

The fear of being wrong vs. the freedom of love

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This June will mark 15 years I have been in vocational ministry.

The biggest change in my view of ministry in these 15 years is that when I began, I wanted to be right, but now, I want my ministry simply to be marked by love.

This doesn't mean I don't think orthodoxy is important; I do. But trying to get everything right is not my first concern; love is. If I get everything right yet do not love, I have missed the whole point.

Being right was my idol

The desire to be right wasn't even a pure motive to understand right doctrine. It was a desire to fit into the mold of my mentors, to believe exactly what they believed, to be accepted into a club and not to risk being left out.

My mentors weren't overbearing about their doctrinal convictions, nor did they ever give the impression I had to believe everything exactly the way they did. But I am a people-pleaser to a fault, and I wanted their approval. I only read books from a narrow viewpoint, and if I read outside that camp, it simply was to argue.

I want to be faithful to the truth once delivered to the saints. I want to keep the main thing the main thing. I want to be in line with the historical confessions of the church, but as I get older, I want to be known for love and kindness even more.

‘The greatest of these is love’

Don't hear me saying you have to choose one or the other. I am saying I don't want a desire to be right because I'm afraid of being left out of certain circles to be what consumes my thoughts and hinders me from knowing the fullness of God's glory in God's church. I want generosity and love to be how my ministry and life are known.

Paul calls the Corinthian church to faith, hope and love.

Faith is belief. To be genuine, fruit-producing faith, it must be a belief in the orthodox view of Jesus.

Hope is trusting in the promises God has made and in the presence of God. We know this hope by knowing the doctrine handed down generation after generation. An orthodox understanding of the resurrection and the new heavens and new earth is our hope.

Paul told the Corinthians, "The greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Right doctrine is essential, but we also see in this call the utmost importance of love.

Jesus told his disciples in John 13 the world will know they belong to him by their love for one another (John 13:35). Love is the center of the Christian life.

Love is a first fruit of a heart transformed by Jesus, a life filled with the Spirit. Love flows out of an orthodox understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, and love applied faithfully follows orthodox teaching.

Our identity isn't in being right

Again, I am not pitting doctrine against love.

In the beginning of my ministry, I was so consumed with being right about every little detail of doctrine that it consumed my ministry and kept me from living out the truth in love. I was so scared to say something wrong, write something wrong and believe something wrong that I missed the true call of ministry.

I tried to find my identity in my doctrinal positions instead of the love of Jesus. I focused on loving God with all of my mind to the point that I missed the heart, soul and strength part.

There is freedom in pursuing love

The truth is we never will get everything right. Should we pursue the truth? Absolutely. But we never will see or understand everything clearly. So, in the limited strength and time I have, I want to obey the Great Command and fulfill the Great Commission.

I want to love as I have been loved. I want to be marked by kindness and gentleness. I want to follow the example of Jesus by living with humility and sacrifice. I no longer want to walk solely in the fear I might be wrong. I want to walk in the freedom and power of love.

Focusing my ministry on love for others flowing out of the love of Jesus for me has given me great freedom. It has freed me from the paralyzing fear of having every detail right. This subtle shift has made all the difference in my life and ministry.

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