A Publican and a Zealot
06-24-18 AM

One of the most important characteristics of the church that Jesus built (Mat. 16:18) is the unity of the church. In Ephesians 4 Paul declares that we as Christians are charged with working to maintain the spirit of unity in the bond of peace. In short, the church that is unified under one head is to have one mind. This requires us to perfect the ability to get along together.

When Jesus selected His 12 apostles (upon whom He would authorize to establish His church, Ephesians 2:20), He selected a variety of men who would work together to teach His doctrine. When we look at the list of the apostles found in Scripture, there is an interesting tidbit about 2 of them:

> *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.*   Matthew 10:2-4

Two of the apostles, Matthew and Simon, are identified by their professions / ideologies. Matthew was a tax collector. In the roman world this was called a *Publicani* (hence the word Publican). The actions of the *publicani* were fiercely criticized by all Romans. They were accused of insurance fraud in delivering goods during the Punic wars, of excessive greed when collecting taxes in the provinces, of exceptionally crude conduct towards slave labor working in the mines, and of fraudulent practices in trying to get rid of unprofitable public contracts. In particular, they were hated in Israel as servants of the Roman occupation. On many occasions in the bible they are equated with sinners (Mat. 9:10, 11:19).

Simon was a zealot, a political action group dedicated to liberating Israel from the Roman rulers (some translations translate the term as Canaanite by mistake). They were founded by Judas of Galilee (mentioned in Acts 5:37) with some simple ideas: God alone was the ruler of Israel, not the Romans and therefore no taxes should be paid to Rome. They were violent and instigated the rebellion that destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD. As with the tax collectors, they too were despised by most people.

What is remarkable is that Jesus choice these two men to be part of His one team. We see that Jesus often mediated between the apostles in their debates (e.g. Luke 9:24, 22:24). One might imagine the debates between these two apostles. You might think that Matthew accused Simon of murder and mayhem, while Simon made accusations of divine betrayal and blasphemy. Scriptures do not speak to any strife between them; it simply lists them in the fashion they are listed. If there was no strife between them, how could that have been? How might they have gotten along?

Here might be a simple way they worked together:
1. Learned to be mindful of their words - 1 Timothy 6:4
Learned to be mindful of your *OPINIONS*
- Perspective gained from observations are opinions
- Unnecessary inferences from Scripture are opinions

2. Learned to be in agreement of what matters - Ephesians 4:15
Learned to be in agreement of what matters
- Spiritual unity requires unity of Spirit; we need to agree on the Scriptures
- Persuasion requires agreement; we need to find common ground

3. Learned to work at not offending others - Colossians 4:6
Being sensitive to the perceptions of others
> - *"I know that this may offend some of you"* should never preface our statements
> - We need to ask: how important is my opinion?

4. Learned to work at not being offended - Ecclesiastes 7:21-22
Proper speech requires spiritual maturity
> - We need to be slow to anger
> - We need to be patient to all

5. Learned to love each other - 1 Corinthians 13:4-5
Our words need to seek the best for the hearer
> - Sacrificing our words and our feelings
> - Being Godly by wanting the best for others

Conclusions:

We CAN have opinions

We WILL offend some with the Gospel

WE MUST think before we speak

We CANNOT cause needless controversy