



When Our Message Falls Flat

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We all like things a certain way – from how we like our eggs cooked, to serious things like how we communicate Jesus. Our backgrounds and experiences shape our preferences of church, emphases in our relationship with Jesus, and how we communicate our faith. While some of us like occasional variety in our egg orders, we certainly don't want to change "truth" at all.

But our understanding of truth is often clouded. Certainly our way of communicating truth must vary with the context. Neither Jesus nor Paul treated everyone the same, but they used different lessons, methods and illustrations.

Naturally, our views have also been profoundly impacted by where we live. When some from North America see challenges to their views and perspectives of Christianity, they lash out. Well-known Christian leaders have done this repeatedly in the last few years. Even if their words are sometimes mere "sound bites" taken out of context, what those outside the Church most clearly remember is that Christians are inclined to point out evil in *other* people, in *other* religions, and in *other* systems – but never about problems or evil within Christianity.

We can't see – or don't talk about – the log that is in our own eye related to the ways in which Satan has infiltrated the Church and our "Christian" systems in the West. In fact, if someone writes a book about problems in the Church, he or she is usually branded as attacking the Body of Christ or causing disunity.

Yet when we learn of the number of Christians in North America or around the globe, we have to ask: why aren't they making more of a difference? Either (1) we are hiding our light under a basket, (2) there isn't any light at all, or (3) our light is so weak as to not need a basket to hide it!

So, when well-known Christian leaders speak out about the evil in other religious systems, do we follow their lead because they seem more spiritual than we are? Or do we assume they must be right because they are so well-funded? Or are we really, secretly, hoping they're right because – like many Americans – we want to "get angry" and lash out, demanding our rights and freedoms (and donating to ministries which do that)?

Remember that the world is not so much listening to our ranting as watching our slip-ups. Are we communicating truth in ways that really impact and edify? Today's higher volume of public information on the Internet and other media (some of it true!) means that it's not only *not* helpful to spew out judgments, but that such statements also derail those seeking to effectively reach out to people categorically included in the public rants.

For example, the public pronouncements of one North American leader have prompted a nationalistic backlash in one Latin American country, forcing 150 missionary adults and their children to leave their homes and work in the remote tribal areas of that country. These missionaries are waiting in the cities of their adopted homeland, expecting to be forced to leave the country. They're now wondering how they will continue church-planting ministries and translation work.

If we know Jesus and are seeking to follow Him, we have the truth living in us. Yet none of us reflects that truth fully all of the time. Some of what each of us believes is right, some of it is wrong or misinformed, and some of it is neutral.

One example revolves around how we represent ourselves to Muslims or Hindus. If we call ourselves "Christians" before Muslims, many assume we are immoral. Why? Because America is a "Christian" country which churns out the immoral media programming beamed every day into their homes and sold in their video stores. Most Muslims have never met an American, much less a believing follower of Jesus, to provide a comparison or contrast to what they see in public media.

Have you tried to befriend a Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist near you? Learning how they think and how they perceive us is as important as knowing what to say. Listening and learning teach us how to verbalize truth in ways others can understand and receive. 🌐



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