

March 27, 2007

Hi Everyone!

We had an interesting experience last week in our home Bible study. An engaged couple had contacted me and asked if they could come to our Bible study. Turns out that he works fulltime for a para-church organization here in the Vienna area - they told me they would be getting married, would be living in the area, and wanted to check us out. Of course, I'm thinking, "Hey! A guy who has ministry experience! Huge help for a church plant! This is good!", so I told them they could come.

I wasn't at the first Bible study they came to, but Arndt, the man who helps me lead it, told me afterwards that this new guy (We'll call him "Evil Bob" . . . you're probably getting a hint of where this is going) basically took over the discussion, ran the whole group down a bunch of rabbit trails, criticized others in the group using a lot of Bible knowledge that he had (which others didn't have) - basically ruined the evening. We agreed that we weren't going to let him do that again.

He came again two weeks later - slightly late so I couldn't really chat with him beforehand. We were talking about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, mentioning that Bible teaches that we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe on Christ. At that point he said, "I just want to be provocative. Satan believes in God, so why isn't he filled with the Holy Spirit?"

My response: "Interesting question. Why don't we talk about that afterwards?"

His response: "No, I want to talk about it now."

My response: "No, that really has no practical application for us so we'll stick with what we had planned and I'll be glad to talk with you about that afterwards."

. . . and then the stare-down started.

I don't know how long the stare-down lasted, but then he looked at the floor, I cleared my throat . . . and we went back to our study. As I led the study a couple of things were happening: 1) I was convinced that everyone in the Bible study thought I was the meanest guy in the world for shutting this guy down the way I did, 2) with the exception of Arndt and his wife Karin, nobody else said a word, and 3) "Evil Bob" began coughing, sneezing real loud, and muttering under his breath.

At the end of the study, as people were getting ready to go home, I went to "Evil Bob" and told him I would still be willing to talk with him about the question he posed. His response: "I've got my answer. This is a Bible study where only the leader gets to talk." And he left.

I went back into our living room, ready to explain to the others why I acted the way I did, but I didn't have to. The unanimous response was "Thank you. You protected us." What's interesting is this: We're working through a book by Gene Getz with our leaders about how to lead a church, and the discussion topic for the next session is the responsibilities of a leader (including protecting the church).

Note: Arndt always has good insights. This time: "I find it interesting that we were talking about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and ("Evil Bob") wanted to make Satan the center of attention."

Anyway, we had a great worship service the following Sunday - a number of new people came. The guys in the preaching class informed me that they were going to fill me in on all the mistakes I made in our next class. One man who was visiting (and who has been very skeptical) told his wife that they would be in our service on Easter Sunday because he can actually get something out of our service. Another man who has just received Christ came to help with the setup beforehand and told me afterwards, "Anytime you need help with anything, you let me know!" My response, "How about preaching for me?" (I like it

when they get the "deer in the headlights" look) His response: "Not yet." (I like that answer.)

One more note: "Evil Bob's" fiance came to our worship service on Sunday (without him). I didn't get a chance to do more than greet her, but a number of our women spent quite a bit of time with her after the service, and it seemed that they were ministering to her. So . . . it could be that the saga will continue - but "Bob" is going to have to have a little chat with our leaders before he comes to anything else that we do.

We'll be having a Good Friday service with Lord's Supper in our living room. A number of people have said they are coming. On Easter we'll be having a worship service in one of the city auditoriums followed by a buffet dinner - Reinhold Eichinger, the head of our association of churches, will be speaking (they get a break from me).

Thanks for your prayers for us!

Paul