

## Attaching Labels

Maybe it has always been this way, but over the last several years politics in America has become as polarized as it ever has. The divide between liberal and conservative seems to be growing day by day. People are quick to label one another and once the label has been attached, they look at each other only through the lens associated with that label. We probably do this more than we realize. It is hard to imagine a time when the polarization will not be to the degree it is today. Will it ever lessen?

What about the church? Are we too quick to label? For several years I have noticed a disturbing trend that has developed in the church where brethren are quick to place labels on persons that may or may not be deserved. A preacher preaches a series full of practical and uplifting information that Christians need to hear and receives a derogatory label of being a “positive preacher.” In a recent gospel meeting I attended, the speaker made the implication if one preaches on the home and family that he is softening the gospel. (Didn’t Paul preach on the home and family? See Ephesians 5:22-6:4.) Another preacher preaches a series warning against denominational error and doctrine and is looked down on by some for being a “negative preacher.” Is it fair to attach a label to either one of these preachers after just one or a few sermon series? But it happens all the time. And across the brotherhood, preachers and congregations are viewed through the “positive/negative” and “liberal/conservative” lenses by others – which may be accurate, or it may not. While it is clear that some influential men and congregations have moved to extremes on each end of the spectrum, not everyone has! And, too often, brethren place their labels based on hearsay and inaccurate information.

We must move away from the idea of always *assuming the worst in each other*. Paul wrote of *evil suspicions and constant friction between men* in 1 Timothy 6:4-5. Such behavior is not conducive to Christianity. But it happens too often today, and those who do it feel they are standing up for truth. And all the while, the divide between perspectives widens and we wonder if there will ever be a time when the polarization will decrease. So what to do? How can we move toward an atmosphere where we expect the best out of each other?

**Open up the lines of communication.** It is amazing what a little communication can do. What you think someone may believe may not be exactly true, and things can be cleared up with good conversation over a cup of coffee. Why do we find it so hard to communicate? I am convinced that if we would talk with one another as soon as a question arises, that many matters would never be “issues” at all. We must constantly work to *be of the same mind toward each other* (Romans 12:16a).

**Once communication has taken place, accept what is said.** Jesus taught our word is to be our bond. *But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil* (Matthew 5:37 NASU). In speaking of others, I have heard some say, *I know what he says, ...but...* Who are we to assume and judge motives? That is God’s place! (Matthew 7:1, 12) Judgment is to be made on a person’s deeds and the attitudes they express, not something we *assume* to be the case!

**We must learn to keep our mouths shut.** James said, *everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger* (James 1:19). The temptation to talk negatively about someone else can be great, because it is easier to be negative than positive. Yes, it takes effort to see positive. But it is absolutely necessary if we wish to glorify God and

not say anything that could come back to haunt us. The last thing we should want is to be the talebearer of something that is fabricated, exaggerated, or embellished.

**Put forgiveness into action.** Paul wrote: *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you* (Eph. 4:31-32 NASU). I'm convinced that this passage is not put into action like it should and it is to our detriment. Imagine how much more vibrant, joyful, and unified the church would be if we fully embraced and practiced what is contained in these verses.

Let's resolve now that we will not contribute to the poisonous environment that is too prevalent in some circles of our brotherhood these days. Put the above principles in practice and glorify God in your life.

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