

Confrontation in Agape

Rod shared this at our recent gathering.

“How different are these words from the compassionate, forgiving, accepting words Jesus consistently spoke to tax collectors, prostitutes, and the ordinary, run-of-the-mill sinners he daily engaged. Indeed, how different is Jesus' treatment of these religious leaders from his treatment of other religious leaders who were at least somewhat open to truth, such as Nicodemus¹.

Why is this? Didn't Jesus love the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees? Of course he did. Jesus loved them as much as any other sinners. In fact, even while he publicly confronted them, his heart broke for them as well as for those they were harming. On one occasion, he concluded his harsh confrontation of religious leaders by crying out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing".² We see that Jesus wanted to gather these blind leaders and their followers under his protection! Knowing that these leaders would put him to death within days, Jesus still expressed the loving, longing, and forgiving heart of God for them. And even after they crucified him, Jesus prayed for their forgiveness.³

Why, then, were Jesus' words to and about these religious leaders so harsh? The answer is that they had to be. Whereas love usually requires we affirm worth by showing compassion toward people, in certain cases it requires aggressive confrontation. If a person is in a severe state of blindness and hardness of heart, and especially if a person is in a leadership position and is damaging others with his or her blindness and hardness, intervention may be necessary. Families or groups of friends who have had to deal with loved ones addicted to alcohol, drugs, or pornography know this side of love well. Such was the case with certain religious leaders of Jesus' day. These leaders were in grave danger and were placing others in grave danger. A radical intervention was called for...

We have addressed the church's need to embody Jesus' outrageous love toward all people. But how are we to apply Jesus' confrontation of harmful religious leaders today? Some have mistakenly taken Jesus' confrontation of the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees as a justification for overtly confronting sin wherever they see it (except in themselves), whether inside or outside the church.”⁴

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1 – John 3:1-9

2 – Matthew 23:37

3 – Luke 23:34

4 – Gregory Boyd (2004) “Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgement to the Love of God” Baker Books p:202-203