

First Light

If you watch or read the news, if you spend more time on Twitter than in Titus, you will invariably be overwhelmed with division--Republican, Democrat, conservative, liberal, evangelical, progressive. Scripture instructs us to "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Titus 2). Verse 8 calls for "sound speech that cannot be condemned." Our speech regarding our family, friends, favorite sports team, those who are on whatever we believe to be the correct side of any given culture-consuming question of the day, is probably pretty good. How is our speech regarding those we oppose? How do we refer to and interact with those we disagree with politically, theologically, morally?

Much like supporting protections for speech that we agree or identify with, it's usually not much of a challenge to love those of our 'tribe'. Those who look, talk, and act like we do. Those who say and do things we like and approve of.

Then there are those we typically think of when we think of the 'lost'. The church has entire ministry departments devoted to those in prison. Felons, abusers, murderers, thieves. We send Bibles, we engage in study via correspondence courses. We take part in and support mission efforts to strangers all across the globe. We pray, we have compassion, as we should. Though we have a long way to go we have some pretty robust outreach and service efforts directed towards the poor, the prisoners, the downtrodden...as in "a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho."

Do you pray for Joe Biden? For Donald Trump? For Kevin Stitt? For your neighbor who puts out yard signs for that candidate? For the person with a slogan that you oppose in their social media bio/signature? Do you love them?

We make efforts to love like the good Samaritan, to tend to the needs of the victim of robbers lying there in need. But how much love are you showing the priest, the Levite, the ones who pass by? It can be very difficult to love them but do we really think God excuses our contempt for the Levite any more than he does the man in the ditch? Jesus instructed us to not pray like the self-righteous but was that followed with 'and they are also the exception-do not love them'? By our differing responses are we saying we believe God is powerful enough to pull someone from poverty or addiction but not from arrogance or greed or hatefulness? Or do we maybe only want to be part of the process for one but not the other?

I would argue the priest and Levite passed by because to do otherwise involved more effort, more time...more love than they were willing to give. What does it say about our commitment to love when we follow a ministry effort for the poor with voicing hate towards someone from a different political party? When we head from our Bible study to either a gathering of folks who spread vitriol or home to watch such on TV? Like you, I have very real concerns about some things others say and do. Sometimes they are very

First Light

relevant to my own life, the life of my son, or to our church for example. But I have thought and said things in response to those valid concerns that are shameful. I am reminded of what Paul called those who were causing major division problems in the church at Corinth: 'Brethren'. 'Brothers and sisters. Another lesson that comes to mind is how hard it is to be ugly to someone you are earnestly praying for.

Rather than sending a donation to a political candidate you support, consider sending a note to the ones you differ the strongest with telling them you love them and pray for them. Better yet, ask that neighbor with the signs how they are handling the pandemic and if there is anything you can do to help their situation. Tell them you know brothers and sisters who will join you. Ask them to tell you their story. Truly listen when they do so. Invite them to study the Bible together.

Love the poor soul lying in the ditch, yes. Also, love the priest. Love the Levite. God sends us.

----- Cory Shipman