

FURTHER REFLECTIONS



Giving an Answer for Our Hope

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Christians in America are getting exercised, or even “radical,” about all kinds of things these days. I guess that is better than the opposite, but I wonder if we are getting confused in the process. Some evangelicals are building up cultural defenses to stave off encroaching “evil” of all sorts. I’m not talking about things where the Bible is clear; certainly, we should resist the Evil One, and he is wreaking havoc on a host of things in the West.

Often, however, without realizing it, American Christians are becoming defenders of our religious systems and not true biblical faith. Here’s how it happens:

- People with a public platform, from radio to cable news, believers and non-believers, raise various issues and everyone gets upset. Sometimes it is because the government is doing something to erode “our rights,” or someone from another religion is invading “our nation.”
- Innocently and often naively, Christians get upset about something and send around emails about, for example, how they won’t be able to broadcast on the radio any more (not true, never was true). Or rumors circulate that a new federal government policy prohibits U.S. service members from speaking at faith-based public events (also not true—you can check these out at: www.snopes.com, before you pass on anything.)

To explain how we are to engage the world, we often quote: “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Jesus said this as He was sending out the disciples. The first part of the verse says: “I am sending you out like sheep

surrounded by wolves” so as you go, He says: “be wise....” (Matthew 10:16, NET.bible.org)

But there is more to the context. In the passage that follows, He tells the disciples that people will:

- hand you over to councils
- flog you in their religious gathering
- bring you before governors and kings

Then Jesus says something very interesting: “do not worry about...” STOP, before I go on, based on that

I NO LONGER PRAY FOR SAFETY WITHOUT ALSO PRAYING THAT WE DO ALL THAT HE WOULD DESIRE EACH DAY, AND THAT IN EVERY WAY WE WOULD LIVE TO FURTHER HIS PURPOSES AND KINGDOM.

list above, how would you finish that sentence? What do we expect to be worried about? Being hurt by others, such as in a flogging? Having councils totally opposed to us decide our fate?

Jesus says “do not worry about *what you will say*.” Interesting. Why would Jesus care so much about what the disciples said? Answer: Because it is ALL connected to Him and people being drawn to the Father. Those things listed above will happen. Why? The passage tells us, “because of Me, as a witness to them [the governors and kings] and the Gentiles” (v. 26).

When we come to Him by faith, we are submitting to and growing in our understanding of His sovereignty. We know we will both be saved and we are being saved. But, it turns out, being saved doesn’t mean we avoid suffering or pain or death, even if premature by our standards. In fact, God uses suffering to further His purposes.

There is much good that has come from Western civilization. Rule of law and the Judeo-Christian ethic are powerful and helpful. But let’s not confuse those with our faith. Faith often, if not usually, grows in the crucible of suffering. Just look to China if you need an example.

Peter had a good approach. Speaking to believers in great difficulty, he said, “always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess.” (1 Peter 3:15b, NET Bible)

Because we fight evil and work against darkness, we should not be “pushovers.” Like you, probably, I pray for my family that we would be safe, that God would protect us. But I don’t want that to keep us from doing whatever God wants. I no longer pray for safety without also praying that we do all that He would desire each day, and that in every way we would live to further His purposes and Kingdom.

If safety is our main criterion for ministry, we will never finish the task among the unreached. As Jesus sends us—His disciples today—let’s be sure and ask Him to give us the right words to say and the right actions to demonstrate the hope that is within us. And let’s be wise in what we choose to fight and radical in our obedience. 🌐

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