

## Antagonism

*By David Cook*

Two Christian radio commentators were being compared, and one was preferred because, 'he never preaches at us'. The preferred one, 'is just nice, accepting and just like us, except that he is a Reverend'.

The other, by the way, was not ordained but had definite gospel convictions and very effectively used the radio to share them.

It is typical of many comments you may hear, people may say, 'he is the type of Christian I like' or, 'I would feel very much at home in their church, they are so non-judgemental and inclusive'.

When it comes to witness and ministry there are two factors involved, there is the message and there is our manner in delivering it.

Paul says in Romans 1:1 that one of the distinguishing marks of the Gospel message is that it is God's. He owns it, so we have no right to add to it or take from it. Indeed, in Galatians 1:8-9, Paul says of the person who changes the gospel, 'let him be accursed'. The world will find the gospel message offensive for two reasons:

First, it is exclusive, there is only one true message, one Lord, one Saviour, one way to God's presence. It is intolerant of other ways, because there are none.

Second, it is humbling, the gospel leaves no room for human contribution, it tells of God's undeserved activity on our behalf. This is an affront to human pride, the gospel is a message of grace, contrary to our deserving, not an award for good behaviour. 'You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin which made it necessary,' said Jonathan Edwards.

Only the gospel of God can save a person; it is God's powerful instrument, used by the Holy Spirit to open deaf ears and

uncover blind eyes so that people have new life.

To be sharing God's message, we will need to speak about grace, repentance, faith, the Lord Jesus, his death and resurrection and Lordship, and the coming judgement, from which we can be saved. The world will want us to talk about Jesus as a model of good works or of the self-fulfilment, wholeness and prosperity which is to be found in Jesus. The world will want to continue to live the good life and just add Jesus as eternal insurance.

The world will find God's gospel offensive.

Then there is our manner in delivery.

Do we come across as bullying, belligerent, arrogant and outspoken, unwilling to listen? Our manner ought to reflect a deep awareness that we do not deserve to be Christian but are in debt to God's grace ourselves. There will be a humility in our manner; we ought never look down on anyone.

We have no right to change the message, but do need to work continually on our manner in delivery.

Pray that God, the evangelist, will do his work as you speak, and work on your manner so that it's no cause of offence.

The degree to which the world hails you, accepts you, marks you as popular, may be the degree to which you are not being a faithful disciple of Christ, delivering a heavily edited version of the gospel, palatable to the world but unrecognisable in the Bible.

Jesus tells the disciples to expect hatred from the world, for 'a servant is not greater than his master' (John 15:18, 20).

The world did not greet Jesus with open arms and it will not

treat us that way. However, in light of the world's antagonism, we are to respond as God the Father responds. In John 15:26 Jesus says that the Father will send the Spirit of truth. To do what? 'He will bear witness about me,' Jesus said.

And what are we to do? From John 15:27, we see that we are to bear witness too! When I share the gospel, I am not alone, my witness is part of a twofold witness, 'the Holy Spirit and you also'. The way God responds to antagonism is the way we are to respond to antagonism, namely witness!

We don't go looking for antagonism; it will inevitably come if it is God's gospel we are sharing.

'Every believer will inevitably face hatred from the world, to some degree,' as R.C. Sproul reminded us.

So, get the message right and work on the manner.

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