

THINGS NO ONE TELLS US: AT LEAST NOT NEARLY ENOUGH**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

In every sport there are rules which govern how the game is to be played. Paul once reminded his protégé, “If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Timothy 2:5; NKJV). Perhaps just as important as any codified regulations are the *unwritten* rules that permeate sports. These are rarely formally discussed; athletes are supposed to be familiar with them from having participated in contests over the years.

Baseball is a sport especially rife with these unwritten mantras. Taking too long to round the bases after a home run, for example, is a definite “no-no,” and is likely to result in the offender getting “beated” by the opposing pitcher in his next at-bat. Speaking of “no-no’s”, former San Diego Padre Ben Davis ignited a firestorm several years ago when he bunted in the eighth inning to break up a Curt Schilling no-hitter. “That was just uncalled for,” said an outraged Arizona manager Bob Brenly.

In similar fashion, there are many principles that are often overlooked in the performance of the Christian’s day-to-day duties. It is not that these commands are entirely unwritten; they are, however, terribly neglected. We would do well to remind ourselves of a few of these truths from time to time.

Do the Little Things Well

Many, like Naaman of old, are waiting for “some great things” (cf. 2 Kings 5:13) to come along so that their fidelity to the Savior can be attested. Many are blind to the greatness that lies in the faithful performance of the routine chores of life (cf. Luke 16:10). As William Barclay observed, “In the everyday duties of life we make or mar a destiny, and we win or lose a crown” (*Commentary on Matthew*, Volume 1, 143).

Be Respectful

I graduated from a small high school that lacked many of the amenities found in wealthier school districts. Because of this, not a few believed they were at a distinct disadvantage, compared to their more affluent peers. Rather than bemoan a situation that could not be changed, a science teacher offered her students this advice: “Good manners will open doors for you that background and education never will.”

Be honest. Be sincere. Look people in the eye when you speak to them. These small things can add up to a big difference. “You may not be bright,” this teacher continued, “but you can at least be polite.” After I have forgotten every bit of science she taught us, I will remember those choice words of wisdom.

Don’t Be “That Guy”

Now a teacher myself, I hope to impart to my pupils many of the same truths I learned. One of those lessons, unfortunately, needs to be learned by adults as much as by children, and that lesson is this: Do not be the person who, in practically every possible situation, seeks to draw attention to himself. In most every setting, there is “that guy” - and, chances are, you do not want to be him.

For instance, most teachers dread monthly faculty meetings. After an exhausting day in the classroom, having to discuss often trivial matters for an additional ninety minutes can be particularly taxing. Making a bad situation worse is the fact that there are those who apparently believe it their God-given duty to enliven such meetings with ill-conceived “comedic relief.” Somewhere along the way, these poor souls were told how humorous their banal observations were. What is worse, they believed it. The southern colloquial, “Bless your heart,” was likely coined with these irritating individuals in mind.

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

Be Personable

Even within the church, if not all local congregations, there are those who are friendlier than others. They greet visitors with a warm handshake or a genuine, “Nice to have you with us.” Others leave a first impression that is less-than-desirable.

It must be admitted that some brethren are quiet and uncomfortable in crowds. Their shyness in this regard should not be misconstrued for aloofness. On the other hand, some simply never learned to “play well with others.” Before anyone cares to know the plan of salvation or the proper acts of worship, they will have seen how we treat others. It is therefore beneficial to ask ourselves, “What image am I projecting?”

When in Doubt, Don’t

“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,” the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian brethren (Colossians 3:17). This admonition covers both what is taught (“in word”), as well as what is practiced (“in deed”). Even actions not intrinsically sinful can become such, if we violate our conscience in performing them (cf. Romans 14:23).

This rule is also helpful to remember when it comes to controlling our tongues. Before lashing out in anger, or having thought a matter fully through, it is helpful to ask yourself how confident you feel in what you are about to say. Will you regret it soon afterwards? Will it lessen your influence with those you seek to win to Christ?

“When in doubt, don’t” is a very good maxim. The problem is, many are not nearly as doubtful as they should be!

Learn to Recognize Real Experts

Everyone has had the unfortunate experience of being around those who are convinced they are a “cut above,” intellectually-speaking. There are no issues on which these self-styled “experts” cannot pontificate ad nauseam. One is tempted to say to these individuals, as did the ancient sage of Uz to his self-important friends, “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!” (Job 12:2). It is frankly amazing that some, given their inexhaustible storehouse of knowledge, have not advanced further in life than they have.

True experts, in sharp contrast, rarely speak up first. Almost never are they the loudest in a room. A talented musician, for example, does not feel the need to hold court for hours, discussing his ample talents—he simply plays. In similar fashion, an expert instructor will waste no time extolling his exploits—he will simply teach. The thoughtful individual will recognize the difference between a true teacher and a self-promoting charlatan.

Be Brief, When Possible

Not every topic can be covered in five hundred words or less. Nor is it possible to exhaust any Bible subject in a thirty or forty-five minute sermon. Still, it is probably best to be as concise as we can, when possible. The reason for this is obvious. As one writer observed, “The less we know, the longer our explanations.”

The legendary N.B. Hardeman was especially noted for his brevity, claiming on more than one occasion that he could state his beliefs on most any subject on the back of a postcard, with enough room left to write, “Bring all your folks and come see me.” It was also Hardeman who admonished dull preachers, “If you can’t strike oil after twenty minutes, stop boring.”

Be Considerate of the Feelings of Others

It is regrettable that some believe they have not proclaimed the gospel unless they have offended someone in their audience. When potential converts balk at this ill-treatment and turn away, these acerbic teachers console themselves with the notion that others just could not “endure sound doctrine” (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3). The truth is, they just couldn’t stomach their abrasive personality! Those foolish enough to boast, “I just tell it like it is,” more often than not tell it like they *think* it is and lack the common sense to know the difference. Paul’s exhortation to Titus is well worth repeating: “Show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:2, ESV).

-Brandon Renfroe

DO YOU LIVE WHAT YOU PREACH?

While speaking to a group of Hindu women a missionary noticed one of the women silently walked away but soon returned and listened more intently than before. Afterwards, he asked her, “Why did you leave in the middle of my message?” The woman replied, “I was so interested in the wonderful things you were saying that I went to ask your servant if you live like you teach and he said that you do. So, I came back to hear more about Jesus

HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS

Homosexuality is a theme that permeates every facet of our society. The debate regarding this behavior extends to our nation's government, educational system, entertainment, homes, and religious groups. Unfortunately, while the homosexual community marches to advance their rights, many who should be standing for the home, as God would have it, have instead turned a blind eye to the current crisis. Let us briefly consider homosexual rights from a biblical perspective.

First, homosexuals have the right...to know the *damage* brought on by their lifestyle. The destruction that a homosexual brings upon himself is three-fold. For one thing, homosexuality damages *internally*. Repeated studies have shown that practicing homosexuality drastically reduces one's life expectancy. The disastrous toll that homosexuality has had on the health of those who practice such is truly staggering. Homosexuality also damages *externally*. Many lives have been ruined because they innocently contracted the AIDS virus as a result of someone else's decision to practice homosexuality. Adults have unknowingly received tainted blood donated by infected homosexuals. Children have been born with this terrible disease because their parents were involved with the homosexual community. Countless lives have been ruined because someone decided to sow to the flesh (Galatians 6:7-8). Homosexuality will also damage *eternally*. Paul makes the eternal consequences of homosexuality very clear in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 when he wrote: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." The Bible is clear about the fact that when someone rejects God, they open themselves to all manner of wickedness (Romans 1:25-28). And Jude 7 lets us know the eternal fate of those who committed such sins in Sodom and Gomorrah when it says they are still "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

Second, homosexuals have the right...to know the *depth* of God's love for them. The love of God is not limited to those who agree with us on these moral issues. God's love is extended to all men, no matter what sins they may have committed. Homosexuals need to understand that "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Even when we are in rebellion against God's will He is still "longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). No matter what one's background or previous transgressions, God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

Third, homosexuals have the right...to know the *deliverance* that is available for their souls. As noted earlier, there is no doubt that one cannot inherit the kingdom of God if they are currently practicing the sin of homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). However, there is tremendously good news in the very next verse when Paul continues by saying, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). There were members of the Corinthian church who had been saved from many sins—even the sin of homosexuality. The Bible plan for washing away any and all sins is very plain. Sinners must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of their sins (Luke 13:3), confess their faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Eternal salvation for the soul is available to all who are willing to obey (Hebrews 5:9).

Fourth, homosexuals have the right...to know the *decency* of God's people toward them. The saying "Love the sinner and hate the sin" is a very true principle from the Bible. As God's children we must "hate every false way" (Psalm 119:128), while at the same time maintaining a love for every lost soul (Matthew 22:39). It is not too much for the world to expect Christians to act like Christians toward them. Some who claim to be religious have at times shown a mean-spirited attitude toward those in the homosexual community. The one who manifests such hatred because just as guilty before God as the homosexual. Let us always be sure to show others the transforming power of Christ's love.

The Bible has spoken clearly on the sin of homosexuality in both the Old and New Testaments (Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26-28). God's design for the home has always been one man and one woman lawfully united in the marriage bond (Genesis 2:24). May we always seek the will of God in every way so that we might reap the blessings of God, both now and eternally.

-Bobby O'Dell