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EXCERPT

A Caution to ‘Nice’ Christians

When we don't confront sin, in others and in ourselves, we commit spiritual malpractice.

SCOTT SAULS / POSTED FEBRUARY 15, 2019



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Once, when my family lived in New York City, I was in a hurry to get from one meeting to the next. The first step was descending from the 28th floor of the building where my first meeting took place. I was joined on the elevator by a mother and her young daughter, who smiled at me and said, “Watch this!” Then, with a mischievous look on her face, she proceeded to press every single button on the elevator wall. Even worse, the mother said to me,

“Isn't that just the cutest thing you've ever seen?”

Several years later, I am still mystified by the mother's response. Why didn't she stop the little girl from pushing all those buttons? Why didn't she treat it as an opportunity to teach her child about self-control, sensitivity to others, and the value of time?

Perhaps the mother passed up this opportunity for the same reason we resist similar opportunities: *We don't see them as opportunities*. Truth be told, most of us don't value confrontational truth-telling (or, as Paul calls it in Eph. 4:15, “speaking the truth in love”) because we are cowardly. The drive to be liked compels us not to rock the boat, even when rocking the boat has potential, if received humbly by the listener, to prevent the boat from sinking.

Even as I write this, I am reminded of how often I, too, have passed up an opportunity to lovingly resist hypocrisy when I observe it in those I am called to love. Sometimes I am tempted to leave a hard truth out of a sermon—even when it's right there in the biblical text—for fear of offending someone. Other times, if I hear a fellow Christian engaging in gossip, I will listen passively as someone's reputation is attacked or even participate in the attacking myself. Still other times, if I witness a fellow Christian speaking harshly to his children or to her husband, I will choose silence over the awkwardness of redemptive correction.

Would a doctor do the same if she discovered a lump in the armpit of one her patients? Surely not, because she would lose her license due to medical malpractice. Sometimes I wonder why we don't think similarly about our silence. Instead of calling it what it is—*spiritual malpractice* that allows a cancerous lump to fester within a human soul—we call it being nice. But sometimes being “nice” is the furthest thing from being a Christian.

There is an appropriate and necessary anger that must be nurtured in our hearts toward the sin in others and in ourselves. As we channel our anger in this way—as we correct and rebuke one another, not as with a sword to destroy but as with a scalpel to heal—we become channels of God's love to one another. Love and anger go together. Both are necessary for the redemptive exchange that must take place between flawed sinners when one or both are “caught” in transgression (Gal. 6:1–2).

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