

Question: Is it not okay to speak with honesty and straightforwardness even though it upsets some people? What would Jesus do?

Jesus taught his disciples to always speak truthfully. For example, he told them that it should not be necessary to affirm our word by an oath. Instead, he told them to “let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37). He would join the apostle Paul in asking: “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16).

At the same time, we need to realize that when we show love to those around us, they are less likely to take offence at any honest truth spoken to them. Jesus taught his followers to “love your neighbor” (Matthew 22:39) and even “love your enemies, do good to them” (Luke 6:35-37). The great love chapter of the Bible says that love is patient and kind, and it is not rude (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). Because the disciples knew that Jesus loved them, they did not turn away when he bluntly said to them: “You of little faith, . . . Do you still not understand?” (Matthew 16:8-9). In a loving relationship, the word of the proverb rings true, “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips” (Proverbs 24:26)

However, anytime Jesus felt it necessary he was very candid in his words. For example, he said to the Pharisees: “Woe to you, . . . you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean” (Matthew 23:27-28). Their hearts were in a desperate condition, and they needed to repent. It was no time for flattery. Therefore, Jesus spoke very frankly to them. As another proverb says: “A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin” (Proverbs 26:28).

But while the meek and gentle Jesus understood the need for frankness at times, most of the time he would recommend the use of tact in the way we address one another. The Bible teaches that Christians should “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6). How we say something matters as much as what we say. For example, how something is spoken can belie what is said. If I shout, “I’M NOT ANGRY!” you will probably only hear the

anger. "A gentle answer turns away wrath," said the wise man, "but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly" (Proverbs 15:1-2).

Obviously, we do not need to give up honest speech. As followers of Jesus, we should thoughtfully consider to whom we are speaking, whether the person desires our advice, and how it may be received. Hopefully, we will consider our own actions before speaking. It is so important that we not use a situation as an opportunity to express a personal opinion and clothe it as being "straightforward and truthful." On occasion, it may be necessary to be frank if someone is being dishonest with himself or herself. Especially at times like these, we must speak with love or our message will not be heard. This is what Jesus would have us do.

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