

It Can Be Wise To Remain Silent

In the book of Ecclesiastes we're told that there's a time to speak and a time to keep silent:

Ecclesiastes 3:7: "A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;"

Both the church and our culture has had a lot to say about the need to speak up and say something. However, there are also times when the best course of action is to remain silent and say nothing. Speaking up isn't always the right thing to do.

This may seem strange, but it's Biblical. We can find this teaching throughout the Bible. For example, the prophet Amos also told us there are times when it's prudent to remain silent:

Amos 5:13: "Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time."

Why will those who are prudent keep silent? Because it's an evil time. Why is it an evil time? If we read the context of the passage we'll discover it's because of the wickedness of the nation:

Amos 5:11-12: "Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right."

Since the nation was full of wickedness, God wasn't looking for people to speak up. That wasn't going to fix the problem. Instead He commanded people to *repent*:

Amos 5:14-15: “Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.”

Because the days were evil, God wasn't seeking words. Instead He wanted *actions*. The only thing that would save the nation was repentance. Even if the speeches were good and right they weren't going to fix the problem.

Why were the prudent keeping silent? Because there's a second principle at work. There's a limit to how many times people should be confronted with their sin before it's time to move on:

Titus 3:10-11: “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”

The apostle Paul didn't command people to keep confronting heretics over and over again. Instead he said that when someone was confronted with their sin and rejected the rebuke, it was time to reject them. In fact, he taught that they could be rejected *after their first admonition*.

The principle is that there's a limit to the number of times a person can refuse to repent of their sin before they should be considered unrepentant. Jesus taught the same thing in Matthew 18:

Matthew 18:15-17: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the

church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

If the person repents then we must forgive them. However, if they *don't* repent then there comes a time when we must consider them to be unrepentant pagans. We aren't required to keep rebuking them over and over again.

In fact, the Bible actually forbids us from rebuking scorners:

Proverbs 9:8: "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee."

Once a person reaches a point where they hate the truth and are fighting against it, they're no longer acting out of ignorance. Since they're enemies of the truth and won't listen to it, the wise thing to do is reject them and consider them to be pagans. The Bible warns us that nothing good comes from rebuking such people:

Proverbs 9:7: "He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot."

Jesus Himself taught that we should avoid scorners. He compared them to swine (which were unclean under the Mosaic Law):

Matthew 7:6: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

We're not required to keep preaching to people who have not only rejected the truth, but who will violently attack us for speaking to them. Once they've been warned their blood is on their own head:

Ezekiel 3:19: “Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.”

It's true we must warn them that they're sinning and need to repent. However, God doesn't require us to keep warning them after they've heard His words and rejected them. We can see this principle in action here:

2 Chronicles 25:15-16: “Wherefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand? And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.”

In this passage we can see that the prophet did indeed rebuke Amaziah. When the king refused to listen, though, the prophet stopped talking to him – which is the principle we've been discussing throughout this study. Amaziah was warned and he rejected the warning. At that point his blood was on his own head.

As Solomon said, there's a time to speak and a time to refrain from speaking. Those who are wise will learn to tell the difference and will act with prudence.