

## The Art of Taking a Stand

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The Bible documents many people who took a stand for God. Moses and Aaron demanded that Pharaoh let God's people go worship in the wilderness (Exod. 5:1). Elijah rebuked King Ahab for his wickedness. Queen Esther politically maneuvered the saving of the Jews. The apostles Peter, John, and Paul boldly held governments to account for their unrighteousness.

Likewise, the Bible commands us to take a stand for God. Consider the following passages:

**Matt. 10:5-7:** "These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

**1 Pet. 3:14-16:** "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

**Jude 3:** "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

We are expected to teach the Gospel and defend the faith. The question for us is *how* are we to do this.

Today, people are quick to defend all kinds of beliefs with little ethical restraint. On cable news, people passionately defend opposing views. Often, these segments quickly digress into shouting matches. On social media, people thoughtlessly react instantaneously. The more divisive and condescending their comments are, the more likely they will be retweeted. Of course, religious discussions are often tense. When our beliefs are questioned, we often feel threatened. Our fight-or-flight responses kick-in and conversations frequently become ugly. Once everyone calms down, rarely ever is anyone's mind changed.

### The Art of Taking a Stand Involves...

If we are not thoughtful, our reckless and vindictive culture will influence how we attempt to take a stand. As with being a Christian, taking a stand is an art. And, like any art, taking a stand requires learning and careful actions. Consider some of what is involved in the art of taking a stand.

**1. Strong moral compass.** One of the problems we face today is that people lack proper moral discernment. To use an analogy, the moral compass of many people is backward. Like in the days of Isaiah, people call good, evil and evil, good (Isa. 5:20). Many stand for evil.

By the cross, God made a judgment against evil (John 16:8-11). Therefore, by the Gospel, we can discern the differences between good and evil. As was described in last week's article, by the renewal of our minds, we can make accurate judgments of good and evil in our lives (Heb. 5:12-14). Moral intelligence enables us to know what to stand for, when to take a stand, and how to take a stand.

**2. Willing to sacrifice.** Today, many people are willing to voice their beliefs; however, few are willing to sacrifice for them. In the days of the Babylonian exile, we read about three young men who were willing to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were brought before King Nebuchadnezzar for refusing to bow their knees to worship Baal. Facing death they said, *"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up"* (Dan. 3:16-18).

These three young men were rescued by an angel of the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar had quite the change of heart toward God. However, doing what is right is rarely rewarded. This can be a surprising reality for some. The Bible is filled with people who took a stand and sacrificed greatly for it.

Taking a stand may not require our lives; yet, there are other things that we could lose for doing what is right. Are we willing to sacrifice a relationship, job promotion, or scholarship to stand for Jesus? After all, He is the one who calls us to sacrifice: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Matt. 16:24).

**3. Graceful speech.** Taking a stand for God does not give us license to be mean-spirited or condescending in our speech. Paul wrote, *"At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time"* (Col. 4:3-5).

The art of taking a stand involves knowing what to say and how to properly express truth. This requires wisdom. Recognizing that souls weigh in the balance, we must use love to persuade people to obey the Gospel (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

**4. Glorifying God.** Bringing glory to God is to be the driving motivation for taking a stand. If we are not careful, pride can harm us and those who hear us. Taking a stand is not about advancing ourselves, winning an argument or seeing how many people will retweet our pithy comment.

God is glorified when we take a stand by speaking the truth in love. Meekness, kindness, and humility prove our sincerity towards God and those who hear us. The qualities of self-giving love prove our love for God and interest in others. The words of Peter must be a guiding principle of our efforts to take a stand: *“Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen”* (1 Pet. 4:11).

### **Conclusion**

Taking a stand is an art that is learned and improved over time. Our moral compass must be guided by the truth. Otherwise, we will stand for all the wrong things. We must be willing to sacrifice for what is right. We must never expect to be rewarded. We must use our words wisely. Our speech and demeanor will reveal our motivations. If we are self-serving, others will quickly notice. If we are self-giving to the glory of God, we will be persuasive.

We need to be careful that culture does not shape how we take a stand. Today, some are misguided in the message they are promoting and in the tactics they employ. Is our message self-serving? If it is, then it is not the Gospel. Are we more influential than our message? If we are, then our tactics need to be corrected. As we consider ourselves, let us become dedicated to learning the art of taking a stand to the glory of God and salvation of the lost.