

April 2000: Picking Our Battles

by Aaron Greenway

Nothing will make us fight faster when someone takes shots at our reputations, our relationship with God, or our goodwill. Some of us have felt misunderstood. Some of us have been misrepresented. And we try to recommunicate our heart's intentions only to find others who continue to mischaracterize us.

This is very frustrating, for sure. It makes us irritable and it hurts and grieves us deeply. To our dismay, there are simply "coppersmiths" out there who intend on doing "much harm" to others (2 Tim 4:14). And they fill the pews in the Church in America.

Without going into what their attitude should or should not be, I want to talk about what our reaction ought to and ought not be.

It is very easy to fight back, to defend ourselves, or to try and clarify our intentions. But, it is very clear from Scripture that someone who does not understand us may not want to understand. Someone who gossips about us and gives a report of us that is jaded may have a hard time abiding by Philippians 4:8 "...whatsoever things are of good report..." If this is the case, we need to know how to react.

The best example of someone who was falsely accused, who had His reputation raked over the coals, and who was demonized from one end to the other was Jesus. And He not only was accused, He was sentenced to die for it. I want to take us to what was an "illegal" court by recounting the events that happened in the Gospels. The Lord's reaction to the accusations were "classic" and can help us to know how to react in similar situations.

After His arrest, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin to give an account to the accusations that were leveled against Him. Interestingly enough, Jesus did not have a defense. He did not have an attorney to represent Him, to plead His case. In fact, when His accusers spoke up, Jesus

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did not respond back to them. The priests were bewildered! “Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?” But Jesus kept silent” (Matthew 26:62-63a; Mark 16:60-61).

We see the same in Luke's Gospel with Jesus' appearance before Herod, the king over Galilee, who was hoping to see some “light show” done by Jesus for his own amusement. Jesus didn't give him what he wanted. In fact, Jesus never said a word to him (Luke 23:9).

And when the chief priests made their list of accusations in front of Pilate, Pilate turned to Jesus, “Do you answer nothing? See how many things they testify against you” (Mark 15:4-5)! But Jesus answered nothing. This doesn't mean that Jesus didn't reveal who He was or that He didn't give truth where it was needed, but Jesus never defended Himself against his accusers. He never lashed back. He never returned an insult. He never tried to protect His reputation, no matter how it made Him appear.

Jesus knew that His real battle was not with the men who put their fingers in His face, but rather with the Prince of Darkness, Satan himself, who has blinded the eyes of people and uses them as pawns. Jesus picked His battles very carefully. To the Lord, the battle was to be fought at the cross, not in the courtroom.

So what can we learn from this situation in which our Lord would eventually go to the Cross? How can we glean some principles in how to act in situations where people have dirtied our name, where others have questioned our character, or made us appear to be what we are not? Do we fight back? Do we curse back? Do we defend our name? Do we try and reexplain ourselves?

Scripture has a better solution: “the battle belongs to the Lord” (I Samuel 17:47). If we are so intent on protecting our reputations, we must know that it is not our ‘reputation’ to protect. When it comes down to it, the Lord's name is at stake, not ours. This is very hard, because we have been wounded by the words and actions of others. But we must know that usually the innocent are “targets” and the devil cannot stand someone who is pure. So, it becomes his objective to taint them in the eyes of those who look up to that person, therefore discrediting anything he or she has to say otherwise.

We must remember that the power over such things is never found in defending ourselves against them. We will never win those who mock and question us by giving them answers they will never accept regardless. Rather, the power is found in prayer and in the fact that we are looking for the resurrection, in which God will vindicate us. His approval is what ultimately counts! Take notice that Jesus never revealed Himself, in His post-resurrection state, to His critics. Jesus had every right to “prove Himself” to those who mocked Him for claiming to be the Son of God. But He only showed Himself to His own followers. It is definitely true that people who love and accept us as we are trust the Holy Spirit rather than the gossip reports. If they have a problem, they will go to God and then us personally rather than accuse us publicly. Noticeably, both kinds of Christians fill the pews of the Church.

In summary, the way to defeat a curse is to return it with a blessing. The way to defeat hate is to return it with love. The way to defeat an accusation is not to accuse. Many times, our lives are the only things that truly can defend us from the words and unkindness of others. More profoundly, as we go through the Easter season, let us be aware that Jesus did not defend Himself so that we could be defended before God.