

The Importance of Loving Articulation

Articulation is the ability to state plainly what you believe and why. **Love** is the attitude that shines from your face as you consider the person you are talking with. One without the other is a great error. Love without articulation is absentee leadership, like a parent without rules. Articulation without love is condemnation, like the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

Jesus struck the perfect balance in John chapter 8 while teaching in the temple courts. The teachers of the Jewish law and some Pharisees were listening to him. Likely Jesus was speaking about the modern application of the ancient Hebrew law (not unlike the practice of delivering sermons in our own day). In order to trap Jesus in his grace-filled applications of the Law, the teachers and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. Jesus, teaching under the New Covenant of Grace, repudiated the Pharisees' desire to stone her, saying, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone." That's New Covenant **love** and forgiveness. But then, as the woman was walking away, Jesus charged her with, "Go now and leave your life of sin." That's **articulation**. Jesus struck the perfect balance.

Whether you're the principal of a school, the pastor of a church or a parent in a family, that balance will forever be the most difficult balance to strike. You will struggle and squirm with getting the balance just right. Some days you will likely get it wrong. Then the next day, you will overcorrect on the other side. Only Jesus gets it perfect all the time. But understanding the balance is the first step towards success.

John Stott asks in his classic book, *Involvement*, "How can a Christian have an influence on the society in which he lives?" I ask the same question now... How can a Christian speak out about contemporary moral issues such as marriage law, abortion rights, public school curriculum, penal code and euthanasia? Stott's answer speaks to the same balance I've noted above. There are two extremes regarding a Christian's influence on society: **imposition** and **laissez-faire**. *Imposition* is the crusading attempt to coerce people without regard for democracy (e.g. Middle Eastern countries with Islamic state law). Hence, in our country we work hard at appropriate separation of church and state.

A *laissez-faire* attitude, on the other hand, remains silent based on a total non-involvement perspective. The *laissez-faire* attitude values tolerance as the primary expression of love. If Jesus would have taken tolerance as His primary expression of love, He would have told the adulterous woman in John 8 that she should "Go and return to her life of *choice*." But, of course, He did not say that. Rather, He lovingly articulated the situation.

Stott suggests that Christians should be in the habit of lovingly persuading the society around it to make wise moral choices. God's moral prescriptions for people are not just valuable and reasonable for believers... God's moral prescriptions are valuable and reasonable for *all* people. God's truths are not just truths for the sacred realm, but for the secular as well. In fact, to God, there is no such distinction between sacred and secular. People and nations who don't respect God's moral prescriptions will eventually suffer the natural consequences of their actions, *whether or not they are believers*.

Therefore, a Christian's involvement in the moral affairs of society should be lovingly articulate. We live in a pluralistic culture. That is, there is a plurality of voices speaking about what is good and right. But just because there are many voices does not mean that we should abstain from speaking God's voice. And as we speak His voice, let it be clearly reasoned (**articulation**) and compassionately spoken (**love**).

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