

## **“Christian Instruction”**

We have recently finished a sermon series on Atheism in which we took up five questions perennially raised about Christianity. Such messages make us ask, “How should we approach instructing people about Christianity?” I would like briefly to explain why I believe a sound Christian approach to instruction will unashamedly speak the truth in love.

When it comes to difficult questions posed about Christianity, we should acknowledge when we don’t have an answer, when we don’t have a complete answer, and when the answers we have sometimes carry with them uncomfortable realities (e.g. God ordains suffering). Such honesty is not only ethically demanded (Lev. 19:11) and demonstrated in the Bible (e.g. Romans 11:33-35; 2 Peter 3:16), it also helps establish credibility with our message.

There is, however, a tendency that some Christians have which is never to sound certain, never to strike a confident note. After all, “Some may disagree” and “Who are we to say what is right or wrong?” There are a number of responses. First, it is by God’s truth we are saved (Romans 1:16) and grown in the faith (John 17:17; Rom. 10:17). This necessitates that we not shy away from proclaiming truth. Moreover, to please God (Galatians 1:8-10) and to love others (e.g. Mark 6:34-35), we must tell people about God and what He has said.

One very important reason we should firmly, courageously, and unashamedly proclaim the truth we have is that the only setting in which Christians will hear God’s Word and His Truth defended are usually when a Christian teacher, pastor, or friend takes the time to answer their questions and the objections brought against Christianity. They will hear plenty of doubt, along with reasons to question, elsewhere. What many need from us are answers and reasons to believe.

Of course, we must always be honest when it comes to evidence and questions--never overstating our case. But, when we have answers (and for the vast majority of questions and objections we do), a sound Christian approach to instruction demands we “step up to the plate.”

Once we are clear on the importance of sharing truth--that it is somehow not arrogant or sub-Christian to sound certain when we are, we do need to remember that we do not have the same level of certainty about all issues. We can say with certainty that Jesus Christ is the God-man and that He is the only way of salvation. Yet, as we saw during our last message in the series on Atheism, we can’t be quite as certain when it comes to how literal we should take the descriptions of hell. As such, when asked about such matters, we might say that whatever the reality is will be at least as bad as the symbols. Nevertheless, we will not make the level of literalness a matter of orthodoxy.

In an ever-shrinking world with an ever-growing myriad of opinions, may we lovingly, but firmly “Teach these great truths to... people who are able to pass them on to others” (2 Timothy 2:2, NLT).

Pastor Tom