

Digging Deeper : Responding to error

Matthew 18.15-17 gives steps to follow when someone sins against you. However, this is a wise process which can be adapted for handling error too. What steps are involved?

Look at some of the following passages about dealing with error. There are many passages that address how to deal with error but these are perhaps the more drastic when teaching and rebuking fail to work. Where possible identify the nature of the error, and the action to be taken.

Romans 16.17-18 1 Corinthians 5.1-13 Titus 3.9-11
2 John 7-11 Revelation 2.18-25

Note that in the final passage the Thyatiran church was rebuked because they tolerated someone teaching error.

The following are not questions but comments you may like to consider and discuss.

Reasons for opposing error include:

- In the hope that people will repent (Gal 6.1 etc).
- To guard the flock so that others will not be seduced by false teaching or sin (Acts 21.28-31)
- Because part of the reason God has given us the Bible is to rebuke error and correct ungodly behaviour (2 Tim 3.16).

Ideally error should be dealt with privately and with gentleness. However, sometimes it has to be dealt with publicly. A current day example is where church authorities tried to keep charges of child abuse quiet because of the scandal it would cause. This can happen in other situations too. The motives may seem good but the result is often far worse than if things had been done openly. Remember that in Matthew 18 Jesus' final step is to 'take it to the church' which implies the whole congregation not just leaders..

In addition, if someone teaches error in public a private rebuke is inadequate because people may have been taken in by the error and need to know why it is wrong.

David Phillips, June 2012

The Fruit of the Spirit is ... gentleness ...

Bible Study 8 on Gal 5.22-23



Blessed are them meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (Matt 5.5)

The word for this fruit in Gal 5.23 is one of a family of words (Greek - *praus*) which can be translated as gentle, lowly, humble or meek.

Gentle Jesus

Read Matthew ch 21 vv 1-5

Previously Jesus entered Jerusalem quietly, even secretly. How does His actions here suggest that some climax is being reached?

He deliberately acted to ensure that His entry in Jerusalem accorded with the prophecy given by God through Zechariah over 500 years earlier. What impact would this have had on the expectant crowds?

Despite this expectation Jesus was to arrive on a simple beast of burden. What does this teach you about what this fruit means for us?

In what other ways did Jesus show His gentleness in His ministry?

Learning gentleness

Read Matthew ch 11 vv 28-30

We noted in study 5 that 'easy' in v30 could be translated 'kind'.

There are two invitations here and the language of our souls finding rest suggest that both are about salvation. If an unbeliever asked you to explain what these few verses really mean what would you say?

A yoke was put on oxen to enable them to plough and pull. What does this imply about what we are saved for?

How does the promise relate to the example of Christ?

Remembering how your answer in the first section above about Jesus' gentleness what are we to 'learn from' Him (v29) about our own service?

Are there times when you have found Jesus' yoke hard to bear?

(Note: Jesus calls himself humble, only a person who was truly humble could say this without arrogance.)

Keeping unity

Read Ephesians ch 4 v 1-3

We see in the New Testament that division is often the result of error. However, a church is made up of people with faults and foibles and often with very different backgrounds. Tensions are inevitable.

What sort of issues can arise that have nothing to do with error?

What does Paul say in these verses about how we are to relate to one another?

How do you think what he says about gentleness works in practice?

Are there ways in which we need to work on this at St. James?

Handling error

A specific outworking of the need for gentleness can be found in how we are to deal with error. One of these comes just a few verses after Paul's listing of the fruit in Galatians.

Read Galatians 6.1 & 2 Tim 2v24-25

Two different forms of error are being addressed in these two passages, what are they?

When error in teaching or conduct arises gentleness is often not the first response. What can happen in such situations?

In Galatians 6.1 what does Paul's warning suggest about how we should understand ourselves as we seek to respond to others? How

does having a proper self-understanding affect the way we deal with others?

What do the two passages say about the aim of correction? *(There are other aims - see Digging Deeper section.)*

What does the gentleness approach look like in practice? You may have experience of this but it is probably best to avoid names.

If the gentle approach fails should we just leave it at that? *(The Digging Deeper section contains more on dealing with error but you may like to have a look at 1 Cor 4.18-21 at this point.)*

Giving an answer

Read 1 Peter ch 3 vv 15-18

Why do you think Peter says we should 'give an answer' with gentleness and respect?

Why is it particularly difficult to remain gentle when people speak maliciously or slanderously about us or our faith?

Peter's mention the death of Jesus in v18 as the heart of our faith, but it also reminds us that He was despised and rejected. How does His example therefore help us as we seek to 'give an answer' to those who do not know Him?

Sometimes Christians can be forceful and even offensive in confronting the views of non-Christians. Do you think there are times when this is appropriate?

How easy do you find it to 'give an answer'? How can you be better equipped? Are there particular areas where you feel you wouldn't know what to say?

The Greek word for giving a defence/answer is apologia and so the practice of this is known as apologetics. We will be looking at this over 5 evening sermons starting in late June and there is an introductory article in the summer Magazine.