarrassment.

"Don't you know, Brother Martin, how 1 Peter 4:8 declares that love will cover a multitude of sins? If we're walking in love, we will not identify people by name." Using that logic, are we then saying that neither the Apostle Paul nor the Apostle John were walking in love? Considering how much they both emphasized love, such an accusation cannot be supported.

"Brother Martin, I think you need to correct your own doctrine. Remember that Jesus said in Matthew 7:1, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' Who are you to judge people and name them publicly?" Well, for one thing, those who would lay that accusation at my feet have taken Jesus' words greatly out of context. Left in context, Jesus was saying that whatever standard you use for judging will be used on you. Additionally, Jesus made it clear in John 12:48 that God's Word would be our judge. If I point out scripture which proves a preacher's doctrine is wrong, I am identifying that what is being taught has *already* been judged to be wrong by God.

Along with this, it is a preacher's *doctrine* that we are judging; it is not about declaring a final judgment against the individual. We are to take what a person is teaching other Christians, compare it to what is recorded in scripture and judge accordingly. If you knew someone was putting poison in food before serving it to people, wouldn't you identify that person by name to protect others? Why are we so hesitant to do the same when it comes to preachers who mix error with truth, resulting in doctrine that is spiritual poison?

I have been shocked at times to read on the internet how Christians come to the defense of ministers who are preaching and/or living in error. When some of these preachers are marked, immediately many Christians start casting stones and harshly criticizing the ones who are marking those who are causing division and offenses contrary to the doctrine recorded in scripture.

- If a pastor declares to his congregation that abortion is not what he would recommend, but that he supports a woman's right to choose, what scripture could he use to defend such a doctrine? There is **NONE!** Is it therefore wrong to mark the pastor who defends the right to murder an unborn child?

- If a pastor gets divorced, but neither he nor his wife can identify any scriptural reason for the divorce, how do they support their actions with God's Word? What example are they setting? Do we ignore what has happened?
- If a church begins holding services in a bar or nightclub and alcohol is served to those in attendance, should that pastor's compromise be swept under the carpet?
- If a pastor explains that same-sex attraction and the accompanying "feelings" of such attraction are okay, just as long as the person does not act on those attractions and feelings, do we accept such a teaching as viable for the Body of Christ? What about Psalm 19:14, *"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer"*? If the acts themselves are condemned of God, then aren't the desires for such acts wrong as well?
- If a pastor preaches salvation through Jesus, but ignores scripture and teaches that Christians do not need to repent when they sin, are we to act like nothing is wrong?
- If a pastor begins approving of homosexual behavior, relationships and even marriages - in spite of how God has condemned such behavior in His Word - should we ignore his doctrine and refuse to warn others?

Where do we draw the line between obedience to mark such preachers and passive indifference to the spread of destructive doctrine? When do we finally decide to follow the examples in scripture and not worry about who gets mad at us when we sound the alarm?

In Matthew chapter 24, Jesus gave a strong warning about false prophets rising up in the church. These false prophets are not simply those who say they can foresee the future; these are people who stand up and preach what they declare are sermons birthed of God. Their teaching will be so impressive and convincing that, according to Jesus, if those considered as the very "elect" in the Body of Christ are deceivable, they will be deceived. Both Jude and Peter (in 2nd Peter) warn that some of the doctrines preached by these false prophets will result in a seared conscience and some Christians totally walking away from Jesus.

Is it gossip when we mark those who teach error and/or live in a manner that is open sin or rebellion to God's Word? No, it is not gossip. If it were, God would not have told us to mark such preachers. Keep in mind that we are only hearing the fruit of what God has seen growing in them for quite some time.

There are several factors involved concerning Christians who are not willing to mark preachers who have begun leading people astray through their teaching. But the one which is the most prominent is a lack of knowing God's Word. The majority of Christians I have met over the years are quick with their opinions but weak on a contextual use of scripture to support those opinions. When we use God's Word as our standard, we are not expressing an opinion. Scripture does not need our opinions; it's strength is in its source and it stands on its own merit regardless of our own personal thoughts and feelings.

If Christians were as committed to the unchanging standards and doctrine in God's Word as were people like Paul, James, Timothy and others in the New Testament, marking preachers of error would be a priority.

I fully understand that we are all growing in our understanding of God's Word; no one I have met so far understands every passage in the Bible. But the moment a person stands up before a group of Christians to minister, no matter how large the crowd, that person is to be held to intense scrutiny and a much higher standard (see James 3:1-12).

Rare are the times when I have identified preachers by name who are delivering messages which cannot truly be supported with scripture. I believe God is "holding back" the public identification of some to give them ample opportunity to respond to the Holy Spirit's attempts to bring correction. However, more and more of these preachers are being named by other ministers and in Christian media. I believe the day may be soon coming when God is going to lift His hands from this "holding back" and those who feed error to the Church will be identified without reservation.

We must refrain from personal attacks, while at the same time refusing to compromise the instructions God has given in His Word. We should be deeply concerned about destructive doctrine that is being preached; but we must also be deeply concerned for those who are teaching that which is wrong, praying for their recovery.

I encourage you, study God's Word and rightly divide His truth (2 Timothy 2:14-16) and pray in the Spirit for edification deeper into truth (John 14:16, John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 14 and Jude 1:20). Guard your heart against the leaven that is corrupting so many Christians. Together, we must become iron that sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17) as we await the return of our Lord and Savior!

In His Grace,

Jim

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