

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



August 26, 2012

The “H” Word

Resolving disagreements requires that the disputants treat each other with civility and respect. Slapping the “hate” label on an opponent before the discussion even starts is not helpful.

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:17-18).

The Biblical injunction to “love your neighbor” is often quoted, but rarely in the context in which it was originally given. Look carefully at this passage in Leviticus: the “neighbor” under consideration is one with whom I have an issue, one who (in my opinion) deserves a rebuke. It is *that* neighbor whom I should learn to love. Loving that neighbor means I will not harbor any hate toward him in my heart; I won’t even bear a grudge against him. I love him too much to allow that kind of base passion to infect my heart and conduct.

Notice also that loving my neighbor does not require that I ignore the issue that divides us. In fact, God encourages me to “surely rebuke” him. Get the issue out on the table, discuss it, argue it, debate it — but do all this in a spirit of

love, not hate. This is how differences get resolved in a civil society.

Our society sorely needs to learn this lesson. We are currently in the throes of a great struggle over a number of issues that challenge traditional faith and morality. Both sides have strong convictions regarding abortion, gay marriage, gender roles, and the role of the Bible in deciding these issues. Sadly, proponents on both sides can’t seem to come together to discuss these issues without somebody screaming “hate!” at the other side. It’s an impugning of motives before any effort is made to understand what the other side believes or why they believe it.

I have no doubt that there is some hate represented on both sides of these debates. But to automatically blackball *all* of our opponents as motivated by hate before we’ve even had an opportunity to discuss the matter with them is judgmental and childish. No progress can ever be made toward resolving our differences in such a climate.

Of course, this assumes that we *want* to resolve our differences. If our

strategy is to steamroll the opposition into silence through intimidation, then resolution is, by definition, impossible, and we’re right back where we started, with hearts poisoned by a desire to harm our neighbor. Shouting “hate!” at others from this kind of motive is nothing more than psychological projection — projecting onto others the very character flaw that blackens our own hearts. In this scenario, our opponent is not the one with the hate problem.

If we’re really serious about resolving these important questions that confront our culture, we — *all of us* — must train ourselves not to assume the worst possible motives in our opponents, and stop carelessly flinging about the “H” word with such reckless abandon. If our opponent really is motivated by hate, we’ll find out soon enough when we try to engage him in a civil discussion on the issues that divide us.

Regardless of our opponent’s motivation or behavior, our duty is to love him no matter what — no hate, no grudge, and no hateful talk. The world has enough of that already.

— David King