

Name-calling kills many a good discussion

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Once upon a time there was a conscientious Church of God father who regularly gave instructions to his son.

Like any good dad, he planted seeds. He knew that his son did not always understand the depth of his lessons. But he knew that his son would face experiences that would allow his son to comprehend these lessons later in his life.

On one particular day the father had a discussion with his son that went like this:

Father: "Son, I want to warn you about an effective method that some people in this world use to end a conversation. If you are making excellent points that are cogent, logical and scriptural, they will label you in a broad, generalized way to avoid discussing the details of your subject."

Son: "Do they do this on purpose?"

Father: "Some people do. Some people, who view life as a win-or-lose scenario, use this technique to win an argument. Some people who fancy themselves as leaders use this technique to establish their control over a person."

Son: "Do most people do this on purpose?"

Father: "Probably not. Many people use this technique because that's the way they learned. Many people are not emotionally equipped to cogently and politely disagree about ideas."

Son: "How can you tell the difference between people who are doing it on purpose and those who aren't doing it on purpose?"

Father: "The important thing is not determining whether they are doing it on purpose. The important thing is understanding that it will happen to you and therefore being prepared to exercise self-control and patience."

In high school

The young man tried hard to learn the lesson, but it wasn't until he encountered a few experiences that he understood what his father had told him.

One day in a high-school class he was involved in a discussion about homosexuality.

He said: "Even though I believe that God loves all sinners, I believe the Bible condemns the practice of homosexuality in both the Old and New Testaments."

Suddenly a few people in the discussion said: "You're just a homophobe."

The young man realized that any productive discussion about his legitimate ideas were now useless. These other students had quit discussing ideas and had lapsed into name-calling.

On the job

Months later on the job, the young man was discussing the terrorist attacks on his country and the extra security measures that the government had established at airports. At the time of this discussion the government had not yet established the practice of checking every passenger on the plane.

He recalled a plane trip he had taken.

He said to his coworkers: "I couldn't believe my eyes. The security personnel were randomly selecting passengers for special attention. I saw them frisking ladies who were over 65 years of age, yet they were not paying much attention to people from Saudi Arabia."

A coworker replied: "So?"

He continued: "Since most of the suicide bombers on Sept. 11 were from Saudi Arabia, you would think that they would pay special attention to people from that country."

The coworker replied: "You are a racist."

The young man realized that any productive discussion about his legitimate ideas were now useless. This coworker had quit discussing ideas and had gone to name-calling.

In college

After high school the young man went to college. One day he entered a discussion with some classmates about abortion.

Some of the people espoused their views supporting abortion. When it came this man's turn to talk, he expressed his views against the practice of abortion.

He said: "I believe that science demonstrates that life begins at conception. Even though we should support a woman's right to make choices in her life, I do not believe anyone has the right to kill an unborn child."

One of the classmates said: "Since you do not support a woman's right to choose, you are a sexist."

The young man realized that any productive discussion about his legitimate ideas were now useless. This classmate had quit discussing ideas and had gone to name-calling.

In church

The young man thought that his church would provide him refuge from the labeling and name-calling that was prevalent in other areas of his life.

He discovered that his conclusion was wrong.

One day he was discussing some of his ideas with two other believers.

He said: "I appreciate God's grace. I believe what Paul wrote in Romans 8:3. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

One fellow believer said: "I can't believe you hate the law so much. You sound like a Protestant."

He said: "You say I hate the law because I quote Paul? And how can you pigeonhole millions of Protestants like that?"

Another fellow piped in: "You are a Laodicean."

The young man realized that any productive discussion about his legitimate ideas were now useless.

These believers had quit discussing ideas and had gone to name-calling.

The bottom line

With experiences like these over time, the young man realized that his father was right. People resort to labeling and name-calling, and such behavior ends the productive discussion of legitimate ideas.

He had been incorrectly called a homophobe, racist and sexist in his dealings in the world. He had been incorrectly called a Laodicean and a Protestant in his dealings within Church of God congregations.

He remembered how his dad reminded him to take responsibility for his reactions to such behavior. Therefore, he asked God to help him have self-control and patience.

His physical father gave him good advice and his spiritual Father empowered him to internalize the lesson.