

No Win Situations

By: David Burruss

In Luke 20, we find a notable encounter between Jesus and the chief priests and scribes. They posed a seemingly simple question: "Should we, the Jews, pay taxes to Caesar?" However, this question was a trap designed to put Jesus in a no-win situation. If Jesus answered "yes," he would anger the Jews, who resented Roman rule. If he answered "no," he would be seen as defying Roman authority, which could lead to his arrest. With great wisdom, Jesus responded, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's," effectively avoiding the trap and providing a profound lesson in discernment and balance.

We all encounter no-win situations in our lives, often feeling trapped and frustrated. For instance, consider the story of a husband who, in a grumpy mood, told his wife he wanted one fried egg and one scrambled egg for breakfast. When she served him the requested meal, he complained, "You fried the wrong egg!" This humorous yet relatable scenario illustrates how some situations can feel impossible to navigate correctly, no matter what we do.

In our professional lives, no-win situations are common. Employees might be criticized for not giving enough attention to customers but then reprimanded for neglecting other duties when they try to improve customer service. Similarly, in church settings, no-win situations can arise. As a preacher, I have faced criticism for both spending too much time and not enough time in the office studying. I've been told my sermons have too much scripture and not enough, showing that sometimes, you simply can't win.

The apostle Paul found himself in a no-win situation while writing 2 Corinthians. He had previously corrected serious errors in the church at Corinth, which was not well-received. When he then tried to avoid further confrontation, that too was criticized. Paul needed to explain himself, convincing the Corinthians that his actions were motivated by love for them.

When I started preaching, I was somewhat naïve, believing we would all unite to love Jesus, love each other, and change the world. However, I soon learned that ministry is inherently messy. After witnessing things firsthand and talking with other preachers, I've realized that even in the most wonderful churches, messes are inevitable because where there are people, there are problems.

Many of us have experienced hurt in the church or other areas of life, often leading us to vow never to get involved again. However, as Paul shows us, we must persist. Broken people reaching a broken world will inevitably encounter messes. Paul's experience with the Corinthians provides valuable lessons. He begins by examining his motives, stating confidently that his actions were driven by holiness and sincerity, not by human wisdom but by God's grace.

Paul's critics accused him of having hidden motives, but he asserts that his conscience is clear. He emphasizes that his message is sincere, a term derived from the Latin word *sincerus*, meaning "without wax." This term comes from the practice of reputable pottery makers who discarded cracked pots rather than hiding flaws with wax, symbolizing honesty and integrity.

Paul explains that his actions were not driven by human wisdom, which is competitive and self-centered, but by grace, which fosters genuine care for others. In a grace-based system, our value comes from our connection with God through Jesus Christ, allowing us to keep our insecurities in check and genuinely prioritize others.

Paul urges the Corinthians to understand his straightforward letters and, more importantly, his sincere love for them. He hopes for mutual understanding and pride in each other when they stand before Jesus.

He points out that negativity and criticism within Christianity often stem from a misunderstanding of faithfulness, which can cause division.

Despite criticisms of the messenger, the gospel message remains true. Paul emphasizes that the message of Jesus is God's ultimate "Yes," fulfilling all of God's promises. Even if messengers falter, the truth of the gospel stands firm. Christians must recognize that the message's validity is independent of their personal experiences with its messengers.

Paul explains that he avoided a second visit to Corinth to prevent further pain. Sometimes, stepping back from a conflict allows time for healing and reconciliation. This approach can apply to various leadership roles, where temporary separation can prevent worsening a situation.

In conflict, we must first examine ourselves, ensuring we act with sincerity and integrity, operating out of love rather than ego. It's essential to recognize our own faults before addressing others' issues. Despite criticism, we must persist in doing what is right, as God has called us to do, trusting that our efforts, driven by genuine love, will ultimately bear fruit.

Paul reminds us to persevere and continue doing what is right, as this is what God has called us to do. Our trust should not be in the approval of people but in the unchanging nature of God's promises. Remembering that our ultimate accountability is to God, not to human opinions, can provide us with the strength to persevere.

So, let's follow Paul's example by staying true to our calling, acting with sincerity, and relying on God's grace. By doing so, we can rise above the negativity and continue to fulfill the mission God has given us, knowing that our efforts are not in vain, and that God's truth will ultimately prevail.

Sinners are welcomed at North Main church of Christ. If you're struggling, have any needs, or are simply seeking a loving Christian family, we invite you to come and see us.