



We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.
Luke 7:32

“It’s the Tone”

“I just don’t like the tone of his sermons. It seems so harsh and unloving. He sounds so prideful and harsh.”

This familiar refrain is expressed every time someone does not want to repent of something in their heart or lives. So let us explore this comment for just a moment while we ask ourselves a fundamental question, “Would they repent if the tone were different?”

Jesus declared they would not repent. God declared through His Son that it doesn’t matter what tone the Holy Spirit works, when push comes to shove people just will not repent. Be it a dirge or a flute, they will not repent.

“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”’ But wisdom is proved right by her actions.” Matthew 11:16-19

Jesus said that God sent John the Baptist, a tough talking preacher and then He sent His Son, instructed by the Holy Spirit not to raise His voice in the streets. Either way the people refused to listen claiming that John had a demon and Jesus was a glutton. When people don’t want to repent, they always attack the messenger. Even the world declares “Hate the message, kill the messenger.”

Truthfully sometimes the preaching the Holy Spirit works through me has a tone that grates against the flesh. Not only does God work words that oppose the flesh, but also the tone guided by God crucifies sin. All true preachers should be God’s instruments to play as He sees fit. No instrument ever tells the player what tune to make. God has seen fit to make me an instrument that plays a “dirge.” Indeed, my wife says that my singing sounds like I am crying.

But there is something holy at work here. God gave me a wife who is a “flute” in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Many, however, display the same stubbornness toward God even if the Holy Spirit plays a dirge through me or a danc-

ing song through my wife. In reality, it isn’t the tone that people don’t like but the Truth they hate. If you want to whine about the tone, then direct your grumbling against God. For His Holy Spirit not only gives me words to preach and write, but also how to say and write those words. Just like Jesus, those dead to themselves will not only be given words, but be told “how” to say those words.

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. John 12:49

Yes, yes, I know that sounds self-righteousness and like I am saying that I am equal to Scripture, but I am not – so deal with this as it should be dealt with.

WEIGHTY

People didn’t like the tone of Paul’s letters so they ridiculed his character just as they do mine if they lack repentance.

For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” 2 Corinthians 10:10

Individuals who don’t like my tone should study Paul’s letters. His messages were loaded with sarcasm, looking prideful as he attacked sin head on. For example, read what Paul wrote about himself and you will understand how many people slanderously accused Paul of being prideful, harsh, and egoistic.

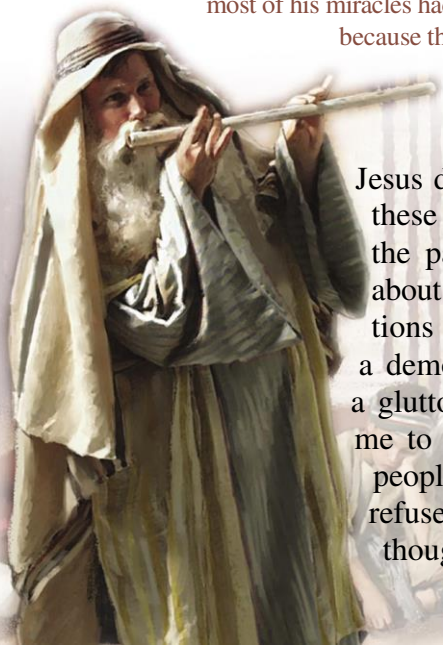
I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 2 Corinthians 1:23

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 1 Thessalonians 2:10

Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. Galatians 6:17

Let me remind the reader that Jesus spoke gently yet was crucified because of it. In the same way it doesn’t seem to matter what tone God uses if someone does not want to repent, they just will not repent. And if someone loves God, honestly desiring righteousness, they will not notice the tone of the message. The only people offended by the tone of a message are those who never really repent in the first place. Time and time again individuals are at first excited about sermons, books, and tracts. When it comes time, however, for God to put nails in their hands and feet to crucify their flesh, then, and only then do they start whining about the tone. For this reason Jesus renounced most of the cities in which He preached with such a loving tone.

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. Matthew 11:20



Jesus denounced these cities right after the passage we read about false accusations of John having a demon and Himself a glutton. God has led me to denounce many people because they refused to repent even though they were at

first excited about the goodness of God and His Word. As we close this section, did you catch that? For Jesus to denounce those cities doesn't sound very loving, kind, or gentle does it? To judge everyone in all those cities sure had a bad tone about it. For those who complain about my tone, one has to wonder if such people have ever read the Bible.

PAUL: TWO PERSONALITIES

Paul didn't have tape recorders during his day, so his sermons flow from the letters he wrote. Many called these letters weighty and very offensive. In person they remarked that Paul seemed "unimpressive" and his speeches amounted to "nothing." Paul appeared timid, weak, and ineffective when fellowshiping in person.

First notice that Paul seemed like two different people. In the same way many act very surprised when they meet me in person, saying that I am not the same in my sermons. That I am shy and gentle in person and not at all like they pictured me. God works a love that gently urges individuals to repent, act, have faith, and love Him with everything. He works a patience of love combined with the truth that comes from love. Paul wrote about this gentle aspect of love in the following passage. Though his letters were weighty, his actions in person were "like a mother caring for her little children."

but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 1 Thessalonians 2:7

"I just don't like the tone of his sermons. They seem so harsh and unloving. He reeks of pride. So much of it is over-the-top. Not too mention those word games. And then there us that sarcasm."

Those who have reached past the offensive message of the cross, (the tone) have discovered the resurrected life. Besides, those who refused to humble themselves would never have repented anyway.

As they did with Paul, some have taken me for a fool thinking that the Holy Spirit will not work such toughness, or as they put it harshness, when they meet me in person. This is not a wise course of thought.

Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. 2 Corinthians 10:11

The Holy Spirit determines my actions in relationship to a person's heart. In short, you get what you deserve. If you deserve the whip, the whip you shall receive. If you deserve gentle prodding and encouragement in the Lord, you shall receive that from the Holy Spirit. It is up to you, make your choice. Come with a humble hunger for righteousness and you will be greeted with all the gentleness you want. Come with a self-righteousness and deceitful heart and it will be revealed. It is your preference.

What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit? 1 Corinthians 4:21

Sound arrogant on my part? Does this sound like I am boastful, making myself to be something? It sure does sound that way, doesn't it? I know you are use to your false preachers who are what you want them to be. God is God, however, and He will play His instruments as He chooses. In reality, I am less than nothing.

A SECRET

Here is a secret that I should not really share. My sermons and my writings appear harsh so that God doesn't have to lead me to be so in person.

This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. 2 Corinthians 13:10

If you let the tone and words of a sermon or book do the work God intends, then you will discover a rich source of gentleness that builds you up in Christ. Paul's sermons were "harsh" so that "I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority" and the Holy Spirit has not changed today.

The self-righteous cult-watchers, who understand nothing about the message of the cross, would love to make this sound sinister. Yet such things are really a safeguard for you in Christ. Great peace and love fills a church where the pastors, leaders, and elders are dead enough to self to protect the flock from others and themselves. If need be, such leadership can protect each sheep from things that will cause them harm. Leadership dead to their greed, egos, and pride can allow the Holy Spirit to work His love—a love like Jesus that lays down their lives for the benefit of others. Blessed is the church with leaders crucified to self enough that no selfish motive or deceit can stop the power of the Holy Spirit from guarding the church.

The Holy Spirit works a love among true pastors that they become drink offerings for their congregation. It may not be a drink that most claiming to be Christians want to drink, yet

never the less it's the true protecting love of Christ only the Holy Spirit can work through a crucified life.

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. Philippians 2:17

CONCLUSION AND MORE

Of course there are other comments, concerns and complaints which the sermon by this name fully addresses. The important thing for each of that seeks God with a full heart is to surrender all of self that God might speak to us He wishes. For God's way of coming to us is always love even if we don't think we deserve it. Those who have moved past the offensive of the cross, one offensive being my speaking and writing, have discovered a person filled with the love of Christ. Those who refuse to move past the offensive were never interested in a loving God in the first place.

We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. 1 John 4:6

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