

Are Strict Teaching and Love Mutually Exclusive?

Many in the religious world today stress that we need to use caution in what we teach and preach from the Bible. Some tell us that we need to avoid teaching about controversial subjects and instead focus on our love for one another and Jesus' love for us. They contend that we lack love for others if we teach and demand a strict, conservative interpretation and application of the scriptures. Is this proposition valid? Can we demand strict adherence to the teachings of the Bible and still possess love for one another? Or, as many claim, are the two mutually exclusive?

To find an answer to this important question, let's look at the instructions Paul gave to Timothy. In II Timothy 1:13, Paul instructed Timothy to "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Here Paul commanded Timothy to "hold fast" to the form or pattern that he had given him. Many in the religious world today would put a large number of the things that Paul had taught Timothy in the "controversial", "taboo" category. What, then, did Paul mean by this instruction? Did Paul expect Timothy to disregard the controversial "sound words" that he had heard of him and only "hold fast" to the non-controversial "sound words"? Maybe Paul wanted Timothy to just use the "sound words" as a general "guideline" for the things that he would believe and practice, modifying the "sound words" if they got too controversial? Obviously not! Paul wanted Timothy to hold on to the things that he had taught him, controversial or not.

Some would contend that this interpretation places Timothy in a position that would cause him to be devoid of any love. After all, they would claim, if Timothy were to be inflexible and strict about something he had been taught from Paul, think of all the controversy that he would cause. The answer to this objection is found in this verse. Paul tells Timothy to "hold fast" to the things that he had been taught "in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Clearly, then, demanding a strict adherence to the things that Paul had taught him would not cause Timothy to lack any love for others. Rather, Timothy was to possess love as he held on to the things he had received of Paul. We can "hold fast" to the teachings of the scriptures and still possess love.

While some would agree with our conclusions drawn from this verse, they might argue that this instruction was just applicable to Timothy's personal life. Paul had taught Timothy some things that would cause trouble or controversy if taught to others. They might go on say that Paul was concerned that Timothy would hold on to the pattern that he had learned, but didn't want him to teach this pattern to others. This, however, was not the case. In II Timothy 2:2, Paul told Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." We see that Timothy was not only to "hold fast" the pattern that he had received of Paul in his own life, but that he was also to teach this pattern to others. These individuals, then, would "hold fast" to the pattern in their personal lives and "teach others also", all the while possessing the "faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

Clearly we can teach and demand a strict adherence to the teachings of the Scriptures and still possess love for others. We need not allow the rhetoric of the "religious" world to keep us from following the Divine pattern that Paul delivers in II Timothy 1:13 and 2:2.

- by Jacob Gwin

Some quotes worth pondering . . .

"If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere."

"A problem is a chance for you to do your best."

"Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all."

"The hatred you're carrying is a live coal in your heart - far more damaging to yourself than to your enemy."

"It's choice - not chance - that determines your destiny."

"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."

"If money talks, it usually sends the wrong message."

"Truth ever gains, and error uniformly loses, by discussion."