

*Colossians 3:16*

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

*Luke 17:3*

3 So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

### **Fighting the Good Fight for What is Right in God's Eyes Is an Act of Love.**

There are subtle, yet insidious and pernicious, ways in which we fall short in loving God with all our hearts and therefore by extension His magnificent creations, our brothers and sisters. In particular, I'm pinpointing how we stray from righteous confrontation in spite of multiple scriptural passages (some cited above) that command us to do so.

In this article, I would like to put a spotlight on a universal inveterate quality to all our fallenness, especially in the absence of a curious and rigorous interest in self-examination. We are masters of minimizing, denying, or rationalizing the protection of ingrained unconscious tendencies that enable silent passivity and ingratiating mirroring when we are called to confront our Christian brothers and sisters when they stray from God. There are more times than not when anxious fears of conflict and not Godliness is the order of the day. We refrain from fighting the good fight and calling each other out in direct, respectful and compassionate ways over our betrayals of the teachings of God, our Christian siblings, and ourselves. I'm advocating for all of us to recognize those moments – when discretion is not the better part of valor – and go against the grain of passivity and conflict avoidance in efforts to break harmful patterns of behavior.

Apples and oranges are both fruits, even though they exhibit marked differences in character. For me, my former therapist-patient relationships and my relationships to my fellow church congregants are similarly comparable and different. The contractual terms for these two relationship categories are unmistakably different. Yet they are similar in that as a regenerated creature made in God's image, I believe I'm conscripted at all times to keep in mind the frequency of which my self-interest is linked to theirs. As I said many times over when I laid out ground rules for conducting couples therapy, "If what you are about to say or do is not a win-win for your relationship, then it is a lose-lose proposition."

In retirement now with time on my hands to reflect back on my years in private practice, I equate my modest success to cultivating and preserving my patients trust in me by telling my truth and not being complicit with their wishes to airbrush theirs. I could not be silent about their attempts to flee accountability for their relationship eroding patterns of behavior, either inside and outside the boundaries of our therapeutic alliance.

Sometimes deftly, sometimes not, I drew attention to their patterns of relating to me and to other attachment figures in their lives. These patterns were at odds with ensuring that those they depended on would continue to care for them and support their initiatives. God loves us,

the only condition being that we honor Him as Creator of everything whose wisdom and strength is without limits; human beings not so much.

I often fought fairly and reasonably with my patients and courted their annoyance, irritation, protests, and threats of abandonment, while always keeping their long-term interests at heart (meaning, the identification and fulfillment of their soul's mandate). For most of my career I was not a practicing Christian. Often, I was fighting all by my lonesome. An epitaph to my now expired career might read: He never mailed it in, no matter how sick, tired, anxious, or depressed. I'd hazard to say that this has likewise been a key to my success in marriage to a non-believer, and I hope a future key to success in relationship to members of my Christian community.

As I said often to many couples in my office battling over marital problems: "If you are afraid to put your best foot forward to save your marriage for fear of blowing it up and being worse off, then you are less likely to take your emotional handcuffs off to save it and re-configure the dynamics to your mutual satisfaction."

Some were quite anxious and angry over having to step into the unknowns and uncertainties of changing their marital dances. Many refused to embrace the unavoidable challenge to change and grow. And some stormed out of my office, believing that I was shirking my duty to them by not fixing their spouses (the real culprits) and marriages the way an auto mechanic might fix their cars. However, with trust and faith in God's values, God's gifts to me, and my training, I told my patients what they often did not want to hear although, by their own admissions, needed to hear.

As an accepted member of my church, I'm convinced now that God mandates I behave in a similarly respectful, compassionate, and proactive manner in the community, even though I may ruffle some feathers in the process. May I be remembered one day as someone who cared enough to fight the good fight, even if opinions will be divided on my methods.