

Starting the Conversation

2 Timothy 4:1-8

Book recommendation: "Challenging Conversations" is an excellent book. If you struggle with how to have healthy conversations on controversial or sensitive topics like abortion, racism, gay marriage, transgenderism, homosexuality, pornography, politics, and more, I would encourage you to read this book. The author, Jason Jimenez, provides biblical insight and practical advice to start the conversation in drawing others (and maybe ourselves) to a more biblical perspective.

There has been a breakdown of morality in American culture: i.e. gay marriage, abortion, sexual orientation, gender identity, unwed mothers, absent fathers, and many other issues.

There has also been a breakdown of morality in the American church as a result of:

- A watering down of theology - Many in the church have been secularized and believe the Bible is too dogmatic. Absolute truth is oppressive.
- A compromising of personal holiness - Many in the church believe morality is determined by individual preference. Holiness is optional.
- A pandering to self-gratification - Many in the church adopt worldly living disguised as Christian living. Sin is subjective.

To make a difference, we must be willing to engage people in conversation.

Paul's charge:

1. Be Biblically Oriented

2 Timothy 4:1 - I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2 Timothy 4:2 - **Preach the word**; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Why are Christians so afraid to have challenging conversations?

- Fear of disagreements
- Fear of arguments
- Fear of offending someone
- Fear of rejection

We have many excuses:

"I never know what to say."

"What if I embarrass myself?"

"I don't like it when people are mad at me."

"I don't want to argue."

"I don't like the way it feels when there's tension between us."

"That's just your opinion/interpretation."

Thoughts:

- It doesn't matter what you are I think. "There is no such thing as your truth. There is only God's truth and your opinion."

- What matters is what God has said in His Word
- Just because you are a Christian does not mean what you believe/understand = the truth of God
- God's truth stands no matter how much we believe something to be right
- Just because people disagree on an issue does not make them mortal enemies
- We can reject a person's stance without rejecting them as a person.

2. Be Constantly Prepared

2 Timothy 4:2 - Preach the word; **be instant in season, out of season**; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

- At all times
- For any situation

1 Peter 3:15 - But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and **be ready always to give an answer** (ἀπολογία) to **every** man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

“Every man is a potential adversary, even those whom we love. Only through dialogue are we saved from this enmity toward one another. Dialogue is to love, what blood is to the body. When the flow of blood stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment and hate are born. But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. Indeed, this is the miracle of dialogue: it can bring relationship into being, and it can bring into being once again a relationship that has died.”

by Reuel Howe - *The Miracle of Dialogue*

3. Be Patiently Engaged

2 Timothy 4:2 - Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.**

- With boldness and truth
- With persistence and patience
- With meekness (gentleness) and fear (respect, reverence)

1 Peter 3:15 - But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you **with meekness and fear** (φόβου):

We will be one of three kinds of people when it comes to challenging conversations:

1. An Avoider of controversial experiences - dodging the challenging conversations
2. An Aggressor of oppositional viewpoints - attacking those who disagree with you or oppose your beliefs
3. An Advocate of Scriptural truth - engaging with people in challenging conversations

An advocator of God's Truth - “A conversant Christian who speaks the truth on love and is skilled at navigating the cultural landscape with boldness and discernment.”

- Persuading, not accusing
- Winning the person over, not attacking
- Conversing, not lecturing
- Respecting them and their views, disparaging them for not conforming to your views
- Start with seeking to understand, not setting them straight