

When is it Right to Tell People What They Don't Want to Hear?

Luke 11:27-54

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When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." - Luke 11:29, ESV

In our generation and our culture, we're not used to hearing some of the things Jesus said. We have a stereotypical image of Jesus as a "nice guy" who spoke of peace, love and understanding. But today's passage challenges those assumptions.

Jesus' words are unlike anyone else in history. He held crowds spellbound and left them in awe of His great authority. He spoke words of gentle forgiveness and love, but at times He also spoke words of clear rebuke and judgment. The same crowds who gathered to see Him heal, to get free food, or to hear wonderful words of forgiveness could also be shocked by how bold and uncompromising Jesus could be. Consider:

1. Jesus looked at those around Him and called them "an evil generation."
2. Jesus warned the Jewish people who heard Him that gentiles like the Queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh would rise up and condemn them at the judgment.
3. Jesus went to eat with the most religious people in His culture and called them fools, telling them that they were full of greed and wickedness inside.
4. Jesus compared religious people to unmarked graves.
5. When the lawyers challenged Jesus, He implicated them in the guilt of killing the prophets.

Considering what Jesus said and how he said it, we might wonder when it's right to tell people what they don't want to hear. After all, no one wants to be told that they're a sinner and in need of rescue from their sin, but if we don't tell them the truth about themselves, how will they see their need for Jesus?

Well, as popular as the "WWJD?" question was several years ago, we need to be careful when we just try to go out and do what Jesus did. After all, we're not the Son of God. We're not sinless ourselves, and we don't have perfect knowledge of the hearts of others either. So, while Jesus could speak clearly and boldly with absolute authority and accuracy, we need to be more humble and aware of our own sin.

Still, people do need to know the truth. In most cases, it's best to let the word of God do its work in the hearts those who need Jesus. We can share with humble honesty and bold clarity what God's word says about God's holy standard (the Law of God, in the Ten Commandments) and what God says about our hearts as fallen sinners. If we will speak the truth in humility and love, praying for God to do His work, we can trust in Him. After all, salvation belongs to the Lord, not to us!