

Question: I work with a man who almost constantly spews forth vulgarity from his mouth. What do you think Jesus would do in this situation?

Vulgarity always has a way of stirring the righteous indignation of one who seeks to be holy as the Lord is holy (1 Peter 1:16). However, a Christian must maintain self-control and seek to live in peace with all people (Romans 12:9-21). There were times when Jesus was angry at the actions of people like the Pharisees; but he never allowed himself to react improperly in his anger, and neither should we (Mark 3:5-6; Ephesians 4:26). By studying the way Jesus dealt with those whose conduct angered him, we should be able to find guidance for this situation.

Jesus taught that “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34-35). Therefore, any effort made to change outward behavior will not be very effective without changing the heart. If you are willing to tolerate his vulgarity while developing a meaningful relationship with this person, you might eventually be able to invite him to church, a Bible study group or even a social gathering of Christians. Through this kind of loving and patient endeavor, you may help this man come to faith in the Lord who fully transforms even the most sinful of lives. If nothing else, he may find enough respect for you and your Christian life that his conscience will cause him to be more careful about his language around you.

Yet, sometimes Jesus also saw the need for confrontation. An example would be an exchange with the Pharisees when they accused him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons (Matthew 12: 33-34). Although he spoke very sternly, saying, “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good?” (Matthew 12:34), Jesus never forced his way upon the Pharisees. He respected their freedom to choose for themselves whether or not to believe and live by his teachings.

Following this example, you may find a way to kindly and respectfully confront your fellow-worker about his vulgarity. Sometime when he is alone and you can speak without embarrassing him before others, you might say something like this: “John, I don’t mean to be disrespectful or try to tell you how to live your life, but as a Christian I am not accustomed to the kind of language you use. The people I associate with do not use

such language. I find the language distracting and respectfully ask that not use it in my presence. What you choose to do elsewhere is your business.”

However, you may find that you have no real ability to change this fellow-worker. When the Pharisees refused to change, Jesus told his disciples: “Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14). Jesus placed them in the hands of a just God saying: “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). If this is the case, you may face the tough decision. If your company offers a grievance system, perhaps you can appeal to others for help. Otherwise, you can learn to tolerate it at work or begin looking for another job.

Continue to conduct yourself in a manner that exemplifies the life and teachings of Jesus. You should not appear self-righteous, but neither should you laugh along with others at his vulgarity. Above all, pray for God’s wisdom to guide you everyday.

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