

My Granny was all about manners. She knew which fork to use for things, and what to say and not say in every situation. When I was a child, I was taught there were two topics which were never discussed in polite society. Can you guess what they were? Politics and religion. Money could be discussed only in the broadest of terms, such as noting that the price of coffee went up with absolutely no judgment, because if you implied that was bad you might offend someone with a stake in coffee, or if you implied that it was good, you offend someone who couldn't afford coffee. Politics, of course, could lead to tense discussion and so could religion, so neither was acceptable talk for dinner parties.

People seem a lot less afraid to talk of politics these days, and often it is discussed in ways my granny would definitely not have approved of. She would never have approved of speaking ill of a politician among friends or acquaintances because that might offend someone, as she would say, you might step on toes. I've noticed that people don't much seem to care if they offend others when it comes to politics anymore because it is assumed there is only one right answer. Talking about religion has also changed in ways my Granny would not approved, but instead of there being only one right answer, there seems to be only one wrong one.

I studied the religions of the world for my undergraduate degree and it was very interesting. The various temples and artwork are stunningly beautiful. The stories of the religions can be very meaningful. I can't think of one that I found where there wasn't something I liked in it. Yet there was also a lot to dislike in some of them. Some of them continued practices that were barbaric, especially in their treatment of children or women. Some encouraged violence. Some taught things that the modern American would consider ignorant. And yet, when discussing these religions it was considered very rude to say so, because

after all, that's just their beliefs, their religion. Yet in these same contexts, Christianity was given that same gentle treatment. Our heartfelt beliefs that trace back millennia are called ignorant, backwards, stupid, and any other such word you can find in the dictionary. My granny would be horrified.

Jesus tells us to be unashamed of the gospel of God. If we're ashamed of him, he will be ashamed of us. If we are ashamed of the gospel, we lose. We lose our soul, our relationship with God, we erode the body of Christ and the church. Jesus never spoke with shame. He was never ashamed of the gospel even unto death, and he expects the same from us, not merely because of his sacrifice, but also because there is nothing shameful in the gospel of the holy god.

Still, with the way Christianity is received these days, it can be hard. We might not say or show that we are ashamed of the gospel, but I wonder if we act in other ways that communicates the same thing.

Do we fail to speak the truth when we see something wrong? One of the hardest dilemmas we face as Christians is when we watch a friend or family member turn to sin. How far do we push? Our culture here in American is one of the most independent in the world. We tend to figure people can do whatever as long as it doesn't bother us. And if we speak the truth, even in love, that person might be mad at us. They might not even like us anymore. We might lose that relationship. It does not seem worth the risk to speak truth in hopes that we might save another from sin. But what good is it for someone to gain the world if we forfeit our souls?

Do we let others degrade or misrepresent our faith while we stay silent? This might sound like being in a group and someone says "Christian's hate blank." The blank could be any number of things.

Republicans, democrats, women, men, insert any race or sexual orientation here. And if you believe Christianity teaches us to hate any of the above, you are wrong. God hates sin, but he loves us. He hated what we did, but he loved us enough to save us. And it's awkward and hard, I know, but it's as simple as saying, actually Christianity doesn't teach us to hate blank. It teaches us to hate sin and love people, and we can have a debate over what constitutes a sin, but we are never to hate a person. To hate a person who bares the image of God is to hate a piece of God. Awkward, hard, maybe not well received, but what good is it for someone to gain the world if we forfeit our souls?

Do we talk openly about what God has done for us? We live in a society where we love to believe that we can control everything, that we can save ourselves, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. I really wish that were true, because I'm a bit of a control freak. But it's absolutely not. I think nearly everyone has or will encountered a situation where we must face our lack of control. You get that diagnosis and no matter how you want, you can't heal yourself. You do everything right but you're still the victim of a crime and in that moment, you realize you are powerless to save your own life. You choose an addictive substance and before you know it, it starts choosing you and you just can't seem to stop. You are adrift with no purpose, and no matter what, you can't seem to find one. For some of us, God intervened in those moments. Your life is spared, that addiction eases just enough for recovery to take place, you find a reason to live. You have a testimony. You know who needs to hear that testimony? The people who are still deep in the addiction and wonder if there's any way out. The people who lack purpose, who are facing horrible circumstances. But it can awkward to discuss our faith. We might upset that person. Sometimes sharing our faith only plants a seed, that will be watered by others later. But if we are bold and do share, we might help someone find life in Christ. What good is it for someone to gain the world if we forfeit our souls?

Let us never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, either with our words or with our silence. Let us never remain silent when the gospel is at stake, and let us speak confidently when souls hang in the balance. Let us speak openly of what God has done for us. When people mention lazy sundays with nothing to do, let's hand them a Trinity coaster and invite them over! Let us always be unashamed of the gospel, in word and in deed, so that on the last day when we stand before Jesus, when we see the wounds he bears for us, he will be unashamed of us, and will welcome us home with the words well done, my good and faithful servant.

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