

Is Rejecting Someone's Sin the Same as Rejecting the Person?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "It's not enough to help hurting people; you must also stop the things that hurt them."

In the Bible, we call this the balance of truth and mercy. God commands that His followers show mercy by helping hurting people, yet He also requires they expose the things that hurt them so they can be led to the truth.

This requires supernatural balance, because there are ditches on both sides of the road if you err to the extreme of either side.

To be all-merciful and yet refuse to speak the truth is like building a hospital at the bottom of a cliff without also installing a guardrail at the top.

Sure, you'd help plenty of hurting people, but you would stop no one from falling off.

To be all truthful and yet lack mercy would be like installing a guardrail without also building the hospital.

You would definitely prevent a lot people from hurting themselves, but you'd have no way to help those who fall.

Human nature is to err to the extreme of either side of truth or mercy—to be all one and very little (or none) of the other. It's just hardwired into us because of sin.

But Jesus' life clearly shows we can—and must—be both.

In John 8, an angry mob brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, and His response reveals a perfect balance of truth and

mercy.

Although Jewish law called for stoning as the punishment for infidelity, Jesus had mercy and removed the punishment for the woman's sin. Yet He still upheld the truth that her actions were indeed sinful. He protected the person while upholding the principle.

When Jesus had stood up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more" (John 8:10-11).

Because Jesus was filled with mercy for this woman He protected her life. Yet He also spoke the truth to her about her lifestyle.

In today's culture, people have been led to believe that rejecting someone's lifestyle is a rejection of them as a person. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus didn't reject people, nor should we.

But embracing a "life of sin" (as Jesus put it) by not speaking the truth about it is also not fully following Jesus. Jesus didn't abandon the truth, nor should we.

He helped hurting people, yet He also exposed the things that hurt them. And, as a result, some people despised Him for it.

Jesus said, "The world cannot hate you. But it hates Me, because I testify concerning it, that its works are evil" (John 7:7).

The same thing happens today, so it's OK to be hated for speaking the truth. It happened to Jesus—it will happen to us.

But what is not OK is to be hated for showing no mercy. "For he who has shown no mercy will have judgment without mercy" (James 2:13a).

Our lives should be characterized by a deep desire to help hurting people while also stopping the things that hurt them. And the only way to perfectly balance the two is to walk in the Spirit of God and not the flesh.

“So I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. These are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Gal. 5:16-17).

Although our flesh tugs at us consistently to err to the extreme of either side, we must be a people of the Spirit, walking in the balance of truth and mercy.

This is one simple way we can help hurting people today while also stopping the things that hurt them. {eoa}