

Taking a Stand

by Kyle Campbell

The nature of the wonderful blessings of God come with responsibilities, namely, that those who identify as Christ's are willing to stand for His doctrine. Paul urged the Thessalonians to "stand fast in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 3:8) and to "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). An effective way to illustrate standing for truth is through the people who have done it. Micaiah was a prophet of God during the reign of the wicked king, Ahab. In 2 Chronicles 18:1-34, Micaiah stood for right even though it cost him. There are four very good traits of this relatively obscure but important prophet of God that teach a valuable lesson about fighting for truth.

First, he was a hated prophet (vv. 1-7). Ahab hated Micaiah because he only prophesied evil against him. This really has not changed. God's spokesmen are still hated today. Christ warned, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18-19). But these men boldly did the will of God, and were approved by God. When religious leaders hated the apostles and persecuted them, they had the strength of character to declare, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Second, he was an honest prophet (vv. 8-22). Micaiah would not be swayed from speaking the truth God gave him. Even though he knew this would cause him to suffer, he prophesied boldly anyway. In Acts 4:29, the apostles prayed for boldness that they may continue preaching truth. We need that boldness today. Paul asked for prayers that the word of God would free course and be glorified (2 Thessalonians 3:1). The word is glorified when people have the backbone to honestly proclaim it. Error, issues, and controversy abound — both from within the church and from without (cp. Acts 20:29-30). A Christian who will not stand for God's truth and shrinks in the face of opposition is not worth anything to the Lord and deserves no respect from Him and other brethren.

Third, he was a humiliated prophet (vv. 23-27). A false prophet slapped him. Ahab put him in prison. But Micaiah remained true. What will we do when we are really put to the test of standing for the truth? Will we be able to stand even when we suffer for the decision (Hebrews 10:32; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:12)? Will we cower and be counted among the popular or will we put on the whole armor of God and fight for what is right and true even though we might be maligned and characterized as troublemakers like Ahab did with Elijah (1 Kings 18:17)? Elijah answered Ahab by telling him, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim" (v. 18).

Fourth, he was an honored prophet (vv. 28-34). Micaiah had the greatest honor of all — his prophecy came true. It was evident who the man of God was! Ezekiel wrote, "And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them" (Ezekiel 2:5). Deuteronomy 18:21-22 gives the criteria for a true prophet: "And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him." No matter what circumstances befell Micaiah,

he was honored by God because he spoke God's truth; he was willing to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). God's truth is too pure and important to be compromised. Paul asked his beloved Galatians, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (4:16). No man wishes to anger or create unrest, but truth inevitably does this (Matthew 10:34), but you will be blessed if you hold to divine truth.

You learn a lot about a person when you learn what it cost him to stand where he stood. What will it cost you to stand for the truth? Are you willing to pay that cost? Micaiah did and found himself numbered among God's eternal faithful. May we have the courage to stand for God's truth.

Congregational Autonomy

by Kyle Campbell

A common thread in controversy is that anyone who preaches the truth from a different congregation to a congregation in error is violating local autonomy. These protestations are the common tactics of those who do not want their doctrines examined. However, the Bible shows that there is no violation of congregational autonomy when the truth is preached! Conversely, the Bible recognizes no legitimate autonomy for a church to do that which it has no authority to do.

For example, in Acts 15, the elders in Jerusalem took part in sending a teaching (regarding circumcision) to other churches. They warned the brethren about false teachers (vs. 24). They sent men with the written message, who would expound upon it orally (vs. 27). In the written message, they declared the principles of truth (vss. 28-29).

Although the Spirit inspired the content of the message, that does not change the fact that these actions were taken. God does not use a wrong means to declare a right message. The context suggests that the action was approved. If those elders had bound their decision on another church about who was to be allowed to preach for that other church, it would have violated autonomy. However, teaching brethren in other places does not violate autonomy.

Another example would be the Colossian church. Paul warned them of false teachers, even though he was not among them (Colossians 1-8). In doing so, he did not violate their autonomy. We are to imitate Paul, so would this not mean that we can warn of error too (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16-17)?

The churches of Asia are also good examples (Revelation 2-3). John commended Ephesus for not putting up with false teachers and for leaving their first love (Revelation 2:2, 4-5). He rebuked Thyatira for tolerating a false teacher (Revelation 2:20-23). John also condemned Sardis as dead (Revelation 3:1). In doing so, he did not violate their autonomy!

Men will say, "I do believe that we have a certain responsibility to warn or admonish brethren even outside our local congregation." However, when this is done by marking a false teacher, cries of "Foul" are heard, as claims are made that autonomy is being violated. Brethren cannot have it both ways!

Unopposed, no false doctrine would ever cause division. The innovators themselves never cause the division -- it is always the opposition. The cause is the teaching; opposition, the effect; division, the result. The doctrinal purity of the church lies in the defense of the truth.