

Echo Chambers

Introduction

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.' He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him. Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, 'Are we also blind?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (John 9:35-41).

How is it that two groups can hear the same set of facts and come to wildly different conclusions? This phenomenon has become such a pervasive part of our society that we've come up with a word to describe it: **Echo Chambers**.

"An environment in which a person encounters only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own, so that their existing views are reinforced and alternative ideas are not considered."

Increasingly, more communities are forming around their beliefs, shutting themselves off to the outside world of fact and evidence. People who believe the earth is flat, that the moon landing was faked by Hollywood, that vaccinations do more harm than good, and especially in our time of political unrest. Even in religion today, extremist organizations have formed like suicide bombers, cults, and isolationists. Facts are rarely considered, only what someone already believes about a subject.

But this lesson isn't about everyone else. It's about you and me today! Are you living in an echo chamber? Do you surround yourself only with people whose beliefs coincide with your own? Are you unwilling to consider the evidence that doesn't agree with what you've already decided is true? Let's look at the many examples from God's word of the dangers of echo chambers and some steps we can take to avoid them today.

Why Are They So Dangerous?

Spreads Fear and Faithlessness

As the children of Israel were on the borders of Canaan, ten spies came back and infected the minds of the people with their fear (Num. 13-14). Though Joshua and Caleb presented a message of confidence, the people collectively rejected their encouragement and shrank back, terrified of the giants in the land. And, rather than looking back to the miracles in Egypt and God's providence for them in the wilderness, they couldn't bring themselves to trust him.

Today, God calls us to the promised land of Heaven. He's opened the way through Jesus' death, but he calls us to live with faith and without fear (Heb. 11:6). Will we dare to stand like

courageously like Joshua, or be too afraid of the uncertain road of life to trust God enough to take action?

Leads to Disunity and Tribalism

After Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam sought advice on what to do with God's people (1 Kings 12). Instead of listening to the wisdom of the older counselors, he went with the foolish plan of the younger men. No doubt, he already had in his mind what he wanted to do, and when he found others who agreed with him, he abandoned the advice of the elders. Eventually, his harsh treatment of the people led to the fracturing of Israel.

Closing our ears and refusing to listen is still a problem for us today. And when we refuse to be open to another way of handling a situation, we risk isolating others and shutting them out. Are your ears open to the counsel of others, or have you already made up your mind?

Fueled by Prejudice

When Jesus preached in his hometown, he was confronted with a huge obstacle of prejudice (Matt. 13:53-58). Rather than listening to him, the people were offended. They lowered him to the status of a carpenter's son and refused to believe. As a result, Jesus wasn't able to perform more signs among them and moved on to more fertile soil.

We can also reject a helpful message purely based on prejudice today. If we judge the one presenting the truth as "unworthy" of listening to, we'll close our ears and write them off. Operating in an echo chamber, we'll use any excuse to dismiss the evidence. But are we willing to hear, even if the message is given by someone who isn't among our close inner circle?

Promotes Misinformation and Rumor

Maybe the most powerful example of echo chambers in all the Bible was the Jewish crowd during Jesus' trial (Matt. 27:20-23). Many of the same people who had, just days before, shouted "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" (Matt. 21:9) were now shouting "*Crucify him!*" So, what changed? The people allowed the rumors and false accusations to cloud their minds, rather than looking back to evidence of Jesus' ministry and miracles to guide them.

May God help us if we ever allow ourselves to be guided by rumor and gossip! But too often we'll allow misinformation to fuel our beliefs about the Bible and about other people. Rather than investigating the facts, we accept the words of others as truth. Are you willing to do the work of finding out the truth, or are you satisfied with merely listening to the words of others?

What Can I Do To Avoid Them?

Love the Truth

Evaluating the evidence and coming to the correct conclusion takes effort. And one of the great reasons why Jesus spoke in parables was to present truth in a way that required work to understand (Matt. 13:10-17). He wants us to dig for it, not stopping until we find it. After all, it's the truth that sets us free (John 8:31-32)! Avoiding the dangers of the echo chamber, we're always in the word, checking what's being presented, and holding on to those things which we confirm to be true. Like the Bereans, we're examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11).

Do you love the truth enough to search for it? Will you refuse to be satisfied with misinformation and rumor?

Get Comfortable With Discomfort

Our natural tendency is to gravitate towards comfortable teaching. To heap up for ourselves words that tickle our ears and make us feel good (2 Tim. 4:3-4), because change is uncomfortable. But let's get comfortable with being uncomfortable! Like Apollos, who needed to be corrected about his teachings on baptism (Acts 18:25-26), we should welcome the help and wisdom of those courageous enough to teach us as Priscilla and Aquila did.

How do you feel when someone questions your beliefs? Do you put up a wall, refusing to listen, or do you accept instruction as valuable and helpful?

Realize We're Often Wrong

We can convince ourselves of almost anything, it seems. But just because we tell ourselves that we're "right" doesn't make it accurate. If we're honest with ourselves, we realize that we're incapable of directing our steps (Jer. 10:23). Like the Jews who brought the adulterous woman to Jesus, not one of us is worthy to "cast the first stone" (John 8:1-11), since we've all sinned (Rom. 3:23). Since we have such a terrible track record of being right, it shouldn't surprise us that there's more for us to learn! As a church, our boasting is not in how "correct" we are, but how righteous and merciful God is (Gal. 6:14)!

Can you remember a time where you were wrong about something? Does that fact remind you to be willing to consider the possibility that you still have more to learn today?

Conclusion

Though society may say that we live in an echo chamber in the church today, let's be cautious to make sure that we're not! Let's be humble, receptive to truth, and open to learning how to be better disciples of Christ. Let's reject our tendency to close our ears to what may feel uncomfortable and love the truth enough to seek it out and apply it to our lives relentlessly. May God bless us all with soft and receptive hearts, having the love required to be of service for him today!