



Unpopular Christianity?

If you had lived in Jesus' day, would you have sided with the conservatives or the liberals?

On the conservative side were the Pharisees. They were the ones who were concerned about upholding the whole Bible. They were the ones who were concerned about promoting good morals. They worked hard at teaching people how to live a godly lifestyle.

On the liberal side were the Sadducees. They were the ones who were progressive in their thinking. They were in tune with the culture. They had a vision for a better society through creative thinking and an acceptance of people and ideas from other cultures.

Does it surprise us that Jesus didn't become cozy with either one? To be sure, Jesus once said of the Pharisees, "The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you." But in the next breath he continues, "But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:2-4). The Pharisees may have gotten the moral issues right much of the time, but theirs was a burdensome and graceless religion. It lacked the power to help people do the right thing. It was devoid of love—either God's love for us, or true love for one another.

Jesus insisted on sticking with the truth, even if that meant that he was taking a very lonely position. It made him unpopular with the major movements of his day. Eventually, it led to his crucifixion.

Those who follow Jesus still find that sticking to the truth can put one in a very lonely position. More and more, confessing what the Bible has to say brings the disapproval of those around us.

In Canada, for example, a man was recently fined \$1500 for expressing his faith. His crime? He took out an ad in the Saskatoon StarPhoenix in which he published the references to four Bible passages that condemn homosexuality. The court found him guilty of "exposing others to hatred."

We might expect people to object to God's law, but those who share the gospel often fare little better. When Bonnie Witherall was murdered in Lebanon last year by



Muslims who objected to her missionary work, even fellow Christians criticized her for evangelizing. Bishop George Kwaiter compared her to a terrorist, complaining, “She was in the habit of gathering the Muslim children of the quarter and preaching Christianity to them while dispensing food and toys and social assistance” (Christianity Today, Feb. 2003).

Is telling people that Jesus is the Way to heaven a form of terrorism? The Bishop doesn't seem alone in his evaluation. Charles Kimball recently published a book entitled *When Religion Becomes Evil*. Here he lists five signs that religion has become corrupt. Among the five signs: “absolute truth claims” (Christianity Today, Feb. 2003). Apparently the one who said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and “If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth...” was starting a corrupt religion in this author's mind.

We should not be surprised if our attempts to be faithful to our Savior's words meet with the same kind of disapproval. Jesus warned that those who disturb the peace by defending the truth of the gospel would be unpopular. But then, he promises that those who do so enjoy some fine company: “Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23).

In Christ, Pastor Vieths