

"in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us."

Titus 2.7-8 (NASB1995)



Marietta church of Christ

8150 Driggers St.
Jacksonville, FL 32220

Times of Worship

Sunday:

9 am - Bible Classes / 10 am - Worship / 5 pm - Worship

Wednesday:

7 pm - Bible Study/Worship

Evangelist: Devin Barber

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Should Christians Care What Unbelievers Think of Them?

As Christians, we interact with many people who do not share our views or live by the same standards. Some of our family members, friends, and neighbors may find the Bible's teachings to be strange or even offensive. Jesus warned his followers they would be hated and despised. But does this mean we should take the position that we don't care what unbelievers think of us? Should Christians strive to be liked or simply accept that we will be misunderstood and hated?

Christians Should Obey God Rather than Men

Throughout his ministry, Jesus made it clear that he was not a people-pleaser. His chief desire was to do his Father's will. Even when people were offended by his teachings, Jesus continued to teach (Matthew 15:10-20). Even when they opposed him and threatened him, Jesus was, "Obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

This idea of obeying God rather than men can be found throughout Jesus' teachings and the teachings of his apostles. Peter told the Sanhedrin, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Paul said he spoke, "Not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

In Galatians, Paul asked, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man?" Answering his own question, he stated, "If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" (1:10).

Followers of Jesus must teach and practice what is true and right, even when others disagree. In fact, we must even do so when others are offended or demand we stop. The feelings, opinions, and even laws of the world should never compel us to sin or violate God's will.

Christians Should Have a Good Reputation

It's true that we should obey God rather than men, but it's NOT true that we should ignore others' opinions of us. The New Testament actually has a lot to say about striving to maintain a good reputation amongst unbelievers.

One of the qualities a man must possess in order to serve as an elder in a church is, "He must be well thought of by outsiders" (1 Timothy 3:7). Notice, Paul states this as a positive qualifier, not just a negative disqualifier. He does not say, "He must not be poorly thought of by outsiders." Paul goes beyond that and says an elder should be the type of person who is "well thought of" by those outside the Christian community.

If this is true of church leaders, shouldn't this be true of every Christian? Here are a few of the attributes every follower of Jesus should strive to be known for:

- good works (Matthew 5:13-16; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 2:11)
- reasonableness/gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
- oneness with all believers (John 17:20-23)
- honorable behavior (1 Peter 2:12)

The word translated "honorable" is the Greek word, "kalos." It refers to behavior that is good, noble, admirable, and praiseworthy.

Paul wrote, "We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man" (2 Corinthians 8:21). He also told the Christians in Rome, "Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all" (Romans 12:17). In other words, followers of Jesus must strive to do what is good in God's sight, but also in the sight of unbelievers as well.

So Far As It Depends on Christians

There is a natural tension between these two biblical truths:

1. Christians will be misunderstood, slandered, and criticized for following Jesus
2. Christians should have a reputation of being honorable, being united, doing good works, and being easy to get along with

It is tempting to try to resolve this tension in one direction or the other. We *could* change our doctrines and practices so as to be less offensive and more accommodating to unbelievers. Or, on the other hand, we *could* ignore the thoughts and feelings of our neighbors and not care when we offend and anger them. But NEITHER of those options is faithful to our calling.

Consider these words from Paul's letter to the Romans, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18). First, there are times when it is perfectly "possible" to live at peace with people; conflict is not always inevitable. Second, you must **do everything within your power** to live at peace with all people. The phrase, "so long as it depends on you" doesn't mean if someone else picks the fight, you can finish it. It means, do everything you have the power to do to get along with all of your unbelieving neighbors.

The apostle Peter asked, "Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?" (1 Peter 3:13). In other words, if you are full of the Spirit's fruit, you will typically get along just fine with your neighbors. However, there may be rare occasions when you "suffer for righteousness' sake" (vs. 14) or "suffer for doing good" (vs. 17). On those occasions, Peter says, make your defense with "gentleness and respect" (vs. 15).

Conclusion

Should we care what unbelievers think about us? Yes, definitely. We should want them to see we are gentle and honorable people, full of good works, and united with other believers. But we shouldn't care so much about what others think that we are willing to disobey Jesus in order to win their approval. If we walk by the Spirit, we already have Jesus' approval. At the end of the day, that is what truly matters.

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