

On harsh language

It is true that Bnonn uses strong, even harsh, language in his writings. This is not accidental, nor due to a quirk of character, nor an inability to control his tongue. Rather, Bnonn is deliberately attempting to use biblical language and biblical polemics. He is trying to treat sin and foolishness the way Jesus, the apostles and the prophets treated them, and to speak of them the way they spoke of them.

Those who find his style offensive inevitably raise one objection: "But he's not Jesus or the apostles."

The implication being that a person's sin nature, or lack of special calling, disqualifies them from using harsh scriptural language because they are likely to misuse it and thus cause harm.

But let's think about that. Why is imitating Jesus' use of strong language inherently *more* dangerous than imitating Jesus' other attributes?

Take love. Jesus was loving. When Christians imitate that, do they do it perfectly? Of course not. And the consequences are severe. Christians have mangled and misused the doctrine of 'love' to adopt harmful, anti-biblical attitudes to issues like homosexuality, divorce, remarriage, abortion, fornication and criminal justice.

Is the solution to have Christians say, "Well, I should imitate Christ, but I'm sinful and can't trust myself to love correctly; safer not to risk it"? Obviously not. God never gives us that option.

Paul says "Be imitators of me, as I imitate Christ," without any further qualifications. In that same letter he tells the Corinthians that he has to talk to them like babies, not adults. He calls them arrogant. He accuses them of boasting. He calls them weak, low, foolish and despised.

Did he not intend Christians should imitate him like this in straightforwardly rebuking sin and foolishness?

The book of Proverbs is even more explicit. It contains many, many verses about the importance of bridling the tongue, speaking wisely, refraining from foolish talk and so on; and they are cheek-by-jowl with verses which call people fools, wicked, sluggards, brazen, warped, evildoers, unruly, simple (as in stupid), and senseless. Apparently Solomon saw no contradiction here. Nor did he see a contradiction between urging wisdom and discretion, and using insulting metaphors to refer to

sinners (“a constant dripping on a rainy day”, “a gold ring in a pig’s snout”, “as vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes”, “decay in his bones”).

And throughout church history, Christians followed this example. The language Bnonn uses wouldn’t have raised an eyebrow among the Puritans or the Reformers, simply because in those periods of history strong language wasn’t associated purely with an uncontrolled temper; it was associated with a zeal for the truth, because Christians used it so.

The next objection people raise is that ‘times have moved on’; we don’t talk like that any more, and therefore it’s more offensive.

Well, it’s certainly true that the church has moved on. Half the church can barely bring itself to use the word ‘sin’ any more; we call it ‘brokenness’ and ‘messiness’. We don’t talk about ‘fornication’ any more, we talk about ‘cohabitation’ or ‘having a partner’. We went within two generations from ‘sodomy’ to ‘homosexuality’ to ‘gay’. We went from ‘gluttony’, a sin, to ‘overeating’, a medical condition. We went from ‘effeminate’ and ‘butch’ to... no words at all, because the church no longer considers those things sinful.

These changes in wording reflect the culture, but they also shape it. Liberals know this—they have been extremely active in promoting and mandating changes of terminology. They know 'undocumented worker' has different connotations to 'illegal immigrant', and that letting pro-lifers say 'baby' instead of 'fetus' in a debate is dangerous.

But the church has been strangely passive about resisting all this. We call ourselves people of the Word; we claim that every word of the Bible was divinely inspired; but we abandon biblical categories, biblical adjectives and biblical rebukes, and adopt the terminology of a godless culture because we don’t want to be seen as backwards. We try to speak God’s truth in the language of the secular-humanist left, trying to mask the offense of the Gospel. As if non-Christians are so stupid they will accept beliefs they hate as long as we say them nicely.

There are men – especially men – in the church who have become sickened by this. They long for honest, direct, biblical speech. Some of them come from rough, blue-collar backgrounds; some of them come out of atheism, where robust debate is the norm.

It is to these men that Bnonn writes. His ministry is targeted and explicitly masculine. Sometimes I don’t like the way he says things; but I see responses from men who find his language bracing, challenging and convicting. And he’s writing to them, not to me.

Nor does Bnonn use only harsh language. Rebuke and challenge are only two facets of his ministry. In appropriate contexts he is also caring, sympathetic and gentle. He deals in distinctly different ways between those who challenge him to mock God's law, and those who genuinely want to learn or unburden themselves. He has poured countless hours into encouraging young men in need.

If what Bnonn teaches is wrong, it is wrong no matter how he says it. If what he teaches is right, it is absurd to object that he is teaching biblical truth using biblical language.

Is his harsh language accurate, and directed towards targets worthy of it? Those are the questions you need to ask, and it is striking that Ryan did not even mention them. IS Todd Pruitt a quisling? DOES Ryan have androgynous leanings? Ryan didn't seem to feel these answers were even relevant; though the charge at hand is slander, which is only relevant if Bnonn's words are false!