

Answering Anonymous Accusers

A friend of mine received a letter recently which has weighed heavily on my heart and mind.

Like most letters, this one arrived in a white envelope, bearing my friend's name and address. But unlike most letters, the envelope had no return address; the letter had no signature – and the note bore no evidence of love.

Instead, the letter sent hurtful reminders of failures long-past. It contained accusations of unworthiness. It commanded my friend to be ashamed.

How do you respond to a letter like that? What should you think ... or do?

Few things inspire my scorn like an anonymous letter. In part, that reaction is rooted in my experience received anonymous letters back when I was a newspaper reporter. The writers of these letters were eager to emphasize my failures – some of which, undoubtedly, were quite real.

But whether true or false, the anonymous critiques never led me to change. I resolved quite early in my career not to take them seriously.

You see, each day I worked at the newspaper, I began my work by typing my name. My name appeared on everything of significance that I wrote – telling the world that it was mine, for better or worse. If I made a mistake or sinned against someone, my name told all the world whom to hold accountable.

I saw no reason to take seriously anyone unwilling to do the same.

I haven't changed my opinion on that.

That's not to say I haven't re-evaluated the opinions I held as a young reporter. Some of my past opinions have not survived the scrutiny of Scripture.

But this one did.

Open your Bible and read. Yes, some of the historical books have been preserved without a name attached to them. But we know who wrote these, as the writers never tried to *hide* their identity. They omitted their names simply because they didn't see themselves as the focus. It was God's story.

However, the parts of the Bible that are deeply provocative – apostolic letters to the churches, admonishing God's people to repent of their wrongs; prophetic letters that warned of impending judgment – these all were signed. Their authors did not shy away from accountability.

It cost some of them dearly. Jeremiah was publicly beaten, cast into a well, put on a diet of bread and water, hunted by Jerusalem's noblemen, and exiled to Egypt for his words. Amos was deported. Daniel's enemies plotted against him. The Apostle Paul was slandered, attacked, accused and imprisoned.

But they owned the words God called them to write – causing sinful men to scorn them, even as the Lord commended them (Heb. 11:37 ff.).

Those Godly men of old owned what they wrote because they knew that our God wants His people to speak and act openly and without shame.

In the Ninth Commandment, God said, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Then He provided a host of "case laws" – commands that apply the Ten Commandments to specific situations in day-to-day living. These help us to understand how the Ten Commandments should be lived.

Thus, in Deut. 19:15 ff., we learn how seriously God took accusations. If an accusation of wrongdoing was to be made, the accuser had to make himself known, and the matter was to be carefully investigated by the priests and judges. If it was found that the accuser has spoken falsely, the penalty that would have fallen on the accused person was to fall on the false accuser.

God spoke harshly of those who accuse lightly. He warned that none of His people may slander others (Lev. 19:16). Those who speak slander shall not dwell in God's presence of among His people (Ps. 15:3). The Godly king vows, "Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy" (Ps. 101:5).

Nor is that exclusively an Old Testament sentiment. In Eph. 4:31, the apostle urges God's people to "let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."

If someone offends you, or if you see your brother embracing sin, you must "go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). And again, "if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3).

Jesus doesn't permit anonymity. Instead, He would have us look into the eye of the one whom we would accuse. He wants us to give the one whom we accuse an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings, offer explanations, or show repentance – personally.

Anonymous accusations? Never. Not for those who would follow the Lord.

In fact, anonymity is a path only our Enemy could love. It's right up his dark alley! After all, his names mean Slanderer (**Diabol o**j – the Devil) and Accuser (**Sat a n a j**, or שָׂטָן – Satan). He enjoys nothing more than hurling accusations from the shadows, striving to darken the name of one of God's people – even if only in that person's own mind.

Such acts belong to the sinful flesh and should never enter the heart of one who belongs to Christ (Col. 3:5-10). Rather, we ought to strive for compassion, humility, mutual forgiveness and love (Col. 3:12-14). Those attitudes require *rejection* of anonymity – with all the cowardice and hatred anonymity implies.

So what did I tell my friend to do?

I told my friend to pray.

- ✓ Pray for the one who sent the letter, asking God to lead that person to repent of their divisive and accusatory spirit.
- ✓ Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict the letter-writer's heart, leading the person to repent – laying down the bitter pen, confessing the sin, and seeking to be restored to the Lord.
- ✓ Pray for a charitable spirit for yourself, that this sin might not cause bitterness to grow in your own heart.
- ✓ And pray that God would remind you of the forgiveness that He has given, which makes the slander of that poison letter a moot point – since your sins have been cleansed through Christ.

God hears when His people pray such prayers. And His answer is never anonymous. In the name of Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, our God has promised to comfort those afflicted and to convict those who afflict.

And *His* work is more powerful than anything anonymous hearts can write.