

Reprove, Rebuke & Exhort



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Don Blackwell
Lectureship Director

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Jesus Christ: A Case Study In Reproving, Rebuking, And Exhorting

Glenn Hitchcock



Glenn Hitchcock was born in Newport News, VA. He is married to the former Mercedes Dowson of Byron, Georgia. They have been married for 42 years and have one daughter, Lauren Wenter. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. Glenn has preached full-time in VA and GA. He conducts gospel meetings and marriage seminars as his schedule permits. He is the author of a daily inspirational *Thoughts For Today to Brighten Your Day* since 1996. He completed his graduate studies at Norfolk State University in the school of Social Work in 1995. Glenn is a licensed master social worker employed with Dialysis Clinic, Inc. The Hitchcocks are members of the Warner Robins Church of Christ where he serves as one of its elders.

THE AUTHOR is thankful and appreciative for the invitation to be a joint participant in this series of lectures under the theme *Reprove, Rebuke, & Exhort*.

The topic under study is “Jesus: A Case Study of Reproving, Rebuking, and Exhorting.” In analyzing the name *Jesus*, we refer to the Divine Son of God and the “Sweetest Name on mortal tongue” (New King James Version, cf. Mat. 1:18-25). Jesus is the Resurrected Savior for sinful man (Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:4). Jesus is Lord and He is coming again to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:30-31).

Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary states a case study “is an intensive analysis of an individual unit (as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment.” It is a published report about a person, group, or situation that has been studied over time. It includes situations in real life that can be examined to learn about the nature of something. Our examination concerns Jesus and His manner of reproving, rebuking, and exhorting.

What does it mean to reprove, rebuke, and exhort? These words appear in 2 Timothy 4:2 and are spoken of in the context of dealing with false teachers and future attacks against the church of Christ. These words are similar in that all three attempt to effect a change in the one[s] being confronted (Mayfield).

Let us examine these terms in separate usages. The word *reprove* is found in John 16:8, “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” In this rendering, *reprove* means “to demonstrate by argument, to prove, to persuade anyone to do a thing by presenting reasons.” According to Albert Barnes, *reprove* means “to **convince** of anything, and particularly to **convince of crime.**” Jesus will **convince** or **convict** the world of sin. That is, He will so apply the truths of God to men’s own minds as to *convince* them by fair and sufficient arguments that they are sinners (Barnes).

According to Thayer, the term *rebuke* means to “tax upon, i.e., censure or admonish; by implication forbid: (straightly) charge, rebuke.” The primary idea here is that of a sharp reprimand of the guilty (Mark 8:33; Luke 17:3).

In all three Synoptic Gospels, *rebuke* implies disapproval, but not exaction of a concrete penalty. The sense of “censure”

for “rebuke” will suit all instances, but more precise definition is possible. People rebuke one another as a sign of disapproval, e.g., the disciples rebuking those who presented children to Jesus (Mark 10:13), the crowd rebuking the blind man who sought Jesus (Mark 10:48), Peter rebuking Jesus for predicting His death (Mark 8:32), and the Pharisees asking Jesus to rebuke the disciples (Luke 19:39). In each instance, Jesus disapproved of the rebuke, but He Himself was free to deliver a rebuke (to Peter, Mark 8:33; to the Sons of Thunder, Luke 9:55). However, both the rebuke by the penitent thief and the situation of one brother rebuking another did not receive adverse comment (Luke 23:40; Luke 17:3). Sometimes Jesus rebuked in order to repress, as when He cast out demons (Mark 1:25; 9:25), dispelled a fever (Luke 4:39), or stilled a storm (Mark 4:39). In Mark 3; Mark 12; Mark 8:30 and parallels, Jesus did not censure what was happening or had happened, but He rebuked in the sense of forbidding what might happen, when the disciples or the cured demoniacs were likely to publish his deeds as Lord of all. He was reluctant for “the proclamation of the demons, the healed, or even the disciples, however exact it may be, can only do harm until Jesus’ path to the cross makes it possible

for men to follow and even makes that following an irrevocable requirement.” (“Rebuke”)

The term “*exhort*” involves three Greek verbs: first, (PARAKALEŌ), primarily, to call to a person (*para*, to the side, *kaleō*, to call), denotes (*a*) to call on, entreat; (*b*) to admonish, exhort, to urge one to pursue some course of conduct, or to urge one to the practical duties. (Always prospective, looking to the future, in contrast to the meaning to comfort, which is retrospective, having to do with trial experienced). Second, (PARAINEŌ), primarily, to speak of near (*para*, near, and *aineō*, to tell of, speak of, then, to recommend), hence, to advise, exhort, warn, is used in Acts 27:9. Third, (PROTREPŌ), lit., to turn forward, propel (*pro*, before, *trepō*, to turn); hence, to impel morally, to urge forward, encourage, is used in Acts 18:27, “encouraged him” (Apollos), with reference to his going into Achaia. (Vine)

A practical application of the three terms suggests that *reprove* addresses the intellect, *rebuke* confronts the emotions, and *exhort* appeals to the will. While this application cannot be used rigidly, exhortation is clearly intended to mean encouragement and inspiration. Encouragement and inspiration is needed to those who are being discomfited by persecution or pernicious error.

Rebuke without encouragement is often counterproductive and deadly.

Jesus is the ultimate pattern of wisdom and balance in the matter of reproof, rebuking, and exhorting. The Lord is presented in Scripture as being the “Lamb of God.” John the Baptizer said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth” (Acts 8:32).

But the New Testament also presents the Lord as being a “Lion.” John said:

So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” (Rev. 5:4-5)

Thomas B. Warren comments:

He is the “Lamb of God” and the “Lion of the tribe of Judah.” The spirit of the Lamb is vastly different to that of the Lion. The basic lesson must be this: When men made an attack upon the Lord personally, he did not seek vengeance—he did not retaliate. “...who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that

judgeth righteously...” (1 Pet. 2:22, 23). When the Lord was accused by the chief priests and the elders “He answered nothing” (Mat. 27:12). When Pilate said to Him, “Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?” He gave him no answer, “not even one word: insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly” (Mat. 27:12-14). But, when an attack was made upon His teaching—His doctrine—it was a different matter. He fought back, and He fought hard. He stood like the solid rock. He answered, He refuted, He condemned. It was the Lion in action when He said: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves...Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess...for ye are as whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Mat. 23:15, 25, 27, 28). (69)

Our goal is to analyze how Jesus—as Lamb and Lion—reproved, rebuked, and exhorted among brethren. For this

study, we select the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1-3). He who is the Savior of the body, the Head of the church, the Lord of the kingdom addresses these churches on their strengths and weaknesses. Jesus lovingly issues instructions for necessary change, correction, and comforting. The outline of study includes the revelation to the churches, His presentation to the churches, the investigation of the churches, and an exhortation to present churches.

The Revelation To The Churches (Revelation 1:1-2)

In Revelation 1:1 the chain of communication through which the revelation was delivered is demonstrated: From God to Christ, from Christ to His angel, from His angel to John and from John to the servants of God. John faithfully testified of all the things that he saw (Rev. 1:2) (McClish).

Revelation is a book that we dare not neglect. Note G. Campbell Morgan:

The first word of the Greek document is the keyword to the message as well as to the content. That is the word *Revelation*, the Greek word *Apokalupsis*. We have anglicized that word and now speak of the Apocalypse. In the Greek there is no definite article. The book opens with the word *Apokalupsis*, which means quite literally *uncovering, disclosure*. A literal translation is not always a correct one; for we must always understand the use of the word as well as its root meaning. Quite literally this word apocalypse means *uncovering*; far more beautiful and therefore nearer the truth for us is

our word *unveiling*. That is the first word of the book. It is the key to the content, and it is positively, and inclusively the key to the message. (Morgan)

In verse 3, a special blessing is promised to those who read the revelation aloud to the church and to those who listen (Rev. 1:3). So the revelation or uncovering is clearly directed to the churches. In Revelation 1:11, Christ says to John, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia.” All of the congregations addressed by John in Revelation 2 and 3 were located in Asia. Four congregations—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos (Pergamum), and Thyatira—are addressed in chapter 2. The remaining three—Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—are addressed in chapter 3. To each of these churches of Christ, the inspired John unveiled a message that demanded their attention. Each message revealed or unveiled a reproof, rebuke, and/or exhortation from the Divine Head. No church was left to itself, but all had received from Jesus needed instructions for sustained operations in a hostile world. Let us examine how John presents in powerful imagery our Lord and Master to the congregations.

His Presentation to the Churches (Revelation 1:5-8)

We read the first word *unveiling*, and it is as though the great doors swing open, and visions of glory appear, introduced by this word. Attention is immediately centered upon a Person. It is “the unveiling of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show unto His servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John” (Rev. 1:3, ASV). The unveiling of Christ and His vivid self-portrait is the authoritative reason

to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. Jesus disciplines His children through His inspired word (John 12:48; 1 Pet. 4:11). When one is out of step with the authority of Christ, correction and change is needed (Jude 23; 2 John 9)! In unveiling Himself to a persecuted brotherhood that was in need of education, correction, and encouragement, every issue that required attention would be addressed. The response to the authority of Jesus to bring about change rested with the brethren. Force would not be the remedy, but each congregation and every Christian were required to respond before a longsuffering God (2 Pet. 3:9). Each presenting attribute of the Lord's portrait addresses some element of a congregation that was in need of attention. Whenever the Lord renders attention to His Body, He expects a favorable response. The point is Jesus expects members of His body to possess and maintain a proper view of Him and His supreme authority. Despite Satan and sins that will test, the Christian must view Christ in every trial (2 Cor. 5:7)! Note the powerful attributes of His presentation to church:

First, **Jesus is Eternal**: "Him Who Is, and Who Was, and Who is to come" (Rev. 1:4). In a world where empires rise and fall, where all things die and pass away, we are reminded that God is Changeless, Timeless, and Eternal, and promised by Him that His nature may be imparted to us, and that we, like Him, and by His grace, unhurt by death, may live on and on. Alive forevermore! What a meaning it gives to life! Joining our Lord in eternity would be a comforting incentive to the faithful saints facing martyrdom!

Second, **Jesus is Fidelity**: "The Faithful Witness" (Rev. 1:5). He is faithful because He never broke or reneged on a promise. Only Jesus is the loyal and dependable eyewitness to every action ever committed in creation! He is man's devoted Promise Keeper. He promised to never leave nor forsake His

people (Mat. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6). This image would be of great hope to the suffering saints (who have signed a declaration of dependence) of Asia (Rev. 2:10).

Third, **Jesus is Life:** “The Firstborn from the Dead” (Rev. 1:5). Jesus is pre-eminent in His power over death. While it is true that He was not the first one ever to have been resurrected from the dead, it is also true that He was the first one ever to rise from the dead to die no more. Death has no more dominion over Him (Rom. 6:9). Therefore, His triumph over death is the guarantee that all will be raised from the dead. This is the Christian’s victory (Rev. 1:17-18; 1 Cor. 15:22; Acts 17:30-31). Contrast the reign of persecution via Satan to the reign in pre-eminence with the Savior! No faithful child of Jesus should ever suffer defeat and death!

Four, **Jesus is Power:** “The Ruler over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). This affirms His unconditional supremacy over the powers of this world (Halley). The kingdom which Satan once offered and Christ refused, Christ will yet have, in His own, not Satan’s way. Jesus established His kingdom (Acts 2) and now reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15). His power is preeminent over all earthly powers. What a great courage this image affords to the embattled soldiers of the Lord! No power (whether military, political, spiritual or otherwise) can overthrow the power of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master!

Fifth, our **Lord is Sacrificial Love:** “To Him Who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5). In this phrase we have: (1) the objects of His love—“*us.*” (2) the operation of His love—“*washed us from our sins*” and (3) the offering of His love—“*His own blood.*” Salvation through the blood of Christ is emphasized throughout the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:5; Rev. 5:9; Rev. 7:14; Rev. 12:11; Rev. 22:14). Jesus affirms continuous (as opposed to

a one-time action) sacrificial love, not just for the lovely, but also the unlovely. Forgiveness of sins and cleansing was never a one-time need among the saints. Satan is a twenty-four hour recruiter of priests and servants, but so is Jesus! B. J. Clarke wrote: “By the power of His blood He ushered those who had obeyed His will into His kingdom, thus making them priests with all of the privileges thereunto appertaining” (Rom. 8:16; 1 Pet. 2:5-9). (4) Knowledge of the power of His blood in overcoming Satan (Rev. 12:11) was a powerful motivator to Christians who were tortured and tempted by the worldly powers. “These are they who...have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14).

Sixth, **Jesus is Respected Authority:** “To Him be glory and dominion forever” (Rev. 1:6). The word *glory* means “praise” or “honor,” and *dominion* means “strength, power, or authority which is exercised over others.” Christ will continue to exercise glory and dominion until He delivers the kingdom back to the Father after the judgment (1 Cor. 15:24-28). No authority exists that overrules or supersedes the authority of Jesus. This truth serves as a sobering reminder to those who have forgotten or have dismissed the need for Divine Authority (John 12:48; Rev. 22:12).

Seventh, the **Lord is coming:** “He cometh with the clouds” (Rev. 1:7). The Lord’s coming is one of the first words in the book of Revelation and the last word in John’s prayer that it may be “quickly.” His coming is the grand consummation of human history. It will be on the clouds, in power and glory. It will be visible to the entire world. The second coming will be a day of distress and terror for those who have rejected Him and a day of unspeakable joy for those who respect His authority. Jesus first came at the appointed time (Gal. 4:4). He will come again on schedule time (Rev. 1:7; Rev. 2:25; Rev. 3:3; Rev. 3:11; Rev. 16:15; Rev. 22:7; Rev. 22:12; Rev. 22:20).

Finally, **Jesus is presented as the Answer:** “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 1:8). Life poses three significant problems: guilt, grief, and the grave. Jesus is the answer to life’s problems. No new or old issues exist that He cannot handle! He is the answer to suffering, persecution, religious confusion, troubled relationships, etc. In other words, no issue is beyond His power to resolve! His providence, power, and preeminence are the stabilizing force on earth and eternity. Whenever this knowledge of Jesus as the Answer is understood, our heaviest burdens in life would have no load to carry!

Jesus has full knowledge of what transpires in His body, the church. He views all of our illnesses that require His attention. This attention is manifested in the form of reproving, rebuking, and exhorting. For the parts of the body that are disciplined regularly (2 Tim. 2:15), not much is required. But for the undisciplined and the sickly parts of the body, attention must be swift as to avoid disease and death (Rev. 3:15-16). When we investigate our own bodies and detect malfunctioning or hurting members, what are we to do? The answer is, We render a comforting cure. Oh, it may hurt a bit, but we administer only what is needful to bring about healing. Jesus, in reproving, rebuking, and exhorting is administering only that which is needful to bring about healthy healing.

The Investigation Of The Churches (Revelation 1:9-3:22)

We have noted that each of the seven churches were recipients of God’s revealed Word as communicated by the Apostle John (Rev. 1:1-2). Each congregation was presented the powerful self-portrait of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:5-8). Now, the investigation of the congregational character revealed the needed commendation or condemnation. The character

of the churches revealed in three categories. One category constituted the **very good**: Smyrna and Philadelphia. Another category involved three churches that were **part good and part bad**: Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira. The final category included the **very bad**: Sardis and Laodicea. We must always remember the “what” that assigned character to these congregations. It was the Word of God. The Word delivered to the saints demanded attention by each congregation. Some heeded the Word and others did not. Let us review how Jesus dealt with each of these categories beginning with the very good.

The Very Good: Smyrna And Philadelphia

The Christians at Smyrna were undergoing all sorts of problems. To Smyrna, Jesus exhorted, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Smyrna, like Philadelphia, heeded the teachings of the New Testament and allowed His authority to discipline and mature them (Col. 2:10; Col. 3:17). Jesus thus admonished, urged, or encouraged them to continue in fidelity and adherence to the teachings of the Spirit (Rev. 2:10). Their reward for overcoming the challenges to their faith would be eternal life.

Jesus exhorted the church at Philadelphia:

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Rev. 3:10-11)

The church in Philadelphia was being pressured by their Jewish neighbors to deny the name of Jesus. No condemnation was ever issued to the Philadelphian brethren. Their works are commended by Jesus. What were these works? They did not forget or dismiss His Word, but they kept it and took advantage of the open door to spread the gospel. They did not renounce Jesus as Head but rather, they believed in His promises so as to gain the crown of Life.

It must be noted that the only rebuke issued in Philadelphia by Jesus was to Jewish imposters who formed their own synagogue, but were living a lie. They were not in the church but placed in “Satan’s service” according to the Savior. Why was it necessary to expose these false men? This element attempted to attach themselves as Abraham’s descendants both physically and spiritually. Since Jesus knew their works were not credible, He exposed them as liars having no connection to His church or cause. What was the purpose of this rebuke? Jesus promised the Christians of Philadelphia that this disciplinary action would result in their surrender with an accurate knowledge of divine love. “Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Rev. 3:9).

The two good churches, Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) and Philadelphia (Rev. 3:8-11), were composed of humble people and were facing persecution. Both of these churches received the Word of Truth with readiness (they were teachable). This reception (whether early or late) was all the correction needed to survive spiritually (Jam. 1:19-25). Having received the Word, both of these good churches were preoccupied in accomplishing the work of God. In their performance of the work of God, both churches encountered obstacles, but both

remained faithful and they each received strong exhortation from Jesus. These two congregations never encountered a Divine rebuke.

Part Good, Part Bad: Ephesus, Pergamum, And Thyatira

Ephesus was commended for being a great and powerful church, but she was reprovved and rebuked for losing zeal. “Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Rev. 2:4-5). It was right and commendable for them to test evil men and expose the imposters but wrong for them to lose their first love. Their intolerance for the Nicolaitans was commended. The Ephesians had great love for God and one another (Acts 19:19-20; Acts 20:36-38; Eph. 1:15). The opposite of love is not hate, but apathy. Ephesus was a fallen church, needing repentance and restoration. They needed to remember, repent, and do the first works, or the Lord would remove them. Ephesus was high in morals and doctrine, but low in love.

Pergamum was commended for holding fast to the name of Christ in the midst of an environment of unbelief that Jesus described as “Satan’s throne.” Even amidst the persecutions that claimed one of their own members—Antipas—they remained loyal to the Royal. This congregation of God’s people did not deny the faith, yet Jesus saw a problem.

But I have a few things against you,
because you have there those who hold
the doctrine of Balaam, who taught
Balak to put a stumbling block before
the children of Israel, to eat things
sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual

immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. (Rev. 2:14-16)

The sad rebuke by Jesus to this congregation was for their tolerating teachers of immorality. They held to the teachings of Balaam, involving the eating of meat sacrificed to idols and immorality. This sin began as “deeds” in Ephesus (Rev. 2:6) but became a doctrine in Pergamos. So it goes: deceivers introduce false activities into the church, and before long these activities are accepted and encouraged.

The church at Thyatira was praised because it was growing in zeal. They were an active, growing congregation: “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first” (Rev. 2:19). What church among us would not covet such a commendation? But like Ephesus and Pergamos, disease was present, and it must be addressed urgently. The disease of the body in Thyatira was toleration of Jezebel. This congregation was willing to compromise with one disorderly woman to have peace. While reaching new members, they were rebuked sternly for losing others to the immoral seductions of Jezebel! What are you to do when a false teacher is in the midst and brethren are unwilling to confront/discipline her? Note how Jesus, after reproving them, delineated a loving rebuke: “And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds” (Rev. 2:21-22). The warning is Hell is too high a price to pay for peace.

The Very Bad: Sardis And Laodicea

With the brethren of Sardis, the Lord reversed His order and gave the condemnation before the commendation. Jesus said, “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, “These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God” (Rev. 3:1-3). The church at Sardis was “alive” by reputation and appearance only. In the eyes of The Firstborn from the Dead, they were “dead.” The Lord had found no works of this church perfected before God. That is, their works had not been made complete, or carried out fully, in the Divine estimate of things. “Before God” indicates that both God and Christ considered their works incomplete. They were self-satisfied, but God was displeased. Why? Because this was a church and it was absolutely ineffective in functioning as a member of the body of Christ! When a member of your body is dying before your eyes, radical treatment is required while there is a glimmer of hope! The only compliment that was paid (in view of hope) to this church was that some had kept the faith (Rev. 3:4).

The Laodicean Christians were desperately in need of refined gold from Christ—that is, they lacked true spiritual wealth and value. Instead of their famous dark-woolen garments, they needed white garments (purity and truth) to cover their nakedness. And instead of their famous eye medicine, they needed an ointment that would heal the blindness of their materialism and pride which did not see or know the Christ. The Laodiceans thought they had it made, that they had it all. But from Jesus’ perspective, they were the most wretched congregation among the seven. In fact, this was the only church about which

our Lord had nothing good to say! Their censure was created of their own accord because they thought they had it all. They were content, spiritually lazy, and were no longer striving to grow in Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). This was the church that made Jesus sick because they were just ordinary. They had a great self-image, but Jesus was repulsed by them.

An Exhortation To The Present Churches

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 3:22) Thus closes each letter, as if the Lord were warning the churches that they had better take seriously what He was saying to them. Jesus has a vested interest in the affairs of His body and when attention is needed from Him, that attention will be administered!

Our present churches of Christ must regard seriously the authority of Jesus! Successful congregations are dependent upon a proper view of Jesus and His supreme authority. Jesus evaluated each of the seven churches to assess their preparedness; He is performing the same function with regard to congregations today. The order in which the seven churches appeared has no significance. They are not listed from best to worst or vice-versa. They are not listed by the category of their problems. They just appear in the order they appear on the Roman postal route. Each church had strong points and weak points. All were introduced to Revealed Truth, but not all obeyed. Some require attention from the Head. Jesus reproved, rebuked, and exhorted those in need of attention. In studying these seven letters, we can determine the things that concerned Christ for his church. Jesus was concerned about adherence to His Will because adherence brings about balance and balance brings about growth and maturity (2 Pet. 3:18). As long as we are concerned about the same things, harmony will exist in the body. Each of these

letters includes the words, *I know*. In a similar way, Christ looks down on the church today and says, “I know what’s going on. I know the problems you’re experiencing, and I want you to know that I’ll see you through them. I know what you’re doing to serve me, and I know what you’re failing to do. I know whether or not your lifestyle is consistent with the holiness I expect. I know whether or not you are holding the truth of God’s Word. Solomon’s concluding statement in Ecclesiastes is appropriate here: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Ecc. 12:13-14).

The sobering question of our day begs an answer. Will members of the blood-bought body of Christ adhere to His supreme authority? Can we handle reproving, rebuking, and exhorting today? Jesus promises that Heaven will surely be worth it. “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21). Let us again issue forth the call to “be faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10).

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2 Timothy 4:2—An Overview

Robert Jefferies



Robert Jefferies is a native of Memphis, TN. He is married to the former Blair McCall, also of Memphis. They have three children; Aylin, Hilton, and Weston. Robert has done local work in McMinnville, TN where he served as minister for the Smyrna congregation from 2002-2007. Robert also taught Bible and coached high school basketball and baseball for Boyd Christian School. Since 2007, he has been serving as one of the ministers for the Southaven Church of Christ.

EACH YEAR, my love and affection for the Southaven congregation grows stronger. I count it a great honor and privilege to serve as one of the ministers. I take great pride in telling others that I am one of the preachers at Southaven. This congregation has been a blessing not only to me, but also to my family. I continue to be ever grateful for her godly elders that have so much love for the truth and for the church.

Have you ever heard someone use the terminology, “I am waiting to receive my marching orders?” Did you know that when Paul wrote to Timothy, he gave him a number of marching orders to follow? One of the definitions for the phrase *marching orders* is “orders to move on” (“Marching orders”). One of those marching orders is found in 2 Timothy 4:2, and this will be the topic for our consideration. Notice what Paul wrote; “**Preach** the word; be instant in season, out

of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (King James Version, 2 Tim. 4:2, emphasis added, RJ). The word *preach* is defined as “to herald or proclaim a message” (Strong, “Herald”). Preaching is one of the most challenging things a person can do, but it is also very rewarding. In this study, we want to notice four things: (1) What To Preach, (2) When To Preach, (3) How To Preach, and (4) Why We Are To Preach.

What To Preach

When the Apostle wrote to Timothy, he did not leave him wondering what to preach. In fact, he removed all guess work and gave him a specific assignment. Timothy was told to “Preach **the word**; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2, emphasis added, RJ). This approach to preaching eliminates all philosophies, traditions, and doctrines of men. Jesus condemned these very things in His preaching, and so did Paul in his writing. Consider the following:

But in vain they do worship me, teaching
for doctrines the commandments of
men. (Mat. 15:9)

Beware lest any man spoil you through
philosophy and vain deceit, after the
tradition of men, after the rudiments of
the world, and not after Christ. (Col. 2:8)

Unfortunately, a number of preachers are no longer preaching the Word of God. Some have abandoned preaching the Word for gimmicks. The problem with a gimmick is that once you come up with one, you will always have to come up

with another to keep people interested. I knew of a preacher that used paintball as a way to entice young people; he insinuated that his group was better because they had this to offer. Some have turned to the opinions of others. I knew of a man years ago that began preaching messages from the *Reader's Digest Bible*. The brethren in that congregation were starving for the Word. Still others have made preaching a comedy hour.

It is very important to remember that when Paul told Timothy to preach the Word, he was not making a recommendation to follow or offering a suggestion; he was giving a command. What do we preach when we preach the Word?

We Preach Answers To Our Greatest Questions In Life.

(1) From where did we come? The question is clearly answered in the book of Genesis.

In the beginning God created the heaven
and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)

And God said, Let us make man in our
image, after our likeness: and let them
have dominion over the fish of the sea,
and over the fowl of the air, and over the
cattle, and over all the earth, and over
every creeping thing that creepeth upon
the earth. So God created man in his own
image, in the image of God created he
him; male and female created he them.
(Gen. 1:26-27)

(2) Why are we here? Did you know that we are placed
upon the earth for a particular purpose? God's Word tells us

exactly what that purpose is: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc. 12:13).

(3) Where are we going? Did you know that we are going to one of two places when we die? Jesus said in this life we are traveling down a road that can lead to life or to destruction.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Mat. 7:13-14)

We Preach The Good News.

One reason preaching is so rewarding is that when preachers preach God’s Word, they get to tell people the Good News. They get to tell people about how much God loves mankind, and what He was willing to do for mankind.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. (Rom. 5:8-9)

Who will have all men to be saved, and
to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
(1 Tim. 2:4)

We Preach Jesus.

The Bible tells us who He is. “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5).

The Bible tells us what He did for us. “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi. 2:8).

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.
(1 Cor. 15:1-4)

The Bible tells us why He did this for us.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. (John 15:14)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should

not perish, but have everlasting life.
(John 3:16)

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? (Luke 2:49)

We Preach Salvation.

Preaching was God's chosen method to save mankind.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.
(1 Cor. 1:18-21)

We Preach About Heaven And Hell.

Did you know that we are going to spend eternity in one of two places? Jesus clearly made this distinction when He preached the Sermon on the Mount, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mat. 7:13-14).

We Preach About Worship That Pleases God.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). We must worship with the right heart, the right object, and the right actions.

We Preach About Sin.

A few years ago the famous televangelist Joel Osteen told Larry King on *Larry King Live* that he would not preach on sin. If one is going to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), he is going to have to preach on sin. After all, sin is what causes a person to be lost. We need to know what it is, what it does, and what remedy might exist for it. God provides us information concerning all of those thoughts.

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. (1 John 3:4)

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)

We Preach About Practical Matters.

The Word teaches us what to do when we are dealing with temptation or problems at home or being mistreated. It also shows us how to beware of the wiles of the Devil and provides for us a roadmap to Heaven.

When To Preach

The Apostle Paul told Timothy when he preached that he was to be “instant in season, out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2).

What does this mean? *To be instant* is defined as “to take a stand, to be ready, to stand upon it or up to it, to carry on, to stick to it” (Thayer, “Ephistēmi”). When God’s Word is preached, we are taking a stand. When do we take our stand? ***We Stand In Season.***

That means standing when the occasion is favorable and when people seem interested. People enjoy talking about love, joy, grace, peace, happiness, and heaven. Unfortunately, many preachers stop here. However, Paul continued and he said we are to take our stand.

We Stand Out Of Season.

That means standing when the conditions are not as favorable or when the preaching may be opposed. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke recorded a number of occasions when Paul preached in places where he was met with opposition. Even today, preachers are met with opposition at times. Subjects may not meet society’s approval. These subjects would include those hot-button, emotionally charged issues like marriage, divorce, and remarriage; homosexuality; dancing; modesty; mixed swimming; denominationalism; and baptism. Many pulpits are silent on these topics for any of a number of reasons. Some preachers are asked not to preach on controversial topics by their leadership, some preachers do not like to preach on confrontational subjects, and others become too worried about the attendance.

How To Preach

The Apostle Paul told Timothy to “reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). This is very similar to the teachings of the prophet Jeremiah, “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jer. 1:10).

The word *reprove* is defined as “to convince, refute, convict, bring to light, expose, find fault with, to correct” (Thayer, “Elegchō”). The word *rebuke* is defined as “to tax with fault, chide, censure severely, admonish, to charge sharply” (Thayer, “Epitimaō”). This is a sharper and more severe word than *reprove*. The word *exhort* is defined as “to call to one’s side” (Thayer, “Parakaleo”). Some use it synonymously with the word *encourage*. When I was in the Memphis School of Preaching, I heard Garland Elkins say that when we preach, we are to *reprove* those in doctrinal error, *rebuke* those who are in sin, and *encourage* those who are ready to give up. When we preach, we cannot always preach on the encouraging subjects; we cannot always preach on the challenging ones, either. We have to find a balance.

Paul wrote that preaching the Word is to be done with “longsuffering and doctrine.” Patience and endurance is expected when preaching the Word of God. It would be wise to reference Paul’s teaching to the Ephesians here, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Love has to be our motivation behind *reproving*, *rebuking*, and *exhorting*.

Why We Are To Preach

The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3). Why are we to preach? The following three points help us answer the question:¹

Time

The time is coming when members of the church will no longer put up with (endure) sound teaching and will turn to false teachers. Remember, the church at Ephesus was troubled by false teachers. Eventually, they left their first love.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. (Rev. 2:3)

Teaching Of Sound Doctrine

The time is coming when brethren will not endure sound doctrine. *Sound* means “healthy and wholesome” (Strong, “Sound”). When Paul used *sound* with *doctrine*, he was referencing teaching that is healthy and whole to the soul. Such teaching is designed to strengthen, to instruct about right and wrong, and to help people tell the difference in things that are beneficial and things that are harmful.

Teachers

The time is coming when Christians will “heap to themselves teachers. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). The word *heap* means “to accumulate.” The accumulations of false teachers will appeal to the lust (desires and cravings) and

to the listening of those that will not endure sound teaching. For many, religion is about “what I want.” Denominationalism is built upon man-made preferences. Community churches exist because man is trying to give the community what the community wants. Here Paul says some would turn from the truth to fables. A fable is fiction, the opposite of truth.

Conclusion

What happens when God’s Word is not preached? People have a difficult time of distinguishing what is right and wrong, as is the case with many in our society today. “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isa. 5:20).

When God’s Word is not preached, people are ignorant of God’s Word. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6).

What happens when God’s Word is preached? Man’s heart is pricked. Remember what the Hebrews’ writer said about God’s Word, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). God’s Word cuts the toughest of hearts. When the first Gospel sermon was presented following the death of Jesus, it included the following words, “Now when they heard this, they were **pricked** in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:47).

When God’s Word is preached, it leads people to Christ and shows them the way to Heaven. “Thy word is a lamp

unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). Let us make sure that we endorse and support preaching that convicts, encourages, and leads other people to Christ.

Preaching must be done with the utmost care and the marching orders must be followed. “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Notes

1. The subheadings “Time,” “Teaching with Sound Doctrine,” and “Teachers” came from the 1984 Denton Lectureship book. See Watson. Otherwise, the material in this section is the work of the author of this manuscript.

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Christian Relationships: Getting Past The Superficial

B. J. Clarke



Bradley Joseph (B. J.) Clarke was born in Canton, Illinois, the son of Ted and Sherrie Clarke. His father is also a Gospel preacher and educator of preachers. B. J. married the former Tamela (Tish) Hall. He earned a BS and an MA in New Testament Text from Freed-Hardeman University. He is also an honorary alumnus of the Memphis School of Preaching. B. J. delivered his first sermon at age 9. He began full-time preaching in 1983 and has preached in numerous youth rallies, gospel meetings, and lectureships. He has done local work in TN, MS, and AR. For 16½ years, he served as a preacher for the Southaven church of Christ, Southaven, Mississippi. During that time he edited the POWER magazine, directed the annual POWER lectureship, and edited the annual lectureship book. He was a member of the adjunct faculty of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions from 1989-1990. Currently, he serves as the Director of the Memphis School of Preaching. He is also the Director of FOUNDATIONS.

SOME OBSERVATIONS and definitions are important as we consider our assigned topic. First, this is a study about **Christian** relationships. It is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss the relationships a Christian ought to have with non-Christians. The subject at hand concerns the attitudes and actions a Christian ought to have toward other Christians. Second, the focus of this chapter is to encourage Christians

to develop deeper relationships with other Christians as opposed to having merely superficial relationships. Third, the purpose of developing a deeper relationship with my fellow Christians is to help my soul (and their souls) get to heaven.

The Definition Of Christian Relationships

Who, or what, gets to define what a Christian relationship truly is? Since Almighty God gave the name *Christian* (King James Version, Isa. 62:2; Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16), and since He made it possible even to become a Christian by His scheme of redemption, He alone has the authority to give the rules for how to become a Christian and how to behave as a Christian. This He has done in the New Testament. According to this New Covenant, whoever does the will of the Father in heaven is going to heaven (Mat. 7:21-23) and that same person, the one who does the will of the Father in heaven, is my spiritual kinsman (Mat. 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21). When two individuals obey the same gospel, they enter into a relationship with God and, by extension, with one another. Thus John wrote, “That which we have seen and heard we declare unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ...but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:3; 1 John 3:7).

Although two people may have obeyed the same gospel, and thus have been added to the same spiritual family, this does not mean necessarily that they know each other, or that they ever show love and concern for one another. In fact, as Christians, we all have Christian brothers and sisters in this world whom we have never met, but with whom we share the common bond of being in Christ. The significance of this

Christian bond should not be denigrated, but this question remains: is this fellowship at a distance, with unknown/unmet brethren, everything God had in mind for us when He created the church family?

To carry this a step further, it is possible for us to worship in the same building with fellow Christians we have never met. Sadly, this is not true just when we are worshipping with the Lord's church in a town we are visiting on vacation. It is possible for us to be members of the same local church, and to worship Sunday after Sunday with brethren we have never met, or with whom we have never had more than a casual conversation. As important as worship is to the Christian life, is merely being a worshipping society and talking for a few minutes before/after services all that God had in mind for us when He established the church? Or is there something more?

The Delights And Duties Of Christian Relationships

To have a relationship with God is so amazing and so satisfying that one might conclude no need or room for any other relationship with anyone else even exists. However, if we obeyed the gospel plan of salvation, God gifted us with salvation and more. What more did God give us, other than salvation, when we became Christians? In His infinite wisdom, when the Lord added us to the church, He gave us not only salvation (Acts 2:47), but He also gave us one another! This gift offers wonderful privileges but also brings tremendous responsibilities. Even a casual reading of the inspired letters to the first-century Christians demonstrates the privileges and responsibilities we have toward one another.

Love one another. Before His death, Jesus told His apostles, "A new commandment I give unto you, **That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one**

another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, **if ye have love one to another**” (John 13:34-35, emphasis added, BJC). He echoed this same thought to them later in the upper room: “This is my commandment, **That ye love one another, as I have loved you...** These things I command you, **that ye love one another**” (John 15:12; John 15:17, emphasis added, BJC).

The apostle Paul affirmed this same divine message. He told the brethren at Rome, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). “Owe no man anything, but to **love one another:** for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8, emphasis added, BJC). To the brethren at Thessalonica, he wrote: “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to **love one another** (1 The. 4:9, emphasis added, BJC).

The apostle Peter communicated the same idea, placing emphasis on love’s intensity, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye **love one another** with a pure heart **fervently**” (1 Pet. 1:22 emphasis added, BJC).

John was known as the apostle of love, and his writings reveal the reason why this was so. He told the readers of his first epistle, “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we **should love one another...** And this is his commandment, **That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment**” (1 John 3:11; 1 John 3:23 emphasis added, BJC). Tenderly, he repeated this theme: “Beloved, **let us love one another:** for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God...Beloved, if God so loved us, we **ought also to love one another.** No man

hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4:7; 1 John 4:11-12 emphasis added, BJC). In his second epistle, John wrote, “And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another (2 John 5).

This barrage of passages shows us just how much love is the foundational element to deeper relationships. No lasting relationship can be built without it. But how does love serve as the foundation to building deeper relationships that will help me, and my fellow Christians, go to heaven? How does Christian love deepen Christian relationships?

If we truly love our fellow Christians, we will not do certain things. If we truly love one another, we will not be found “hating one another” (Tit. 3:3), judging one another improperly (Rom. 14:13), consuming one another (Gal. 5:15), or envying one another (Gal. 5:26).

If we truly love our Christian brothers and sisters, it will affect everything about our relationships with them. Love will influence the way we greet them (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14). If we love one another, we will receive one another (Rom. 15:7). If we love one another, we will bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). If we love one another, we will be kind one to another, we will forgive one another (Eph. 4:32) and forbear one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13). If we love one another, we will teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16; Rom. 15:14).

If we truly love one another, we will comfort one another (1 The. 4:18). If we truly love one another, we will edify one another (1 The. 5:11). If we truly love one another, we will consider one another and exhort one another (Heb. 3:13; Heb. 10:24-25).

The Deepening Of Christian Relationships

It is one thing to know that we have responsibilities toward one another as Christians—it is quite another to carry them out. I know that I should have some depth in my Christian relationships, but what must I do to accomplish this goal? A survey of the Scriptures reveals the means whereby we may deepen our Christians relationships with one another.

By Worship

When we attend worship services, we build one another up in the faith (Heb. 10:24-25). It is encouraging to see the pews nearly filled, and it can be rather discouraging to see empty pews that used to be filled. My attendance at worship services deepens my relationship with my brethren because it binds us together in communion with God and with one another. It also sends my brothers and sisters the message that they are not alone in living the Christian life. Likewise, when my brother/sister and I both sing out in the assembly and think about the words of the spiritual songs we are singing, we are teaching and admonishing one another and edifying one another in the process (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

By Words

Obedying the command to edify one another is crucial to the enhancement of our Christian relationships. One of the definitions given in Greek lexicons for the word *edify* is “to help improve ability to function in living responsibly and effectively, strengthen, build up, make more able” (Arndt, Danker, and Bauer). How can I strengthen my brother and make him more able to reach a heavenly inheritance? Never underestimate the power of words to build up your brother! However, we are not talking about just any and all words. According to Paul, not all words have the power to provide

“godly edifying” (1 Tim. 1:4). Whose words do possess the power to edify?

God’s Words are able to build up my brother. Paul’s statement to the Ephesian elders shows the edifying power of God’s Word. He said, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). God’s Word has edifying power! Thus, when the child of God investigates the Scriptures on a daily basis, he deepens his relationship with God. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mat. 4:4). Just as physical food sustains and nourishes the physical body, the Word of God nourishes the soul and energizes the Christian.

A daily study of God’s Word provides the reader with energy and strength found nowhere else. “A man of knowledge increaseth strength” (Pro. 24:5). Paul told the Colossians,

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. (Col. 1:9-11)

Paul knew that in order for the Colossians to walk worthy before the Lord, they would first have to be filled

with the knowledge of His will. He knew that as their knowledge of God increased, their strength to live the Christian life would also deepen. In other words, the more the Colossians investigated the will of God, the more built up they would be in determining to live out that will in their lives.

According to Peter, we find the strength to escape the pollutions of the world through knowledge (2 Pet. 2:20). The Psalmist said, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:9-11). A mother wrote a message inside the front cover of her son’s Bible. It read: “Only this little book will keep you from sin, and only sin will keep you from this book.” We need to learn the book and then talk the book to our fellow brethren. This will strengthen us and those who hear us (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

My words are able to edify my brother. This is not because my words are as potent as God’s Word. It is because God’s Word reveals that there is edifying power in a “word that is spoken in due season” (Pro. 15:23) and in “a word fitly spoken” (Prov. 25:11). We read a beautiful passage from the pen of Isaiah: “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isa. 50:4). Although we are not inspired and directly taught by God what to say, we can nevertheless read the Word of God and speak a word to the weary in order to build them up and strengthen their faith. Death and life are in the power of our tongues (Pro. 18:21). We will either be justified by our mouths or condemned by them (Mat. 12:36-37). Therefore, we must heed Paul’s admonition: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of

your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. 4:29).

By Works

I can deepen my relationship with my brethren by my words, but words are not enough. In fact, words without works leads to superficial relationships. How is this so? And what is a superficial relationship, anyway? Webster's Dictionary defines the word *superficial* as “**presenting only an appearance without substance or significance.**” Hence, a superficial relationship may appear to be warm, cordial, and friendly, but a closer look may reveal little substance or depth to the relationship at all.

An excellent example of such superficiality is seen in the following illustration presented by the inspired writer James:

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (Jam. 2:14–17)

The point is clear enough. It is one thing to say the words *Be warmed and filled*, but it is quite another to take the time and make the effort to relieve a needy brother/sister in Christ. To say the words without providing actual help fits exactly the definition of being superficial—“presenting only an appearance without substance or significance.” By

saying the words *Be warmed and filled*, one may appear to be caring and compassionate. But upon further review, it becomes clear that, if the person saying the words truly cared, he/she would do more than say kind words—he/she would do kind deeds.

We have likely all heard the saying, “Actions speak louder than words,” and the Bible backs up the veracity of the saying. James wrote, “Yea, a man **may say**, Thou hast faith, and I have works: **shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works**” (Jam. 2:18). The apostle John echoes this same thought:

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, **let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.** (1 John 3:16–18)

Even with this small sampling of passages before us, it is quite clear that one of the fundamental distinctions between superficial and deeper relationships has to do with a “**saying**” relationship versus a “**servicing**” relationship.

Do we have a “saying” relationship with our fellow Christians, or a “servicing” relationship? Paul exhorted the brethren in the churches of Galatia with the following words: “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but **by love serve one another**” (Gal. 5:13). The passage is plain enough in its

demand, but the question may arise, How should I serve my fellow man in love? If I can see it done, it is so much easier to imitate than if I just read the words.

The Demonstration Of Good Christian Relationships

The definition of a good Christian relationship is seen in higher definition when we see it demonstrated. The Bible is populated with some shining examples of those whose relationships with others were anything but superficial. Let us examine a small sampling of these servants who are worthy of imitation.

Barzillai

Of course, Barzillai was not a Christian, but “the things that were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4), and we can learn much about how to develop a deep relationship with others by zooming in on the life of one of the unsung heroes of the Old Testament. His name was Barzillai, and he was a Gileadite of Rogelim (2 Sam. 17:27). His relationship with David was anything but superficial. When David was on the run from his own son Absalom, he did not have access to a 24-hour Wal-Mart and a Walgreens on every corner. As he hungered, he was dependent on those who were willing to offer him more than the words *Be warmed and filled*. He needed someone to care enough to engage in works of service.

And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley,

and flour, and parched corn, and beans,
and lentiles, and parched pulse, And
honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese
of kine, for David, and for the people that
were with him, to eat: for they said, The
people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty,
in the wilderness. (2 Sam. 17:27–29)

In view of this text, and others in the nearby context, we can learn several things about having a serving relationship and not just a saying relationship.

(1) Barzillai associated with other servants, and they went out of their way to serve David. Serving people inspires other serving people to serve other people (2 Sam. 17:27).

(2) Barzillai and the others saw a need and met it without having to be asked or begged to help (2 Sam. 17:27-29).

(3) Barzillai went the extra mile rather than looking for the easy task (2 Sam. 17:28). With the ancient forms of transportation available to Barzillai, think of how much effort it took to get that much food and beverage out to David and his entourage in the wilderness. Barzillai was not a superficial friend.

(4) Barzillai did not have a flash-in-the-pan relationship with David. Some brethren will help out once, and then they are never seen again. This was not true of Barzillai. Even after Absalom's death, when David came back home, Barzillai was there to help conduct David back over Jordan (2 Sam. 19:31). A true friend and brother is there in the good times and the bad times (2 Sam. 19:31).

(5) Barzillai did not use his age as an excuse not to serve David's needs. Barzillai was an aged man, even 80 years old, and yet he had been front and center in providing the king of sustenance while he was at Mahanaim (2 Sam. 19:32).

(6) Barzillai did not hoard his wealth like the rich fool of Luke 12. Rather, he shared it freely with his brethren who were in need (2 Sam. 19:32).

(7) Barzillai was not self-seeking, but rather put first the welfare of others (2 Sam. 19:33-40).

(8) Barzillai had such a deep relationship with David that when David was on his deathbed, he instructed Solomon to take care of Barzillai's sons (1 Kin. 2:7).

Although Barzillai lived before the church was established, I can nevertheless learn from his example. If I would endeavor to make my Christian relationships like the serving relationship Barzillai had with David, my life and the lives of my brethren would be enriched.

Epaphroditus

One of the unsung servants of the New Testament was Epaphroditus. Paul depicts him as an ideal servant.

(1) Epaphroditus remembered the brotherhood he had with those of like precious faith (Phi. 2:25).

(2) Epaphroditus was not afraid of hard toil and labour (Phi. 2:25).

(3) Epaphroditus was willing to fight side by side on the battlefield as a fellow-soldier of Christ (Phi. 2:25).

(4) Epaphroditus informed others of the needs of others (Phi. 2:25).

(5) Epaphroditus was blessed with wonderful opportunities to assist great and godly brothers and sisters in Christ (Phi. 2:25).

(6) Epaphroditus was deeply moved by a longing to be with and to assist his fellow-brethren (Phi. 2:26).

(7) Epaphroditus was more concerned about others than about himself (Phi. 2:26).

(8) Epaphroditus sacrificed his own health to assist others (Phi. 2:27; Phi. 2:30). He was anything but superficial!

(9) Epaphroditus made such a difference for good that his passing away would have brought much sorrow to others (Phi. 2:27). May we be like Epaphroditus and bring deep joy to the hearts of others by what we are doing, just as he brought to Paul (Phil. 4:18).

Epaphras

Although his name is a shortened form of the longer name Epaphroditus, he should not be confused with the brother from Philippi. Epaphras was a member and possibly a preacher/leader in the Lord's church at Colossae (Col. 1:7; Col. 4:12). He was not a superficial Christian. He was a serving Christian.

(1) Epaphras was a dear fellow servant and faithful minister of Christ (Col. 1:7).

(2) Epaphras remembered Whom He served (Col. 4:12).

(3) Epaphras laboured fervently in prayers for others (Col. 4:12).

(4) Epaphras was willing to endure hardship with others (Phil. 23).

Jesus

The servants mentioned above were excellent examples of service, but were all imperfect men. Jesus, on the other hand, is the Perfect example of service.

(1) Jesus was not focused upon serving Himself, but rather upon serving others (Mat. 20:28; Phi. 2:3-4; Acts 10:38).

(2) The ultimate act of serving others was exhibited in the cross of Christ (Phi. 2:3-8).

(3) We should imitate the preaching and practice of our Lord on the subject of service (John 12:26; John 13:1-17; John 15:15-20).

Nothing would deepen our relationships more and help us get to heaven more than imitating Jesus in our relationships. As we have opportunity, we ought to serve and

do good unto all men, but especially those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10). If we serve faithfully, we will hear those wonderful words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat. 25:21; Mat. 25:23). Certainly, we do not want to hear these words: “Thou wicked and slothful servant” followed by being cast as an unprofitable servant into outer darkness where “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:26; Mat. 25:30). If we serve like Jesus, we never will!

Conclusion

The key to enhancing our Christian relationships is L-O-V-E. Paul reminded us that, in dealing with our brethren, it is knowledge that puffs up and love that builds up (1 Cor. 8:1)! Because I love my brother, I will selflessly seek what is in his best interest. Even if an action is lawful for me, I will not pursue it if it does not edify my brother (1 Cor. 8:1ff; 1 Cor. 10:23). In dealing with my brethren, I must remember, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification” (Rom. 15:1-2).

As we prepare for the time when the Lord shall come, we should in the meantime “exhort one another by teaching, encouragement, and example, and we should build each other up with the word of God and with loving care. Because we will live together with Him then, we should live together with one another cooperatively now” (MacDonald and Farstad electronic ed.).

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Preaching The Word With All Authority—Titus 2:15

Gary Colley



Gary Colley is married to the former Maggie Witty. Together, they have three children. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman College. Gary began preaching in 1954. He has a son, son-in-law, and two grandson-in-laws that are Gospel preachers. He speaks in many lectureships and Gospel meetings each year. He is experienced in radio/TV work. He has taught at preacher training schools in TX, OK, and TN. Currently, he is the minister at the Getwell Church of Christ in Memphis, TN and a part-time instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching.

PREACHING THE Word of God, the good news of the Gospel, concerning Jesus, the Savior of the world, is the highest calling ever given to any man. The man who has been given the ability and privilege of preaching the Word is blessed beyond measure in this life. No better way exists to be of help to our fellow man than to preach to him the Word of God. At the great dispersion of the disciples from Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, “they went every where preaching the word” (King James Version, Acts 8:4). When Phillip went down to the city of Samaria, he “preached Christ” to them (Acts 8:5), meaning the same as preaching the Word. It is important to notice what was involved in “preaching the word” or “preaching Christ.” Notice what points Philip’s preaching involved.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. (Acts 8:12-13)

This suggests to us that to preach the Word is to preach things concerning “the kingdom of God” and “the name of Jesus Christ.” And the action that resulted shows that both men and women were taught to be baptized.

They were entering into a field of labor in which the Lord had already taught the woman at the well (John 4), resulting in the whole city coming out to see and hear Jesus. After this, Jesus said to the disciples:

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours. (John 4:35-38)

We commend the Southaven congregation and the directors, Robert Jefferies and Don Blackwell, for choosing such a wonderful theme for the Power Lectureship this year. Our assigned text and its context is Titus 2:11-15:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

Titus

Very little is known concerning Titus, to whom this epistle was written by the apostle Paul. We do know that he was an able and devoted companion of Paul. References to him are found in Second Corinthians, Galatians, Second Timothy, and of course, in this epistle. Where he was born is not known, nor when he was converted, nor anything about his family background. We do know that Paul had great confidence in Titus, at one time leaving him in Crete after he (Paul) had to leave (Tit. 1:5), as he also left Timothy in Ephesus, that he might set in order that which was lacking in the organization of the church there. Hence we know that he had a great part in the early history of the church.

He was given an important degree of prominence in Paul's letters, especially in the letters to the Corinthians, being mentioned nine times. References to him were always with especial affection and distinction. He was a great Gospel preacher! He delivered the first and second epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, in which he is represented as a peacemaker, when the church was in the midst of strife, and when they showed a lack of confidence in Paul who had established the church in Corinth. He worked with Paul at Corinth (2 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 8:23; 2 Cor. 12:18). Paul highly commends his work (2 Cor. 7:5-16). He was evidently not a Jew or Jewish proselyte, as was seen in the fact that Paul took him to Jerusalem and refused to allow the Jews to compel him to be circumcised (Gal. 2:1-5), in order to uphold the truth that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised either before or after baptism into Christ for salvation (Acts 15).

These Things Speak

Words are the means used by God to convey His thoughts, mind, and character unto men (1 Cor. 2:9-13). We should be thankful that God has spoken to us in words that we can understand and obey (Heb. 1:1-2; Eph. 3:3-5; Eph. 5:17). Our text is a kind of summary of the work Titus was instructed to accomplish. This letter gives what might be considered a creed (meaning "I believe") and the way he was to proclaim the Gospel. It should be the manner and duty of presenting the Gospel for every Gospel preacher today. It would be good for every preacher to read this short letter as well as the two letters to Timothy regularly! We should follow the practice suggested to Titus every time we stand up to preach. Some object today to preaching on doctrine and especially to preaching "with all authority." Timothy was told by Paul, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to

them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:15-16).

All religion is taught, whether it be “vain religion” or “pure religion” (Jam. 1:26-27)! All people should be taught the Truth, that is, the Lord’s system of faith and practice. (John 6:44-45; John 8:31-32; John 17:17). We are to preach the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth! According to our text, the proclaimer of Truth is to do so with exhortation and reproof “with all authority.”

When one speaks the Truth with authority, it means that the Truth-preacher is given the right to command and demand obedience when he faithfully proclaims God’s Word. Our Lord spoke in this manner to the people of His day. In the close of the unparalleled Sermon on the Mount it is stated, “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mat. 7:28-29). In the preamble of the kingdom or church of Christ, Jesus spoke clearly of the dangers, duties, and the motives demanded in the New Testament, and He did so with authority and in brevity (Mat. 5, 6, 7). There were no human doubts and limitations, as the scribes who copied the Law many times were heard to speak. There was no hesitating, halting, or limping along in His presentation! He spoke with authority! And that is the responsibility of every faithful Gospel preacher today.

Exhort

Various duties and obligations are given by inspired Paul, some of which are particularly addressed to the preacher Titus. Exhortation is one of the particulars about which he

was instructed. Likewise, to the Roman brethren he wrote, "Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:8). These exhortations to be an exhorter were to be taken seriously then and now. Titus is commanded by Paul to exhort those to whom he preached. This would include encouragement in every duty of faithfulness, but also a warning of the danger of disobeying God. It was and is certainly important to urge the doubters or those who might be caught up in weakness to remain faithful. The diligent preacher of God's Word today will certainly practice exhortation in the lessons that he presents.

Barnabas was a generous member of the Jerusalem church. Luke wrote of him,

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation [or exhortation]) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36-37)

Barnabas was a man of special talent who was able to exhort and encourage souls to obedience and faithfulness. Some affirm that Barnabas would go with the apostles or other Gospel preachers, and following their sermon would exhort those in the audience to respond in obedience. This certainly would be in agreement with meaning of the word exhort. It would be important to advancing the Cause of Christ. It is to this day an important duty for Gospel preachers and others to carry out.

Reprove

Another important factor given by Paul for Titus to consider and practice in his preaching is reproof. This is not something that most desire to do, but it is imperative if we intend to turn men from their sins and direct them toward Heaven. Robert J. McCracken laid down four basic aims of preaching which, when understood, will involve reproofing those who are in sin. We believe these would be well for all Gospel preachers to remember.

- (1) To enlighten the mind
- (2) To disturb the conscience
- (3) To energize the will, and
- (4) To stir the heart

All of these things will be done consistently when Gospel preachers have their hearts engaged mightily in what they are commanded to do in preaching. When we are entrusted with the salvation of the souls of men, we must not fail in the trust invested in us (Mat. 16:26). To reprove is to convince the sinner of his error and to expose or lay open the heart of one who is thus conducting himself in sinful practices. The mission of the Holy Spirit in the world is given by the writer John: "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). The idea of convicting one of wrong is to reprove or to convince and rebuke him of his sin. The mission of Christ was to seek and save the lost which He did by preaching the Gospel (Luke 19:10). The method of saving the lost given by God is to preach the Gospel with reproof (1 Cor. 1:21). The mission of the apostles, and those who preach today, is found in the Great Commission as given by the Lord after His death, burial, and resurrection (Mat. 28:18-20).

With All Authority

Titus is instructed to “speak...with all authority” (Tit. 2:15). Gospel preachers must refer to and be sure of the Word of God standing behind their teaching and preaching. The apostle John warned, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The Bereans are commended for proving those who sought to teach them. The text reads, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Titus, as is true of all preachers today, was to rebuke the offenders of God’s commandments. He is to express a judgment of what is wrong and contrary to the Truth. Though there is no superior authority of one over another, still the Gospel preacher presents arguments to convince the one in sin and rebellion of his error. He is to admonish and warn those who are not living in harmony with God’s Will. He is to show interest, concern, and love for the lost souls of those to whom he preaches.

Some may have started out well. But after a while, the “new” wore off, and they returned to the worldly life they had lived before (1 John 2:15-17)! Their actions are not painted in an attractive way in the Scriptures (2 Pet. 2:20-22)! The apostle Peter stated, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 4:11). Our “authority” must come from above, that is, from the Scriptures spoken or breathed by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Jesus spent approximately three-and-a-half years in His personal ministry, during which time He preached the

Truth with authority (Mat. 4:17). It was during this time He also chose twelve men who were later called apostles. The word *apostle* means “one sent.” In the inspired apostle Peter’s warning against false teachers who would speak to corrupt their hearers, he states:

And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Pet. 1:18-21)

The chosen apostles were promised that upon the ascension of Jesus, who had been their Teacher for the three-and-a-half years of His personal ministry, that they would not be left alone so far as preaching of the Truth was concerned. Jesus said to them:

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be

brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. (Mat. 10:17-20)

He further promised,

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. (John 14:15-18)

And again Jesus said to them, “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26). To define what is involved by the sending of the Holy Spirit, and what He would do with them, we hear the Lord’s words again:

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but

whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. (John 16:13-14)

The “Comforter”

The word *comforter* comes from a Greek word meaning “I will not leave thee alone or orphans.” From what Jesus has spoken, we conclude that the Holy Spirit would come in His place and speak what He hears from Jesus. The Holy Spirit would abide with them, declare the Truth to them, bring to their remembrance what Jesus had said before to them, and sustain them in the trials and persecutions through which they would pass. Since the Holy Spirit “would guide them into all truth” (John 16:13), there would be no future or latter revelations given to the world from God. This, of course, proves that writings like the book of Mormon, the Koran, and the so-called new translations (that do not translate) are all false and are to be rejected (Gal. 1:8-9; Rev. 22:18-19). What the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, brought to the apostles would be and is the “all Truth” which should be defended by faithful Christians (Jude 3). Jesus instructed the apostles before His ascension to wait in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8). This they did! And the power promised did come to the apostles on the notable day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), not to the one-hundred-and-twenty as some suppose. These men spake as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). Jesus received the full power of the Holy Spirit; that is, it was without measure to Him (John 3:34). The baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit’s power was given to the apostles (Mat. 3:11; Acts 1:8). And the laying-on-of-their-hands measure

gave different measures or gifts of the Holy Spirit's power to some of the members of the early church. Nine spiritual gifts were mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. Simon, who had recently become a Christian, saw that "through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given" (Acts 8:17-18). After the death of the apostles, this power was no longer given or found, after the fullness of revelation or inspiration was given (Jam. 1:25). The miraculous works came to an end after the power of Christ was shown to overcome Satan's power (1 Cor. 13:8-13). From that day until this, man has received no new commandments or announcements about how God will save, nor new promises for the faithful who will enter into Heaven (Acts 2:36-42; Rev. 22:14; 1 John 2:25).

Unchanging Truth

Time passing does not change God's Will or the promises He has made (John 14:1-6). We can trust Him in his plans, commandments, and promises, as they were yesterday, are today, and will be tomorrow. Also, in the same way, we can trust the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb.13:8-9). We are assured by the inspired apostle Paul that we are thoroughly furnished unto every good work by God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In like manner, we have every reason to believe that the Word of God is the source of all Truth (John 17:17). Peter again wrote, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3).

The apostles were true to the commands and guidance which they were given. Just so, we today who have the honor of preaching the Gospel should be sure that we are preaching that which God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit intended us to teach and preach. This is our work! Nothing should distract

us away from our mission. In one sense, we hold the salvation or the souls of men in our hands, and we dare not knowingly neglect, change, twist, or set aside anything which God has ordained for the salvation of His people (Luke 17:10; Jam. 2:10; Jam. 4:17; Heb. 2:1-3; Heb. 3:1-3; Mat. 24:14-30). The faithful Gospel preacher really has no choice, if he remains faithful, but to preach the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. This is true especially if we are “looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

This letter to Titus has several important purposes which we need to observe:

(1) He was given instructions for setting the church in order (Cf. 1 Tim. 3:14-15).

(2) He is warned to be careful of the actions and characters of the Cretans (Tit. 1:12).

(3) He was warned against Judaizing teachers and the influences they had among the Jewish converts.

Paul warned Timothy of those who would not endure “sound (healthy) doctrine” but who would seek such preaching as would conform to their feelings and wishes. These are looking to satisfy their carnal desires without any preacher pointing out their sins. Sound doctrine is sound teaching. It is that body of inspired teaching which is designed to make the child of God complete in God’s sight (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet.1:3). Paul instructed Timothy, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:1-2). Neither preachers nor sinners can “get by” with sin without God knowing! “The LORD looketh

from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth” (Psa. 33:13-14).

James wrote to the brethren, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jam. 4:17). To the brethren of Galatia, Paul wrote,

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Gal. 6:7-9)

Conclusion

The charge given to Titus “to speak...with all authority” is summed up thusly: teach and preach plainly, positively, with the convincing knowledge that what he spoke was from an inspired apostle. He rose to the challenge and so should we! He spoke with authority and without compromise or partiality! He handled the Word of God in a proper manner (2 Cor. 4:2). Paul charged Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Timothy was to handle correctly the Word of God. He was charged to “let no man despise thee” (Tit. 2:15). Timothy was given the same instruction: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

One preacher said that when he arose to preach, he had no friends or relatives in the audience. He simply meant that

his preaching would not be compromised by his love for others nor would he show any partiality (Mat. 10:37). Faithful Gospel preachers will reprove the disobedient regardless of their station or relation in life! It is still the duty of preachers to teach and reprove with authority today! May God help us to be faithful to the charge (2 Tim. 4:1-8).

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Developing An Atmosphere Conducive To Growth In The Local Congregation

Mike Hixson



Mike Hixson is married to Nancy, and they have one son, Braden. Mike has preached in TN and MS. For the past twenty four years, he has preached in the Memphis area. Currently, he is the pulpit minister for the Olive Branch Church of Christ. He is a weekly speaker of the radio program *Anchor of the Soul*. He co-hosts a television show *Counterpoint* with B. J. Clarke. He also hosts *GBN Live*.

I AM GRATEFUL for the invitation to be a part of the Power Lectures. Through the years, the Power Lectures have blessed our brotherhood. Appreciation is in order to the elders who oversee this good work and Robert Jefferies and Don Blackwell for editing the book and directing the lectureship. It is no small task, to say the least.

The theme of the lectureship—*Reprove, Rebuke & Exhort*—is a great one. For the duration of this paper, attention will be directed to the assigned subject, “Developing An Atmosphere Conducive To Growth In The Local Congregation.” Any number of factors contribute to growth in the local church. It is my conviction that spiritual growth leads to numerical growth in the Lord’s church. As a result of a church growing spiritually, a number of traits typically blend together bringing to fruition numerical growth. With this in

mind, let us explore some of the foundational principles that lead to growth in the local congregation.

Leadership

One of the natural prerequisites to developing an atmosphere for growth in the church is rock-solid leadership. In other words, a congregation must have a sound eldership committed to being leaders God's way. The term *leadership* conveys the idea of "guidance" or "direction." The local church must have guidance or direction in order to grow spiritually and numerically. Just as a rudder is important to the steering of a ship, godly leadership is vital to the growth of a congregation.

The desire for church growth should begin with the eldership. Someone has observed, "The church cannot rise above her leadership." Elders must pray and work toward church growth. Balance is the key. The goal ought to be spiritual and numerical growth. This is achieved by striving to be biblical and balanced.

Sometimes the desire for numerical growth comes at the expense of the biblical model. The church in the first century grew by leaps and bounds without compromising the integrity of God's Word and will. Saints in the early church manifested the spirit of Paul when he penned, "We also believe and therefore speak" (King James Version, 2 Cor. 4:13). A brief examination of the book of Acts reveals the fast and accelerated growth of the church. The results speak for themselves. For example, on Pentecost Day, "about three thousand souls" were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:41). In no time, "the number of the men was about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). The church was growing at such a rapid rate; Luke records, "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes both of men

and women” (Acts 5:14). Again, a little later the historian chronicles, “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). The formula for growth was not gimmicks or gadgets, just plain and simple Bible preaching and teaching. And by the way, the early church was committed to teaching and preaching publicly and privately (Acts 5:42).

Biblical leadership demands the Great Commission be taken seriously and earnestly. Jesus commanded,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
teaching them to observe all things
whatsoever I have commanded you: and,
lo, I am with you always, even unto the
end of the world. Amen. (Mat. 28:19:20)

The Great Commission has two parts. The first part is evangelism. This means the church must look outward beyond the four walls of the church building. Elders or leaders have the responsibility to serve as evangelistic catalysts in the local church. They can set the tone for the membership imitating the Lord’s work when He declared, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). One of the reasons the apostolic church grew rapidly is reflected in the words of Luke when he discussed the perception of the Sanhedrin Council to Peter and John. He said, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Luke points out the Sanhedrin Council

recognized these men “had been with Jesus.” If we members of the church want to be soul-winners, then we better start spending more time with Jesus in the Scriptures. When Peter and John were commanded not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus, they responded with these words, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). If we spend enough time with Jesus in the Scriptures, we will not be able to stay quiet but will have to tell somebody about Him.

The second part of the Great Commission is edification. Jesus said disciples must be taught “to observe all things” He has “commanded.” Every new convert must be grounded in the faith (Eph. 4:14). Peter said to new Christians, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). Spiritual growth does not happen overnight. It takes time and effort. Elders have the charge “to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). The brethren in the local church must be taught and retaught from pulpit and classroom. Too many congregations in the brotherhood have not received a healthy and balanced diet of God’s Holy Word (2 Tim. 4:1-2). The consequences are ignorance and apathy, and both are deadly (Hos. 4:6; Rev. 3:14-16). Paul instructed the elders of the church of Ephesus with these sobering words, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Godly exercise promotes spiritual strength and stamina (1 Tim. 4:7-8). Congregations that are being fed a healthy diet and growing spiritually understand the work of the church and the importance of part one of the Great Commission, evangelism. Everything, including benevolence, ties back to evangelism (Gal. 6:2; Gal. 6:10; Jam. 1:27).

Labor

In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul compared the church to the human body. The human body has many members and all are essential to our well-being. In like manner, Paul said of the church, “But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). God intends for every member of the church to be used to His glory (Eph. 3:21). The leaders of the church have the responsibility of integrating every member into the work. Granted, this means elders have to know the church well enough to assign members in areas of work where they can best utilize their talents or abilities. Some people are willing to engage in more visible roles such as teaching or taking part in the worship service, while others are more comfortable working under the radar. Many areas of service may seem trivial, but without them the church could not operate efficiently. Below is a brief list of the works of the church:

- Teach/Preach
- Work in VBS
- Prepare communion
- Open and close the building
- Decorate bulletin boards
- Count the contribution
- Repair and maintain the building
- Cut the lawn and shrubs
- Change the sign in front of the building
- Lead devotionals
- Visit the sick, shut-in and bereaved
- Prepare food for the sick, shut-in, and bereaved
- Work with the youth group
- Work with the seniors
- Serve as a visitation leader

Be a greeter

Send cards to the visitors, sick, shut-in, and bereaved

Cut lawn, shrubs, rake leaves, etc. for a widow

Take the elderly to the doctor, drug store, grocery, etc.

This in no way is an exhaustive list of the works of the church, but it does give a brief sketch of some of the various works members can participate in.

In order for the church to grow spiritually and numerically, members must have a sense of connection. Getting people involved and working is one way to keep members connected. If a person has a sense of belonging and need, it keeps him connected to the body. Furthermore, there is something to be said about getting lost in service to the Lord. The apostle Paul said it well in these words, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The goal, of course, is to live and labor for the Cause in such a way so God is glorified (Eph. 3:21).

Love

Another vital component that breeds an atmosphere conducive to growth in the local church is genuine love among her members. Jesus emphasized the importance of love among His disciples when He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). The command to love was not new to the Jewish mind, for Moses in the Law commanded love for one another (Lev. 19:18). The newness of the command was in the depth of love the disciples were to have for one another. As Jesus

said, “As I have loved you...ye also love one another.” The love of God and Jesus was sacrificial and selfless, just as our love ought to be for one another. The apostle John wrote,

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (1 John 4:7-9)

Consider now John’s powerful words, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

Growing congregations are loving congregations. A sense of warm fellowship and cohesiveness permeates the local body. If tension, strife, disharmony, and trouble are brewing in a local church, visitors will pick up on it. And by the way, why would we ever think people in the world will be drawn to us as a body if we demonstrate these characteristics? On the other hand, if we genuinely love one another, enjoy one another’s company, and care for one another, visitors will be drawn to us. It makes sense why Peter would command, “See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22). From a broader perspective, he counseled, “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17).

Christianity is a religion built on love (Eph. 2:4). Everything that we do is to be undergirded by love. Paul said,

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling

cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-2).

According to Paul, spiritual gifts were nothing without love. Now note the continuation, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3). Sacrifice and suffering, though noble, are also said to be unprofitable without love. Thus, our motivation for living and serving in the kingdom of God is love. When our actions of service and devotion are prompted by love, it makes a strong statement to a lost and dying world. It is a strong catalyst for attracting people to the church of the Lord.

Leaven

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus said, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” Churches that grow and abound spiritually and numerically do not forget their purpose. Jesus intends for members of the church to be a preservative for good in a lost and dying world. Everyone who has been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins is a testament to what the gospel can do in the lives of people marred by sin and unrighteousness. The apostle Paul is a classic example of how the truth can bring about a changed life. Prior to obeying the gospel, Paul described himself as “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Tim. 1:13) to the cause of Christ, but he said,

I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. (1 Tim. 1:13-15)

Not only is salt a preservative, it is also used to flavor food or make it tasty. The way we live and carry ourselves at work, in school, at home, and in the community ought to make Christianity appealing and tasty to non-Christians. In other words, it should motivate people in the world to desire what we have in Christ. As children of God, we enjoy a vast array of spiritual blessings in Christ that are available to all who obey the gospel of Christ (Eph. 1:7). First of all, we have been pardoned from sin (Eph. 1:7). Secondly, the Bible says “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Thirdly, we are blessed with the presence of God in our lives (Heb. 13:5-6). Fourthly, we have the privilege of prayer (1 Pet. 3:12). Fifthly, we have the golden promise of heaven (John 14:1-3). These bountiful blessings should be strong incentives to people in the world to obey the gospel and become a Christian (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Mat. 10:32; Acts 2:38).

Light

Congregations that grow are light-bearers in the midst of a world shrouded in spiritual darkness. Jesus said,

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither

do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Mat. 5:14-16).

If congregations are going to grow, they must make their presence known in the community. One reason the Lord's church is not growing in some areas is because no one knows about them. How sad that in some locations the Lord's church is the best-kept secret in the world. Compare the seeming anonymity of some congregations and individual Christians today to the commentary expressed about Paul and Silas in the city of Thessalonica, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts 17:6).

Congregations that grow are visionary and more than willing to spend time and money raising their visibility in the community. It takes time, effort, and money to be visible in the city. Think of the impact a congregation can have in the community with a weekly or daily radio or television program. A local congregation can use the newspaper to advertise times of services or run a timely article on moral and doctrinal issues. Another way to be visible is to open the doors of the church building and offer food and clothing to the needy. I have always heard it said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." These are just a few ways the local church can be a visible light in the neighborhood or city.

One of the major contributing factors to the growth of the apostolic church was their visibility in the world. In

writing to the saints in Philippi, Paul said, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phi. 2:15). In the midst of pagan darkness, the saints in the first century shook the world with the powerful gospel of Christ. They were beacons of light who manifested the spirit of the Psalmist when he declared centuries ago, “O send out thy light and thy truth” (Psa. 43:3).

The world sits in darkness and stands in need of the glorious light of Christ. Jesus came as “the light of the world” (John 8:12), and as His followers, we must light up the world in word and deed (Eph. 5:8; 1 Tim. 4:12; Mat. 28:19-20). God wants the church to grow spiritually and numerically, and it will, if we do our part. We must have confidence that God’s ways will work. The prophet Isaiah said,

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, saith the
LORD. For as the heavens are higher
than the earth, so are my ways higher
than your ways, and my thoughts than
your thoughts. For as the rain cometh
down, and the snow from heaven, and
returneth not thither, but watereth the
earth, and maketh it bring forth and
bud, that it may give seed to the sower,
and bread to the eater: So shall my word
be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it
shall not return unto me void, but it shall
accomplish that which I please, and it
shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent
it. (Isa. 55:8-11)

Conclusion

It is a privilege to be a member of the church of Christ universally and locally. I am grateful for congregations that are growing and abounding in the work of the Lord. It is my prayer that the characteristics mentioned in this article will be beneficial to growing churches as well as churches that need a revival (Psa. 85:6).

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Preaching Only Positive Sermons Kills Congregations

Lane Dix



Lane Dix is married to Pam. They have two daughters and two grandchildren. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He has a BA in Bible from Amridge University. He has been preaching for 25 years. He has done local work in TN, AR, and AL. Currently, he is the minister for the Summitville congregation in Summitville, TN. He is the head of the Bible Department at Boyd Christian School in McMinnville, TN.

THE TITLE assigned is about preaching and specifically preaching in the church. In that the subject matter deals with activity concerning the church, the Bible is the one source to which to appeal (King James Version, Col. 3:17). It is only the Bible which is to be consulted concerning matters of the church because the Bible is directly from God and is for the purpose of providing mankind everything that is needed to be pleasing to God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Psa. 19:7). Paul stated that what is to be preached to the members of the church must be the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:8-9). The gospel of Christ is what Paul preached (2 Cor. 2:12). In Acts 16:17, even a demon acknowledged that the purpose of preaching was to teach individuals what they needed to know in order to be saved. Therefore, the Bible is sufficient for all matters—including preaching—concerning the church.

Some view preaching as just “telling someone something” whereas others see preaching as something much more involved than disseminating information. Observing how preachers preached in the New Testament, one will conclude that preaching is indeed much more than the passing on of information. Some view preaching as being akin to motivational speaking. However, a vast difference exists between motivational speaking and biblical preaching. Motivational speaking has as its goal to cause the audience to be encouraged in their emotions and perhaps their self-esteem (worldly, fleshly, goal oriented). Biblical preaching is for the purpose of building up the audience in the Gospel (2 Cor. 12:9; Eph. 4:11-13).

Positive Versus Negative

The topic under consideration is also about approach. Is it positive or negative? Actually, positive and negative are relative terms when applied to preaching. No set rule determines the difference because each person has his own standard of criteria. What is positive to one person may not be to the next. It is like unto the age-old question about a glass filled half way- is it half full or half empty? Determining whether or not a sermon is positive or negative is entirely up to the audience. One could preach the good news of Jesus Christ to a Muslim who would find the subject matter to be offensive and subsequently issue a death threat to the preacher for blaspheming Islam. However, a non-Muslim might regard the same material as encouraging. Regardless, the herald of God is not responsible for the content of the message; it did not originate with him, nor did he make the determination as to what is to be said (Jer. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Likewise, it is not the responsibility of the preacher to make the determination

of whether or not the message is positive or negative. Per Hebrews 4:2, the positive or negative aspect is not to be applied to the content. Instead, it is applied to the reaction of the preaching.

Consider the first gospel sermon presented in Acts 2:14-40 and the sermon presented before the people in the temple in Acts 3:12-26. The Apostle Peter had the privilege of presenting these sermons. Concerning the manner in which they were delivered, it was a defense—an apologia—on the part of Peter. Thus, at the start, we have a less-than-positive situation. Consider the verbs used by Peter in these sermons. They portray a situation where Peter was authoritative, rebuking the behavior of his audience, calling to their attention their defects of character, etc. Such a situation is not what one would classify as a festive occasion. Have you ever found yourself in a position where it was your responsibility to point out to someone that he was in error?

Concerning the content of his sermons, Peter did some name-calling. While he did not use the term *murderer*, he did point out that his listeners had a part in the murder of the Son of God. Murderer, accessory to murder, or anything similar is not a pleasurable situation to be in! Nonetheless, that is what Peter pointed out to His audience. Although he did not use the words, “You are guilty,” his audience came away with that understanding.

The audience’s reaction to the proclamation of God’s Word will determine if it is positive or negative. **Therefore, the labeling of sermons as positive or negative is from the minds of men.** Yes, it is entirely in your hands. After all, anytime the word of God is presented, it is good news. Consequently, it is prudent to investigate the examples of preaching found in the Bible. Consider the following accounts from the New Testament.

Proclaiming Good News In The Gospel Of Luke

The Gospel of Luke has ten instances where preaching the Gospel, bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, or preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins is recorded (Luke 3:3; Luke 4:18; Luke 4:43; Luke 7:22; Luke 8:1; Luke 9:2; Luke 9:6; Luke 9:60; Luke 16:16; Luke 20:1). All ten of these instances were about proclaiming the Word of God to the people. The content of these messages was varied. Sometimes it was about judgment and eternal punishment (Luke 3:17); other times it was about redemption (Luke 4:18). In each instance it was Good News (Luke 8:1) to the audience because it was for their benefit. The preaching was for the benefit of the people. In all instances, regardless of the topic (judgment or salvation) the proclamation of the Gospel was for the benefit of mankind.

In Luke 4:18 Jesus gave His mission, His focus as being a preacher to the poor. Currently, poor is usually associated as an economic term. However, in the Gospel of Luke, the poor would represent not just those who are without financial means but those who were rejected by the religious establishment of the day. In fact, Jesus dwelt primarily with those who were rejected (publicans, sinners, etc.) and not highly regarded. He demonstrated love and compassion for those considered insignificant (Luke 7:13). In the context of Luke 16:16, Jesus was rebuking the religious establishment for their attitude about the importance of wealth and prestige (Luke 16:15). They scoffed at His idea (Luke 16:14). In response to their opposition, Jesus stated that a new era had come. It was a time in which all people can be a part of the kingdom of God regardless of social status, financial status, etc. If a man was numbered among the outcasts of the day, he would consider this to be the dawning of a new era and being to your benefit. No wonder it is called Good News.

Proclaiming The Good News In The Writings Of Paul *Paul's Method Of Preaching*

In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul stated his method of preaching. He preached for the purpose of calling attention to the gospel of Christ, to everything the death and resurrection of Christ accomplished (reconciliation—Eph. 2:16) and not to himself. Paul's preaching was more than an exercise in rhetoric; it was an endeavor in presenting a message of salvation to those which were lost. Therefore, when Paul preached, the attention of the audience was not drawn to the speaker; instead, it was directed toward the cross (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Message is to be everything and the medium means nothing!

Additionally, when noting the method of Paul's preaching, one must observe his comments in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Using a military metaphor, Paul compared his efforts in proclaiming the Word of God to that of a soldier in the midst of a military campaign. Christians have weapons to use; however, in the Army of God the weapons are not carnal, but spiritual (2 Cor. 10:3; 2 Cor. 6:6-7; Eph. 6:10-18; 1 The. 5:8). The weapons which Paul used were for the purpose of tearing down strongholds (picture in your mind a battering ram bringing down a castle wall). Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 10:5 some specific types of strongholds which the Word of God destroys. Imaginations are speculations that men throw against the knowledge of God (worldly philosophy, arguments of worldly wisdom, etc.). High things are those things which the Devil has built up in opposition to God (picture a fort or castle high above acting as a deterrent to an opposing force). These high things would serve as an obstacle to the preaching and reception of the Gospel. A second weapon for victory was taking captive every thought of men, using the Word to win the acceptance in the mind of

men. In carnal warfare, the goal is submission; however, in spiritual warfare, the goal is the loyalty of men. When man's obedience to Christ is achieved, then the mission has been accomplished. The goal of preaching the Word of God has been achieved.

The Scope Of Paul's Preaching

Acts 20:17-38 informs the reader how encompassing the preaching of Paul was. He presented everything that God would have the hearer of the Gospel to know (Acts 20:27). In Acts 20:20, he defended his work as an evangelist and stated that he did not avoid his responsibilities as a preacher of the Gospel. Paul presented to them everything that an alien sinner would need to hear in his preaching. Anything and everything that needed to be taught was taught by the apostle. No matter who was before him or where he was, if Paul was preaching, they heard the Word of God. In doing this, Paul was imitating Jesus' method of presenting the Word of God (Luke 24:27). This would include the call for repentance (Luke 24:31). This is a stark contrast to some who identify themselves as preachers today. Some lack either the knowledge of the Word or the courage to present everything that needs to be heard by mankind.

This discussion raises the question What exactly was the "whole counsel of God" that Paul preached to the Ephesians? A careful look at the book of Ephesians will give insight into this question.

In the book of Ephesians, we learn that God had a plan for the saving of mankind which was put forth before the foundation of the world. This plan was that through Christ salvation would be made available (Eph. 1:3-12). The grand themes of redemption, reconciliation, reign of Christ, unity and everyday living are but some of the things that Paul preached to the Ephesians.

The Purpose Of Paul's Preaching

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, the reader learns what the purpose of Paul's preaching was. It was to bring about salvation. This was affected by Paul preaching the Gospel. The importance of preaching the Gospel is revealed in Ephesians 3:8-9. It is God's means of providing salvation to the lost. Described as a fellowship of the mystery, Paul stated that he makes known to all ("make all men see") how they can be saved. The aim or goal for Paul's effort is for the hearer to be perfect in Christ on the Day of Judgment (Col. 1:28). Take note of the method Paul mentions as to how this goal is to be accomplished. Paul employed the verbs *warning* and *teaching* to establish his method. By word of mouth (teaching), the audience is admonished (warning) to take note of their behavior and in doing so, they can make the necessary changes to ensure they will be presented perfect before Christ Jesus. Any preaching that does not draw the audience to the requirements of needing to conform to the standards of God (Rom. 12:2), being faithful (Rev. 2:10), and being ready to appear before the Judgment seat of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) is not preaching Jesus Christ!

The aforementioned aspects are in keeping with the commission Paul received from the Lord on the road to Damascus. Acts 26:16-18 is a recounting of how Saul of Tarsus became the Apostle Paul. As he recounted the events to King Agrippa, he revealed his commission from the Lord. What is relevant to this study are the responsibilities assigned: to be a minister, a witness to cause people to see and turn.

Paul was to be a minister. The word *minister* in this text has the meaning of one who waits to accomplish the commands of his superior (Zodhiates, "Huperetes"). He would no longer do the bidding of the Jewish High Priest (Acts 9:1); instead, he would do the bidding of the Christian

High Priest (Heb. 3:1; Heb. 9:11). He would go from being in total opposition to the Lord to being in total devotion to the Lord.

Paul was to be a witness. The word *witness* has the meaning of one who sees an event and reports what happened (Zodhiates, “Martus”). This quality would be essential for the assignment given to him by the Lord. Paul was given the mission to rescue the lost. Rescuing the lost is to be accomplished by three procedures. Opening their eyes is a metaphor for conversion. It is more than just a change of direction in life; it is a transformation (Mat. 18:3). “To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” is a description of one who has been transformed. The converted are now under the authority of God and not Satan (Col. 1:12-14). “Receive forgiveness of sin” is the result when one is converted and delivered. It was to be the outcome of all of Paul’s efforts in preaching the Gospel to the lost. When this is accomplished, an inheritance awaits (Rev. 2:10). Everything is dependent upon the Gospel being faithfully proclaimed.

The Example Of Paul’s Preaching

The New Testament example of preaching is one of preaching about one thing—Christ (Acts 5:42; Acts 8:5; Acts 9:20; Acts 17:3). No separation exists between the Gospel and Christ; the Gospel is His (2 Cor. 2:12). Preaching Jesus Christ is preaching who he was and is (Acts 8:12; Acts 9:20; Acts 17:3; Acts 28:31), what He did (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:23; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12) and what He will do (John 5:22-27; Acts 10:42; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 The. 4:16-18; 2 The. 1:7-10). Paul preached the person of Christ (Acts 9:20; Acts 17:2-4; 2 Cor. 1:19), God (Acts 17:22-31), everyday living (Acts 14:15), the Gospel (Acts 14:21-25), kingdom of God (Acts 20:25), repentance (Acts 17:30; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:20),

warning (Acts 13:40-41), preparation for the time when man will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Acts 24:25; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10), etc.

Conclusion Of Paul's Preaching

Paul's preaching can be characterized as being for the purpose of eliciting a response from his audience; however, his preaching was not response driven. No compromises were made to elicit a favorable response or to make anyone feel better about himself. It should be noted that Paul had this determination in the face of hostile opposition, character assassination, and rejection of the message, and the threat of personal harm and death could not deter Paul (Acts 9:29; Acts 13:45-46; Acts 14:2-3; Acts 19:8-9). He came to preach Jesus Christ to people who needed to make some changes in their lives; otherwise, they were going to end up in a devil's hell. Paul understood well that for them to have eternal life, they had to change the way that they were living their lives presently.

Conclusion

Having examined the evidence, the reader should be able to discern that preaching is not an act of trying to cause someone to be in a better mood. It is an act of conveying the plan of God for mankind. A preacher who lacks the courage to confront people in their sins is a preacher who needs to sit down and let someone else do the Lord's work. Preaching is not for the faint at heart.

Preaching should always be characterized as presenting all that God wants mankind to know. To deviate from this, and present only what is to be considered as positive at the expense of what is considered negative, is to deny the hearer of essential information needed to be pleasing to God. The opposite, preaching only negative at the expense of positive, is also denying the hearer of essential information. As was

stated previously, labeling the message of God for mankind as positive or negative is from the minds of men. The Bible presents the message of God for mankind as Good News; therefore, what right does man have to decide what is positive or negative?

Elders, preachers, and members of the church: God will not be mocked (Gal. 6:7). To allow for only a portion of God's Word to be taught in your class settings and from your pulpits is to deny the lost an opportunity to be saved. In such scenarios, the Lord will not bless the effort.

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Matthew 18—Going To A Brother In Sin Without Gossiping

Dan Cates



Dan Cates is married to the former Shelly Jones. They have two children, Maggie and Conor. He is the son of Curtis A. (Sr.) and Annette Cates. He is a native Georgian who was reared in AL, OR, and TN. His father and grandfather were Gospel preachers as are his brother, father-in-law, and brother-in-law. Dan began preaching in 1983; he currently serves as evangelist and one of the elders of the Independence, MS, Church of Christ. Formerly, he worked with congregations in TN, MS, AL, and AR. In 1999, he began teaching at the Memphis School of Preaching on a part-time basis; he was moved to full-time in 2013 and soon after was appointed Dean of Communications. Dan is a 1994 (two-year program) and 2002 (third-year program) graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching who also holds a BA and an MA from Amridge University. He received other training at David Lipscomb University, the University of Memphis, and the University of Arkansas Little Rock. In 2009, he joined his father in working with Cates Publications producing books, charts, tracts, and other Bible-based material.

IT IS always an honor to be involved in a work of the Southaven congregation! The writer is grateful to those who have put together this fine lectureship and to the elders of the congregation here for their continued confidence in him. Larry Everson, Con Lambert, and Vern Schrimsher have been valued friends for many years!

This theme is important; indeed, it is the heart of preaching (King James Version, 2 Tim. 4:2)! Especially when reproving, rebuking, and exhorting, the preacher may feel “out of season”; however, the task is the same and the responsibility remains sure. Sometimes the role of reproving, rebuking, and exhorting is beyond merely the purview of the preacher and is a role thrust upon other members of the Lord’s church; having seen a brother living in sin, the member concerned with his brother’s soul is tasked with going to that one to strive to win him back, to charge him to return to faithfulness. While the initial step may be altruistic, men— due to others’ curiosity or sadly, their own delight or worse, self-righteousness— will sometimes be tempted to broadcast or even embellish the brother’s sin. Unquestionably, the dangers are manifold, risking the souls of the sinner, the originally well-intentioned brother, and others who do or even do not want to be involved. This danger is the subject of the study at hand: “Going to a Brother in Sin without Gossiping.” In developing the study, the writer will discuss first the text at hand: Matthew 18; second, the key terms: “busybody,” “talebearer,” “false accuser,” “self righteous,” and “hypocrite”; third, the difficult part of the Christian’s responsibility: the Christian does not want to have to go to a brother in sin; fourth, the process: who and when to tell the state of the sinner; and fifth, the danger: how the situation can do harm.

The Text

Matthew 18:1-11

In the American Standard Version, the disciples asked Jesus, “Who *then* [emphasis added, DFC] is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” That is, who, given the recent events, is the greatest? Those recent events—the greater context of this chapter—included Jesus’ promise to build

His church and His giving authority therein to the apostles (Mat. 16:13-20), His constant reminders of His inevitable fate (Mat. 16:21; Mat. 17:22-23), His call for self-denial (Mat. 16:24-28), His transfiguration (Mat. 17:1-13), His mild rebuke of his “unbelieving” disciples (Mat. 17:14-21), and His miraculously paying tribute (Mat. 17:22-27).

With these events—many of which tried the faith of even the closest disciples—in their recent memory, the disciples’ question was brought forth again, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus used the opportunity to express that the least, the most humble, would be the greatest, that the causing of offenses would be a woeful thing, and that He had come to save the lost.

With reference to the study at hand, three things are important from these verses: first, the Lord is concerned that His followers be humble (cf. 1 Pet. 5:5); second, the Lord is against those who cause others to sin; and third, the Lord puts a premium on forgiveness.

Matthew 18:12-14

These verses are demonstrative of how concerned the Lord is when even *one* is lost. The Lord loves those who never become disorderly, but His greater rejoicing is for the one who has been disorderly yet has repented. This is a concession that offenses will come (Mat. 18:7), but they do not have to be permanent, because the Lord has provided for their restoration. His will is not “that one of these little ones should perish.” David wrote, “For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (Psa. 86:5). Again, the Lord puts a premium on forgiveness.

Matthew 18:15-17

The Lord puts a premium on forgiveness; does the Christian? If the Christian does, here is how he goes to the

brother who has sinned against him: he first approaches the sinful brother to tell him his fault; if his brother repents, the matter is settled. If the brother continues in sin, the Christian takes one or two witnesses and approaches the brother again; if his brother repents, the matter is settled. If the brother still does not repent, then—and only then—the matter is taken before the congregation; if he still will not repent, he is counted as a sinner. The attitudes of the prior verses, humility and a hatred of sin and a love for the sinner and a desire to forgive, motivate the Christian to approach his brother correctly! No envy for the sinner, no self-righteousness in the Christian, no joy in the sin, and certainly no gossiping of the situation exists. Like the Lord, the Christian puts a premium on forgiveness!

Matthew 18:18-20

Returning to the thought of Matthew 16:19, Divine authority would rule the church with the apostles' binding and loosing accordingly.

Matthew 18:21-22

Peter, the apostle with whom so many associate themselves due to his impulsiveness and here, curiosity, asked Jesus further regarding the matter of forgiveness. Peter, putting a premium on forgiveness, wondered if forgiving a brother seven times would be an appropriate amount. Jesus, putting a greater premium on forgiveness and revealing His own longsuffering nature, said not seven times, but four hundred and ninety times. Why that number? Numbers have significance: seven and ten are both numbers representing perfection or completion; Jesus multiplied one by the other and for good measure multiplied that number again by seven. Jesus' point was completely forgive every time a brother repents! The Lord put a premium on forgiveness and so should Peter.

Matthew 18:23-35

In the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, the Lord taught that His disciples certainly ought to be forgiving of the relatively small trespasses against them, for by God they had been wholly forgiven of greater transgressions against the Lord. Failure to be forgiving would forfeit their own forgiveness! As the Lord did, so **must** His disciples put a premium on forgiveness.

Regarding the term *premium* stressed constantly through this point, the reader must appreciate that the premium God put on forgiveness was not an imagined value, but the blood of Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Rev. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12)! That is a far cry from the simple humility, hatred for sin, love of the sinner, and desire to forgive that the Christian ought to have motivating him to go to his sinful brother.

The Terms

Understanding the principle of forgiveness is easy; applying the principle without being haughty as the one who has not sinned is more difficult. A number of terms in Scripture can be applied to the one who would gossip concerning the sinful (or even misunderstood or desired) condition of his brother.

Busybody

The elders in the local congregation are to be overseers of their own flocks (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). It is not in the realm of one who is not in the office of elder to think that this is his role, neither can an elder in one congregation think that his role extends to the oversight of other congregations. The word for overseers is *episkopos* (Gr. ἐπίσκοπος). The word translated *busybody* as in 1 Peter 4:15, *allotriepiskopos* (Gr. ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος), shows that this one puts himself in the

place of overseer over one who is his equal. The gossip does that, making another's business his own.

Talebearer

Ones who whisper about others or slander others cause strife; that is the message of Proverbs 26:20: "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer [*nihrgahn* (Heb. נִרְגָּן)], the strife ceaseth." The gossip does not solve problems; he causes them.

False Accuser

Satan is the devil [*diabolos* (Gr. διάβολος)]; so are those who are slanderers and false accusers! These "devils" would be evidence of the last days, having only "a form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:5). While slanderers and false accusers may appear to outclass those about whom they speak, they are, in reality, ungodly and must be avoided! The gossip falls into this category as well.

Self-Righteous

While confronted for eating with publicans and sinners, Jesus referred to the righteous as those whom He did not come to call (Mat. 9:13). The righteous in that context were the self-righteous Pharisees. Jesus' efforts to win the lost would only be effective when the lost realized that they were lost; the Pharisees could not see their own faults (Mat. 6:23) being blinded by their own "righteousness"; nonetheless, they stood condemned (Luke 18:10-14)! The gossip may think that he is righteous, but his is a mere self-righteousness.

Hypocrite

Actors play parts; they are not representing what they are, but what they are not. The Greeks called an actor *hypocrites* (Gr. ὑποκριτής). This word would be brought directly over into the English word *hypocrite*. The hypocrite ignores his own faults while trying to correct the faults of

others; he acts innocent while he is really guilty (Mat. 7:1-5). The gossip is a hypocrite.

The Difficulty

The Christian does not *want* to have to go to his brother that is in sin, because he *wants* for his brother to be righteous. Some, though, glory when others are caught in the vices of sin. The latter is shameful; the former is godly!

The Christian, like John, rejoices when he hears that others are walking in Truth (2 John 4). The Christian, like Paul, does not want to shame his brother (1 Cor. 4:14). The Christian is patient and comforting, but realizes that, at times, he has to warn his brother (1 The. 5:14).

The Process

As was seen in Matthew 18, the process of going to a brother involves first, going by one's self; second, telling another or two and going with them to try and win the impenitent sinner; third, by telling the congregation to try and win the impenitent sinner. If the brother remains impenitent, then the congregation would need to disfellowship the brother (2 The. 3:6; 2 The. 6:14-15).

What if one just has to tell someone out of a sincere love for the soul of the sinful brother and a feeling of self-insufficiency? This took place in Corinth when the household of Chloe told Paul of contentions there (1 Cor. 1:11; 1 Cor. 11:18) and when someone told Paul about the man who was committing fornication with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1). One should remember that Paul was an apostle; he would know what to do and would have the authority to speak against the action effectively. There are no apostles today; is there someone to whom a concerned Christian can go? With the elders having the oversight of the congregation, they could be

approached. It certainly would not need to be the first step, but even another member or the preacher who might have some influence over or special respect of the sinful brother might be involved in step two. The proverbial moral of the story would be this: let the concerned Christian genuinely be watching for the soul of his brother!

The Danger

The danger is that one may gossip about the sin of the brother. Unfortunately, in this day one who wishes to gossip can share his report with anyone in the world. The shortcomings of others are shared around the water cooler and on social media sites such as Facebook. Sadly, some are sharing the sins of others without knowing for sure whether the brother really is in sin. Perhaps they pass along others' gossip, perhaps they do not know the full story, perhaps they pass on what they wish were the case.

Regardless, when Christians report the sins, or supposed sins, of others, three things take place: first, how others view the sinner, or supposed sinner, can have a lasting and destructive effect on his reputation—one which may never be fully recovered; second, how the sinner, or supposed sinner, views the Lord and His church can be negatively affected, especially if the one who is the object of gossip is a new or weak Christian; third, how those outside of Christ view “the church of the Bible” may lead them to wholly abandon the idea of authentic Christianity—this is especially a danger when social media becomes involved!

Conclusion

In this study of Matthew 18, terms concerned with gossiping have been introduced as have the difficulty, process, and danger of going to a brother in sin. It is this writer's wish

that Christians will always put a premium on forgiveness, having a simple humility, a hatred for sin, a love of the sinner, and a sincere desire to forgive.

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Teaching With Meekness—

1 Peter 3:15

Clifton Angel



Clifton Angel is married to the former Lara Savage. He has a BS in Engineering from the University of Georgia. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and Freed-Hardeman University (MA in Ministry). Clifton enjoys learning, preaching, teaching, automotive work, and a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. He preaches for Coldwater Church of Christ in Coldwater, Mississippi.

THIS AUTHOR is indeed thankful for yet another opportunity to proclaim God's Word. The names of every person deserving of gratitude will not be listed here, but special thanksgiving is extended to the Southaven elders and to brethren Blackwell and Jefferies for their labor in putting together this good lectureship.

It is of a certainty that Christians have been commissioned by Christ to teach. Matthew records Jesus' command to His apostles, which command most assuredly applies to Christians today:

And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of

all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (American Standard Version, Mat. 28:18–20)

However, if the command to teach is fulfilled without regulating it with other requirements from the Scriptures, God's Word has been violated just as the false teacher has done by limiting salvation to faith only. In fact, it is possible for one to teach others, convert others, and be lost oneself. Paul wrote the church at Philippi:

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. (King James Version, Phi. 1:15–18)

Paul rejoiced that the truth in Christ was preached. He did not rejoice that some were teaching and preaching with false motives. Therefore, it is necessary to teach the truth properly. To the church at Ephesus, Paul discussed the need for the completeness of God's revelation in order "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and

fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But **speaking the truth in love**, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:14–15, emphasis added, CA). Paul charged Timothy to preach and teach God’s Word with “all longsuffering” (2 Tim. 4:2). He also wrote to the Colossian church that their words be “always with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6). Peter exhorted all Christians to be ready to give a defense of the truth “with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). The references could continue on how Christians are to teach with love, long-suffering, grace, fear, meekness, gentleness, patience, temperance, boldness, confidence, and much more.

It will be the endeavor of this discourse to sum these all in the specificity of teaching with meekness. If for no other reason, Christians should seek to teach with meekness because thus did Jesus, the Master Teacher: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:28–30).

Meaning Of Meekness

“Deficient in spirit and courage,” “not violent or strong,” or “having or showing a quiet and gentle nature: not wanting to fight or argue with other people” (“Meek”). If the definition of only the popular *Merriam-Webster* dictionary is used, one might be left with the impression that *meekness* means “weakness.” A person that lacks courage and strength is a person who is weak. A person that never fights may be a person who is weak. However, when the definition of *meekness* is derived from the Bible, one must conclude some things quite opposite of the former dictionary citations.

Meekness is found among the list of “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23). It is a characteristic of “the elect of God” (Col. 3:12). Meekness, accompanied by reverence, enables a Christian to defend his faith in the face of persecution (1 Pet. 3:15). “In the spirit of meekness,” a Christian can bring an erring brother or sister to restoration (Gal. 6:1). “In meekness,” Timothy was exhorted to correct those who “oppose themselves” (2 Tim. 2:25). Consider a portion of David Lipscomb’s comments on the passage of 2 Timothy 2:25:

The feelings and impulses of the flesh, the excitements and rivalries of controversy, the desire to expose error, and to make it appear unworthy—all have a tendency to lead us to forget that the Lord demands courteous consideration in our treatment of others. He demands that we give the same consideration to the mistakes and faults of others that we would like to receive and expect of them for our mistakes and faults. It does not mean that we should overlook their mistakes or let the faults go unreprieved; but he demands that we should treat them kindly and to respect their feelings in correcting them.
(224)

Furthermore, it is “with meekness” that a person is able to put away an abundance of sinful practices and receive God’s Word “which is able to save your souls” (Jam. 1:21). Finally, meekness is a characteristic of Jesus, who upholds “all things by the word of his power” (Mat. 11:29; Heb. 1:3).

It is the hope of this author that the reader is beginning to see the tremendous strength involved in meekness. Truly, meekness is not weakness.

In actuality, meekness is strength or power that is controlled and properly used. Meekness has been likened to an equestrian bridling his horse. Horses have colossal strength, yet they can be trained to control it and properly use it, giving it into the hands of the rider. They exhibit meekness under the control of their master.

Models Of Meekness

Many men and women of the Bible are models of meekness. However, in the Scriptures, only three individuals—Sarah, Moses, and Jesus—are explicitly described as being meek.

Sarah

The Apostle Peter, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned:

In like manner, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives; beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner aforetime the holy women also, who hoped in God,

adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose children ye now are, if ye do well, and are not put in fear by any terror. (1 Pet. 3:1–6, ASV, emphasis added, CA)

Among former holy women, the inspired Peter elected to name Sarah as a specific example of a wife with “a meek and quiet spirit.” The text says she displayed her meekness by her obedience and respect for her husband (1 Pet. 3:6).

Consider Sarah. How meek does a wife have to be when her husband spontaneously informs her of their need to leave their hometown, their home country, their parents, siblings, and other family members, their place of comfort, and her nest (Gen. 12:1)? “Where are we going?” one might imagine Sarah asking. “I do not know,” would have to be Abraham’s response (Heb. 11:8). How meek does a wife have to be when her husband’s lies put her life and purity in the hands of powerful, ungodly strangers—not once, but twice (Gen. 12:9–20; Gen. 20:1–18)? How meek does a wife have to be, when her entire life’s desire was to mother her own child, yet she remained barren even to the age of 89, then her husband comes to her and says, “Let us try for a son” (Gen. 16:1; Gen. 21:1–3)? Finally, Scripture does not reveal any knowledge on Sarah’s part of Abraham’s requirement to sacrifice Isaac, her only son—her only child. But how meek does a wife have to be when she learns that the life of her only begotten son is hanging in the balance (Gen. 22:1–2)?

Moses

“Now the man Moses was very **meek**, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3; emphasis added, CA). Further investigation of the context of this

parenthetical revelation of God reveals what it meant for Moses to be meek.

In the previous two verses, the Bible records an **offense** made by the siblings of Moses.

And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it. (Num. 12:1-2)

They suffered a **consequence** for speaking against their brother Moses:

And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore

then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous. And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb. (Num. 12:4–12)

But it is Moses' **expense** which displays his meekness. He rather chose to be merciful than malicious. How easy would have it been for Moses to say to Miriam, "That is what you get for debasing me and my wife." To Aaron he could have replied, "Why should I honor your request after you joined in with Miriam and her disdain?" No such words ever left Moses' lips. Lovingly, sacrificially, and meekly, "Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee" (Num. 12:13). Therefore, it was rightfully said of him, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3).

Jesus

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for **I am meek** and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mat. 11:28–30; emphasis added, CA). Most interesting

to this study is the fact that Jesus uttered these hope-filled, comforting words directly following sharp rebuke (Mat. 11:16–19) and deliberate “name-calling” (the term used in negative accusation of individuals who identify the erring using the names by which they are known), even to the point that the text says he began to “upbraid” them (Mat. 11:20–24). This is important for those who might think that meekness nullifies rebuke, that meekness requires overlooking sin, or that meekness can in no way give the appearance of strength and power.

With that said, meditate a little more on the meek Messiah. Judas had led the officers to arrest Jesus. He was in His favorite place to talk to the Father—Gethsemane. Jesus had already begged the Father’s deliverance with “strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7), “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat. 26:39). But the mighty warrior Peter was letting no man arrest his physical king. In Peter’s mind, this was the moment to fight—the moment he would risk his life to prove his promise never to deny the Messiah (Mat. 26:35). It was time to overtake the Roman Empire and set up Christ’s earthly kingdom. Therefore, Peter “stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest’s, and smote off his ear” (Mat. 26:51). In astounding contrast,

Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? (Mat. 26:52–54)

A full Roman legion had 6,100 foot soldiers and 726 horses in the time of Augustus (Robertson). If A. T. Robertson's numbers are correct, Jesus informed Peter that He had the power to call upon the aid of essentially more than 84,000 angels. Might the reader be reminded, or informed, that it only required one angel to destroy 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (2 Kin. 19:35). The meek Messiah had the entire strength of Heaven at His fingertips!

He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set Him free.
He could have called ten thousand angels,
But He died alone, (alone), for you and me.
(Overholt)

Mastering Meekness

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with **meekness** and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15; emphasis added, CA). Often it is the case that this passage is referenced with the following application or paraphrase: “Memorize Scripture so that you can answer all Bible questions with which people come to you.” Memorizing Scripture is good. Being able to properly and truthfully answer Bible questions is good. However, it is the plea of this author that this verse be considered in light of its context, for there is no more important time than now to realize what Peter was exhorting Christians of the first century to do.

To whom was the Apostle Peter writing? He was writing to Christians (cf. 1 Pet. 1:2). More specifically, he was writing to Christians who were suffering and would suffer because of their faith.

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6–7)

Therefore, Peter wrote to them how they ought to “love one another” (1 Pet. 1:22–25). He wrote to them how they ought to pursue purity (1 Pet. 2:1–12). He commanded them to be good citizens and to obey the laws of the land (1 Pet. 2:13–17). He even addressed Christians who found themselves to be enslaved to men, which situation many find themselves in the nature of secular employment today (1 Pet. 2:18–25). He wrote to Christian women who had non-Christian husbands (1 Pet. 3:1–6). He addressed Christian men who sought to be better husbands (1 Pet. 3:7). Then, he addressed every group together:

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and

ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. (1 Pet. 3:8–12)

They had suffered. They may have been suffering when he wrote to them. They were going to suffer more. Many of them would suffer at the hands of their own government—ironically, the government’s responsibility was to protect their physical well-being. However, Peter wrote to them an infallible message that would instill hope, courage, and confidence in Christians throughout the ages.

And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. (1 Pet. 3:13–17)

Consider also another rendering of the particular verse of focus: “**But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord:** being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a

reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15, ASV, emphasis added, CA). Peter is encouraging them to realize the same thing Paul was trying to get the Philippian church to realize: “For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phi. 3:20, ASV). The entirety of their hearts must scream this holy message: “Christ is Lord!” Once that truth fills the hearts of Christians, it is then that they can realize the following truths: The government is not their master; Their persecutors are not their master; Their physical well-being is not their master; Their physical wealth is not their master. Christ is their Master! He controls the Christian!

My heart, my mind, my body, my soul,
I give to You, take control.
I give my body a living sacrifice.
Lord, take control, take control (“Lord,
Take Control”).

When a person gives his life completely into the hands of Christ as his Master, it is then that he can teach with meekness and reverence those who ask why he has hope, those who doubt his hope, and those who demand a reason for his hope. May the reader be reminded of the horse that meekly follows the commands of the equestrian. He exhibits meekness under the control of his master. In like manner, Christians display meekness under the control of their Master.

Conclusion

Meekness is a word rarely found in common conversation, and an attitude rarely displayed in today’s communities. The meaning of meekness is not found in frailty but in controlled strength. Monumental models of meekness are found in

the persons of Sarah, Moses, and Jesus. The mastering of meekness requires one being Mastered by the Christ. If Christians truly want to change the world, they shall do it by teaching with meekness, for the meek “shall inherit the earth” (Mat. 5:5). “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:28–30).

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Making Christianity Attractive

Joe Wells



Joe Wells is married to Erin, and they have four children, Colton, Michala, Camden, and Bennett. The Wells reside in Spring Hill, TN. He has earned a BS degree in Science.

He is a graduate of the Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies. Joe also has an MA in Ministry from Freed Hardeman University. Joe travels the country as a frequent speaker for youth and family events. He is the co-founder of Kaio Publications, publishers of the Family Devotional series as well as the Finer Grounds Bible Study series for women. Joe is also the author of the book *Game Plan: Developing a Spiritually Winning Strategy for Adults and Teens in Today's Culture*. Joe has served God in a public way since 2000 in the capacity of youth minister and gospel preacher, helping people make the connection with the Word of God and encouraging them to be transformed for Christ. Currently, he serves as a minister with the Concord Road Church of Christ in Brentwood, TN.

MARKETING EXPERTS would all agree that if you do not get your product or service before potential customers in an attractive manner, they will most likely not want to buy what you are selling when it comes time to make a purchase. That is why companies such as Coca-Cola, which spend upwards of \$565 million in advertising/marketing efforts in the US alone and \$3.3 billion in reaching a global market, devote huge departments to research, plan, and implement cutting edge marketing strategies (Zmuda).

The most recent of these efforts was born in Australia and is simply called the “Share a Coke” campaign. In this very successful yet simple approach, marketing experts at Coke removed their traditional “Coke” logo on their bottles and cans and replaced them with some of the most popular names of people (Mary, David, George) and with some of the most generic, yet socially driven words common to us (Friends, Buddy, Mom, Dad, and even Mate—for the British fans). Those who initiated the program stated,

Our research showed that while teens and young adults loved that Coca-Cola was big and iconic, many felt we were not talking to them at eye level. Australians are extremely egalitarian. There’s a phrase called “tall poppy syndrome.” If anyone gets too big for their boots, they get cut down like a tall poppy. By putting first names on the packs, we were speaking to our fans at eye level. (Moye)

Their campaign worked. In Australia, a country where the population is around 23 million, Coke sold more than 250 million bottles or cans which included the new names or catch words. This campaign has since spread to more than 70 countries throughout the world and has been labeled by many as one of, if not the, most successful marketing campaigns in recent history (Moye). With virtual, named bottles being given through social media, kiosks being set up in malls for people to special order named bottles or cans, and even service men and women being sent care packages with Coke products including their name, it is very clear to see that simply having a product is not enough to cause

people to make the purchase. There has to be an attraction to the product, so that the customer realizes the need for your particular product in their life.

Adorning The Doctrine Of God

In the second chapter of the book of Titus, the apostle Paul impressed upon the young evangelist on three separate occasions (New King James Version, Tit. 2:5; Tit. 2:8; Tit. 2:10) the importance of the Christian's behavior and the impact it has on the Word of God being looked at in a respectful manner. The message is very clear: If you claim to be a follower of God, yet act in a way that is not consistent with this claim, you will do damage both to your influence and the influence the Word of God will have in the hearts of others. Thus the charge is laid before Titus to relay to others, specifically bondservants, to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Tit. 2:10).

It is this word *adorn* that is of interest for this particular lesson. This verb is in the present tense and carries the meaning of setting in order and thus bringing honor and dignity to, in this case, the doctrine of God (Zodhiates). In other verses, we find this "adorning" involving houses being in order (Mat. 12:44), monuments of the righteous being decorated (Mat. 23:29), and women who submitted to their husbands (1 Pet. 3:5). Thus, with the weight of this word, we begin to understand what the apostle Paul was truly saying to Titus in chapter two and verse ten. Christians have a great responsibility when it comes to the way we live and the reflection of our lives on the Word of God.

But why does it matter? Why does God need me to make anything concerning Him more attractive? After all, is it not true that God does not need our lives to increase the effectiveness of His Word? The Bible claims His Word is

everlasting (Psa. 119:89), a lamp to the feet (Psa. 119:105), right and true (Psa. 33:4), able to make one grow in salvation (1 Pet. 2:2), the word of life (Phi. 2:16), truth (John 17:17), able to save (Jam. 1:21), and where we place our hope (Psa. 119:114). It truly is great in and of Itself, being the only inspired writing we have passed down from the Holy Spirit, through the hands of the biblical writers, to us today (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). By His words, the universe came to be (Gen. 1:1-31). It was God who set the beautiful rainbow in the sky, demonstrating His covenant nature (Gen. 9:13). The blood-sprinkled hill called Golgotha screams of His great love for humanity (Mat. 27:33). So why does my life matter when it comes to the impact of Christianity on this world?

The answer, while very simple, is very profound: We need to make Christianity more attractive because following after Jesus Christ is costly and difficult, and many will turn away from Christ alone, much less see no reason to walk the narrow path if those walking with them are not convinced and convicted in what we do. The wide path of Matthew 7 is filled with people who are looking for something. The problem is, often times they do not see the point in giving one's life in complete submission to God. Their selfishness has overtaken and blinded them to the reality of God's existence, their need for Jesus as the Christ, and the importance of the revealed Word of God. However, sometimes they lack the clear picture of what following after Christ truly means because we as Christians are not doing a very good job of demonstrating it by our lives. Many have forgotten the command to be holy as God charged His children of old (Lev. 19:2) and His children today (1 Pet. 1:16). Because of these two blinders, those on this wide path struggle to see the benefits of a life of devotion to God. That is why God needs us. We who are Christians are called to demonstrate

what Christianity is truly about by the lives we live both individually and collectively.

The Difficulties That Make It Unattractive

In Matthew 13, Jesus spoke a parable involving multiple types of soils and a sower. As the seed, the Word of God (Luke 8:11), is sown, some soils immediately receive and accept it; however, difficulties choke the growth, causing the once promising crop to disappear. As explained in Luke 8:18-23, Jesus associated the stony and the thorny soils with those who immediately receive yet are driven away by lack of depth, tribulation, persecution, cares of the world, and deceitfulness of riches. Having briefly experienced joy in the newness of their faith, these Christians, babes in Christ, quickly abandon ship as the storms of life rage. Instead of enduring, they choose to join those on the wide and heavily traveled path leading away from God.

The road of Christianity has great reward attached to it; however, if an honest evaluation is taken, and face value is considered, a lot of potential obstacles appear to one being attracted to this path. The crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6-8) promised to those who hold fast is unquestionably desirable, but hurdles make the spreading of this valuable news difficult, for the world oftentimes sees the immediate difficulties and self-sacrifices almost as a repellant. Because of these obstacles, multitudes have turned away from Christ and many more never even consider following Him.

We can learn a great deal on this matter by examining just a portion of Scripture. In Matthew 8-11, we read of at least seven separate obstacles that Christians have faced or will face in their walk. The first is the basic difficulty of following after Christ as explained in Matthew 8:19-22. Being approached by a zealous scribe boldly proclaiming, "Teacher,

I will follow You wherever You go,” Jesus immediately gave him perspective by explaining the life this scribe so desperately and emphatically desired was not going to be easy, after all. For the Christian, our attachment is not to this world, nor the comforts this world allows.

The second obstacle can be found in Matthew 8:34, where it is recorded that “the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.” The context of this passage explains their statement was a direct result of the actions of Jesus in casting out the demons from the men in the country of the Gergesenes (Mat. 8:28-32). On the surface, it seems this miracle should have made the people in that country want Jesus to stay; however, because of their apparent uncertainty and fear of who Jesus was, they begged, beyond asked, implored Him to leave their area. It is this hurdle that causes many today to do the same to Jesus.

Third, one of the biggest difficulties Christianity presents on the surface is that some beliefs do not make sense to common, human logic, especially logic rooted in the mind geared to the flesh instead of one rooted in the Spirit. This is demonstrated in Matthew 9:24, when Jesus was ridiculed by the professional mourners at the home of the ruler we are introduced to in Matthew 9:18. As Jesus approached the bedside of the ruler’s daughter, Jesus told the crowd to “Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping” (Mat. 9:24). It is this statement that caused ridicule to come His way, and it is statements like this that cause some to look at Christianity as fanciful. Their fleshly focused minds struggle to comprehend the spiritual component of life and of eternity.

In Matthew 10:16, Jesus pointed out our fourth difficulty when He warned the disciples of coming persecutions at the hands of those described as wolves. He declared that those

who go forth in His name will be delivered up to councils, scourged, brought before governors and kings, and delivered up (Mat. 10:17-18). It is also within this chapter that we find the fifth and the sixth hurdles as Jesus, in verse 25, told His followers they, in like manner as He was, would be ridiculed and falsely accused as well as the coming about of family problems due to the conviction required to follow after Jesus (Mat. 10:25; Mat. 10:34-39).

The seventh difficulty, and final of our discussion towards this point, is addressed in a direct statement from Jesus. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Mat. 11:12). It is this violence towards followers of Jesus we can read about both in secular history and in Biblical history that definitely presents an inherit difficulty for some who glance at Christianity. This reality can be seen today in the mass killings and public humiliations of followers of Jesus in certain countries where religions such as Islam dominate the culture of the country.

By looking at this very small sample of Scripture, one can clearly see why the subject “Making Christianity Attractive” needs to be considered. It is affirmed that the power of God is found within His Word (Rom. 1:16); however, as we, like billboards standing beside the interstate, walk in the world, we are called to be lights (Mat. 5:14-16) and to live in such a way that by observing us, even in our sufferings, the world may glorify God (1 Pet. 3:13-17). The question then is, How can we make Christianity attractive to the world around us?

How We Can Make Christianity Attractive

While the quality of being attractive is often a subjective topic, we can learn and come to appreciate what the Scriptures say regarding the way we, as Christians, demonstrate what

it truly means to follow after Christ. The reality is, we are God's "marketing plan" when it comes to advancing the greatest "product" ever made available to humanity—the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If the world, in particular those with whom we have influence, sees us in a light that casts doubt and negativity upon what we claim to follow, be certain, they will not desire what we claim. However, when the world sees us walking in the light as we have been commissioned to do (1 John 1:7; Eph. 5:8), they will observe what it means to be transformed (Rom. 12:2) and no longer to find fun in dissipation (1 Pet. 4:4), and they will see the conviction of individuals who are anchored in hope that transcends our circumstances (Heb. 6:19).

Five Ways We Can Make Christianity Attractive

The first way we can make Christianity attractive to the world around us is through the way we respond and cope with the struggles and pains we endure in life. Every family is touched by difficulties; however, the world deals with them in one way and Christians respond in another way. In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul wrote, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). However, this promise is sandwiched between two passages (Rom. 8:18 and Rom. 8:35) that make it very clear that this promise does not mean we will not have an absence of sufferings. It is what we do during these times of trials that the beauty of following Jesus is demonstrated.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything
by prayer and supplication, with
thanksgiving, let your requests be made
known to God; and the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding will

guard your hearts and minds through
Christ Jesus. (Phi. 4:6-7)

It is this peace the apostle Paul wrote about that not only impacts our well-being, but also makes an impression upon those who watch us go through these difficulties. Initially, they may not understand why we respond to what would otherwise be anxious circumstances in a peaceful way, but they will notice the way we respond and accredit said response to our faith in God.

Secondly, we have the opportunity to draw others towards a life of following Jesus by the true convictions we do not simply talk of, but we live. This concept was clearly explained by Paul to the church in Rome when he wrote,

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written. (Rom. 2:21-24)

The Jews were saying the right things; however, they were bringing shame to the name of God because their lives were not consistent with what they were teaching. Being probably the most destructive tool to the saving work of Christ, hypocrisy cheapens and belittles. It causes those who observe simply to stay away. After all, why should they be

drawn towards Christianity if the Christians they know act and live the same way they do?

It was the apostle Peter who wrote concerning the great impact conviction coupled with lifestyle has on the world:

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Pet. 2:11-12)

A third way we can place Christianity before the world in a positive light is by our behavior within the culture we live. In 1 Peter 2:13, we read, “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” Peter continued to write that through our abiding by the laws of the land, we will “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Pet. 2:15). The connection is clear—we will be judged by those in the world based upon the way we live in the culture we are planted. In other words, if we claim to be a Christian, yet we continually get in trouble with the authorities because of our lack of submission to the laws around us, we shine a negative light on what being a Christian is all about. We are not called to bend where God has given us an “iron-clad” teaching within Scripture. However, we need to remember that we are to strive to live peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:18) all while letting our light shine through our good works so that God will be glorified (Mat. 5:16).

Fourthly, Christianity will be made attractive by the way we interact with those outside of the Church. Are

our interactions with non-Christians frustrating at times? Absolutely! No matter how difficult those interactions may become at times, we must always remember that our walk must demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit and not the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-26). Therefore, anger, slander, malice, and all manners of ill-treatment towards our neighbors ought not be found amongst God's children.

In the book of Colossians, the apostle Paul described the great opportunity we have before non-Christians when he wrote, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:5-6). He also affirmed the intention of God to use our interactions to grace those we come in contact with when he wrote, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29). Again, the message is clear—Christianity can either be made attractive or repulsive to those around us simply by the way we interact and respond to them.

Lastly, when considering ways we can make Christianity attractive, one must think about the way we treat and care for each other as fellow Christians. If we claim to follow Christ, then turn around and behave as if we do not want to have anything to do with others who are on the straight and narrow path leading to eternal life, what message are we truly sending? Please understand, the previous question is not suggesting an acceptance of false teaching, as that would be a clear violation of Scripture (2 John 10-11). However, when Jesus prayed for unity in John 17:20-21, He truly painted a beautiful picture of Christian care and unity, a picture that is demonstrated in the early days of the Church when we see Christians being of "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). This

picture is highlighted and brought into more clarity when we understand they were not placing their belongings above the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 4:34-35). It truly is an image that proclaimed—to the world then and to us today—the level of love and concern the early Christians had for one another.

Is not that what we are called to do? Are we not called to love one another in deed, not simply in word or tongue (1 John 3:18)? Of course we are, and the Scriptures make it clear that by our love we have for one another, the world will be able to identify us absolutely as disciples of Jesus Christ (John 13:35). They will know us by our love, and this love will attract more and more who are searching to fill the void in their lives due to the absence of this type of love.

Conclusion

For Coca-Cola, the “Share a Coke” campaign was far more successful than everyone thought it would be. The product did not change. Coke was and is Coke; however, the connection made between the consumer and the product did change. By making the product come across as attractive and needed in the lives of the millions who purchased a bottle or a can with that special name written across the label, Coca-Cola had a huge and successful period of sales.

For God, His marketing strategy is just as simple and just as personal. The message is as powerful today as it has ever been, and the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is badly needed. That is why we must embrace the reality that, through our lives, following after Jesus Christ will either be made more attractive or more repulsive.

We know the wide path must be very attractive because the Bible speaks of the multitude treading there (Mat. 7:13). Christians must embrace our responsibility in showing the

peace that we have in Christ in enduring life's unexpected twist and turns. We have to live what we proclaim and abide by the laws of the land in as much as they do not violate the Word of God. Granted, we have the answers the world is searching for because we know grace and truth in Jesus Christ; however, if we respond in ways lacking the seasoning and not leading to edification, those outside of Christ will not care about what we have to say because what we say will be lost in how we say it.

Granted, we will always have those who are simply not open to the narrow path of discipleship. For one reason or another, they will not see the eternal benefit of being a Christian. However, while this is true, we should all strive to live our lives in such a way that God will be glorified (Mat. 5:16). We are saved for a purpose. Resolve today, that through your life, you will "proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

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A Case Study Of Barnabas

Chad Dollahite



Chad Dollahite married the former Reagan Campbell. They have four children: Joshua (11), Levi (9), Rachel (7), & Noah (5). He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching; he earned a BA in Biblical Studies from Amridge University. He has done local work in IL, AL, TN, and GA. Currently, he is working with the Bremen congregation in Bremen, GA. He has also served as the Program Director for GBN.

MERRIAM-WEBSTER's online dictionary defines *case study* as "a published report about a person, group, or situation that has been studied over time; also: a situation in real life that can be looked at or studied to learn about something" ("Case study"). The study embarked upon in this particular section of the lectureship and its accompanying book falls under both definitions. Being included in the annual lectureship book, this material will be published; Barnabas was a real person; Barnabas' life ("situation") has been studied for nearly two thousand years; and Barnabas' real-life situation(s) absolutely can be studied to learn much for our Christian lives today. Thus begins "A Case Study of Barnabas," centered around the overall theme of this year's lectureship, namely, *Reproving, Rebuking & Exhorting*.

Paul the apostle exhorted the young evangelist Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (King

James Version, 2 Tim. 4:2). This instruction necessitates both positive and negative aspects (e.g., reproving and rebuking versus exhorting). Many preachers in both the Old and New Testaments exemplified such godly preaching, but the study before us at this time concerns a man named Barnabas. Given that Barnabas' name appears twenty-nine times in the New Testament (KJV) and given that only the apostles Paul and Peter are mentioned more in the book of Acts (Paul 132 times, Peter 58, Barnabas 24), Barnabas certainly is worthy of such a "case study" pertaining to living the Christian life (and particularly to gospel preaching). Barnabas is first introduced in Acts 4:36-37, and the last we read of him is in Colossians 4:10 (Grubb). In between, the Holy Spirit records various noble characteristics displayed by Barnabas; these characteristics are what make Barnabas a worthy study. These characteristics will be developed in the remainder of this particular chapter.

Barnabas As An Encouraging Man

Most Bible students, if asked to tell something they know about Barnabas, would say immediately that they recall him as an encourager. Many, no doubt, do not even realize that "Barnabas" is merely the nickname for this man. When he is first introduced in the Bible, his given name, "Joses," in the King James Version (really "Joseph") is mentioned; but from that point forward, he is merely known to the Bible reader by his nickname, "Barnabas" (translated, as Luke points out in Acts 4:36, as "son of consolation"). *Consolation* is a synonym for comfort or encouragement. The same Greek word (or, at least, its root) is used many times in the New Testament, but one notable use that helps to understand how encouraging a man Barnabas was is 2 Corinthians 1:3: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies,

and the God of all **comfort**” (emphasis added, CD). Another familiar passage where this word is used is Romans 15:4: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (emphasis added, CD). Barnabas was an encourager! How so?

Barnabas Encouraged New Christians

Students of the Bible are thrilled to read of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who, having been a great persecutor of the church (Acts 8:3; Acts 22:3-5; 1 Tim. 1:13), was converted to Christ and became a great preacher and apostle of Jesus Christ. But, as one can imagine, the early Christians were a bit skeptical when the persecutor Saul showed up, suddenly claiming he was “one of them.” This event is recorded in Acts 9:26-28, when Saul arrived in Jerusalem and sought to join himself to the disciples there. Was it a ruse, simply to infiltrate their ranks and persecute them further? Enter Barnabas. According to verse 27, Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the disciples and vouched for him regarding his having seen the Lord, the Lord speaking to him, and Saul’s preaching at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Acts 9:28 simply tells us, “And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.” What a critical time for Saul, though! One can imagine the mental roller coaster this man had just experienced, having learned that what he thought was faithful service to God was actually persecuting the God of heaven Himself (Acts 9:5)! Further, when Saul became a Christian, his life was almost immediately in jeopardy because of such, and from which he only narrowly escaped (Acts 9:23-25). Now, his new “brethren” want nothing to do with him. How discouraging! This must have been a crucial time for Saul; thank God Barnabas was there to encourage him, to bring him to the disciples, and to help him gain acceptance!

This encouragement must have laid the foundation for the close relationship between Paul and Barnabas that unfolds between Acts 9 and Acts 15; they were nearly inseparable friends in carrying out the work of the Lord, a friendship that began because Barnabas encouraged the new Christian Paul at a critical time.

Barnabas Encouraged Congregations In Their Spiritual Growth/Development.

When the church at Jerusalem heard about the conversion of a number of people in Antioch of Syria, they sent Barnabas to encourage them and to assist in their spiritual growth (Acts 11:20-22) and according to Acts 11:23, that is exactly what Barnabas did. No wonder “much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24)! Then, Barnabas departed to Tarsus to seek Saul (Acts 11:25), and they joined forces to teach many (Acts 11:26). Barnabas was also among the prophets and teachers in Antioch who ministered to the Lord and helped develop the church in that city (Acts 12:1-2). Furthermore, Barnabas encouraged the early church’s spiritual growth and development in helping to appoint elders, as pointed out in Acts 14:23. Upon arrival back at Antioch, Barnabas located there for some time, continuing to teach and encourage the spiritual development of the church (Acts 14:28). Upon leaving Jerusalem with a letter for the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Barnabas again was side by side with Paul, teaching and preaching, helping encourage the spiritual development of the early church (Acts 15:35).

Barnabas Encouraged Equality In Christ.

When Paul and Barnabas arrived back at Antioch, they rehearsed their missionary journey, particularly how God had opened the proverbial doors of the church to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). When Paul, Barnabas, and others traveled to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders there about

the matter of circumcision (Acts 15:1-2), Barnabas (with Paul) declared the conversion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:3), and they jointly testified to all at Jerusalem regarding the miracles God had performed among the Gentiles via Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12). When it was determined that a letter of encouragement would be sent to the Gentile brethren, Barnabas was the obvious choice to go with Paul to deliver such (Acts 15:22-29). As a result, the Gentile Christians “rejoiced for the consolation” (Acts 15:30-31), or encouragement, that such news brought. Ironically (as will be noted later), Barnabas, the champion of the Gentiles’ equality in Christ, was himself vulnerable to peer pressure in getting caught up in hypocrisy pertaining to this matter (Gal. 2:11-21). (This will be developed further later in this lesson.)

Barnabas Encouraged The Discouraged.

Having returned from the meeting in Jerusalem with the apostles and elders (Acts 15:1-31), Paul later decided to make another missionary journey to check on the brethren where he and Barnabas had previously labored (Acts 15:36). Naturally, Barnabas was Paul’s choice of traveling companion. Acts 15:37 records that Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them on this trip. Paul, however, was determined **not** to take John Mark, due to the fact that John Mark had left them on the previous missionary journey (Acts 15:38). By way of giving background information, John Mark was minister (or servant/helper) to Paul and Barnabas on that first journey (Acts 12:25; Acts 13:5); however, at Perga in Pamphylia, John Mark determined to depart and return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). (Incidentally, the Bible does not reveal why John Mark left, but suffice it to say his departure was clearly not approved by Paul, as evidenced by Paul’s desiring not to take John Mark on this second journey.) While being careful not to venture too far into the realm of speculation, it seems

clear that Barnabas felt John Mark deserved a second chance, evidenced by the fact that he was “determined” to take John Mark with them, as well as by the contention that arose between Barnabas and Paul over whether or not John Mark would, in fact, accompany them on the journey. The point to be made here is that Barnabas, ever the encourager, did not give up on John Mark. No doubt, Paul had valid reasons for not wanting John Mark to go along with them; to risk potentially losing him again on a missionary journey did not seem wise to Paul. Many have debated the question, Who was right, Barnabas or Paul? Could it be, however, that both were, in some way, correct? Paul absolutely had valid reservations, but Barnabas saw a brother who needed encouragement and such being the very nature of Barnabas, he was determined to give such needed encouragement to John Mark. Having the luxury of hindsight, we can see now that Barnabas’ confidence in and encouragement of John Mark paid off, for Paul commended John Mark (also known simply as Mark, or Marcus) to the brethren some time later (Col. 4:10). Also, near the end of his life, Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy, “Only Luke is with me. **Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry**” (2 Tim. 4:11, emphasis added, CD). Though the disagreement resulted in Paul and Barnabas going their separate ways (Acts 15:39-40), Paul clearly harbored no ill will toward Barnabas. What an encouragement Barnabas was to John Mark, who undoubtedly would have been greatly discouraged by Paul’s refusal to take him on the missionary journey!

Barnabas As An Ethical Man

Though not perfect, Barnabas was a man of the utmost ethical character, and such is seen in the confidence placed in him by the early church. Perhaps nowhere is the ethical

nature of Barnabas seen more than in the inspired epitaph given him by the Holy Spirit through Luke: “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (Acts 11:24). When the church at Jerusalem heard about the Christians in Antioch and needed a reliable, dependable man to send there to help the church, they chose none other than Barnabas (Acts 11:19-22). When the brethren in Antioch determined to send relief to the brethren in Judaea, such needed to be entrusted to a man of high ethical character; that man (along with Paul) was Barnabas (Acts 11:27-30). When the Holy Spirit chose men “for the work” of preaching the gospel in the missionary field, He selected Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-2). When souls needed confirming (especially in the midst of tribulation) and elders needed ordaining in those missionary congregations, Barnabas was working right along with Paul in the work (Acts 14:20-23). Paul pointed out to the Galatian brethren that Peter, James, and John gave to both Paul and Barnabas “the right hand of fellowship” (Gal. 2:1; Gal. 2:9), further illustrating the credibility of Barnabas, which stemmed from his well-known Christian ethics. As noted previously, when the Jerusalem church determined to send an encouraging letter to the Gentile brethren, Barnabas was chosen to go along with Paul and deliver the letter (Acts 15:22-25). This man Joses, or Joseph, whom we know affectionately by his nickname *Barnabas*, was not merely a back-slapping “good ole boy” who simply sought to make everyone feel good about themselves; he was a man of utmost integrity, and his strong Christian ethics endeared him to the early church.

Barnabas As An Enduring Man

Barnabas was no “fair-weather Christian”; he endured much in his labors for the Lord and through it all, he

remained steadfast and faithful. It shall be noted more fully that he was by no means sinless, but he never stopped or turned back from his service to the Lord Jesus. On the island of Paphos, Paul and Barnabas encountered a sorcerer named Elymas, who sought to prevent the deputy (Sergius Paulus) from hearing and obeying the gospel (Acts 13:6-12). Paul and Barnabas were not deterred in the least, however, and God chastened the man Elymas with blindness via Paul's pronouncement (Acts 13:10-11). When John Mark left Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13), such may have been a temptation for Barnabas to leave, too. We know from Colossians 4:10 that Barnabas and John Mark were related, so it might have been tempting for Barnabas to stick with his family. But Barnabas remained with Paul, continuing the most important work in the world. Shortly thereafter, at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14), Barnabas encountered unbelieving Jews who spoke against him and Paul, even stirring up the people and raising persecution against the two gospel preachers (Acts 13:45-50). Again, Barnabas is right by Paul's side as they "shook off the dust of their feet against them" (Acts 13:51) and pressed onward in the Lord's work. Just a couple of cities later, in Lystra, Paul healed a crippled man, which then set the people in a frenzy, supposing that Paul and Barnabas were gods (Acts 14:8-18). Some wicked Jews took advantage of the situation and managed to turn the people against Paul such that they stoned him and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead (Acts 14:19). Paul was not dead, however, and he got up and returned into the city (Acts 14:20)! Barnabas saw this entire terrifying scene, but when Paul set out for Derbe the next day, Barnabas was still right there with him! Can there be any doubt that Barnabas was an enduring, steadfast man? Later, when men from Judaea wanted to impose circumcision on the Gentile Christians, Barnabas showed his endurance

again, not giving in to their demands and then traveling along with Paul to Jerusalem to settle the matter (Acts 15:1-2). Barnabas was the very epitome of Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian brethren:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. (Eph. 4:14-15)

Barnabas As An Erring Man

When speaking of the ethical character of Barnabas or of his steadfast endurance in serving the Lord, such does not suppose he was sinless. One of the great evidences of the Bible's inspiration is its depictions of its "heroes." Works of men paint heroes as near-superhuman-type people who often seem incapable of wrong; such is not the case with the Bible, as seen clearly with Barnabas. In Galatians 2:11-13, Paul recounted an occasion in Antioch when Peter had visited and was eating with Gentile brethren. This happy fellowship continued until certain ones from James arrived, at which point Peter immediately separated himself from the Gentiles (clearly wanting to avoid any backlash from the ones who came from James over his open fellowship and eating with the Gentiles). Whether the ones who came from James were authorized by James himself is another matter altogether. Some speculate they were; some speculate they were not; and still others speculate that Peter merely jumped to the conclusion that because they were from Jerusalem,

they would not look favorably upon his eating with Gentiles. Regardless, Peter displayed gross hypocrisy, and Paul noted that even Barnabas got carried away with such (Gal. 2:13). Surely Barnabas, longtime partner with Paul in taking the gospel to the Gentiles, would not get caught up in such! Yet he did, and God gives us an illustration (or a “case study”) of 1 Corinthians 10:12, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Even that great ethical, enduring “son of encouragement” caused much discouragement by falling prey to that old foe, peer pressure. Thus, we have a picture in Galatians 2:11-13 of Barnabas as an erring man. Thankfully, this was not the end of the matter, as shall be seen next.

Barnabas As An Emendable Man

How different would our study be had the biblical record of Barnabas ended with the events recorded in Galatians 2:11-13! Thankfully, that is not the end, as we forthwith find that Barnabas was also an emendable man. *Emend* is defined as “to free from faults or errors; correct” (“Emend”). When Peter displayed hypocrisy and Barnabas was caught up in such, Paul issued a stinging rebuke to them both, as well as to all who would hear (including the Galatian brethren to whom Paul was writing, Gal. 2:14-21). Paul understood that no one, whether close friend, an elder in the church, or even an apostle, was above being corrected if he strayed from the path of right. Paul was inspired to write to Timothy,

Against an elder receive not an accusation,
but before two or three witnesses. Them
that sin rebuke before all, that others
also may fear. I charge thee before God,
and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the

elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.
(1 Tim. 5:19-21)

A number of scholars suppose that the events recorded in Galatians 2:11-13 happened just after the meeting in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 (Lipscomb 208-209). If that is true (and it certainly seems likely), then we know Barnabas got the message and made the necessary changes, for Paul chose Barnabas to go with him on his next missionary journey, which obviously would not have happened had Barnabas not made the necessary correction. The whole situation goes from heart-rending to very likely strengthening the bond between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas, though he had erred, illustrated the truth of Proverbs 9:8: “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.”

Barnabas As An Easy-Going Man

An old saying says, “Blessed are the flexible, for they shall never get bent out of shape.” The saying absolutely rings true with Barnabas. The easy-going nature of Barnabas is seen throughout his record in the book of Acts. Barnabas was, as has already been noted, held in rather high esteem by the early church. Acts 14:14 even mentions him as an apostle. While we know (through common sense and other scriptures) Barnabas was not in the same category as an authoritative ambassador of Christ (such as Paul, Peter, James, etc.), it should not be overlooked that he was a man held in very high esteem by the early church. Yet, for all that, time and again, Barnabas was (for lack of a better term) “overshadowed” in a sense. Before Barnabas’ mention in Acts 14:14 among the apostles, the people at Lystra considered

Paul the “chief speaker” (Acts 14:12). It has been said that the most difficult instrument in the world to play is “second fiddle,” and history has shown this saying to be true in many cases, but not so with Barnabas. Barnabas was content to work behind the scenes, in Paul’s shadow, or in whatever capacity he was needed, so long as it was for the glory of God and the benefit of the church. Too many, even to this day, will not be satisfied unless they are the main focus of attention, and they are anything but easy-going if such is not the case. Barnabas never seemed to take note one way or the other as to whether he or Paul or someone else received more credit and/or acclaim. The excellent attitude of Barnabas reminds one of another great servant of God, John the Baptizer, who stated in regard to his relationship to Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Barnabas’ easy-going, flexible nature is nowhere seen more clearly than in Acts 15:36-40, in his handling of the disagreement he had with Paul over whether or not to take John Mark with them on their missionary journey. It is this writer’s opinion that we all would undoubtedly be amazed if we could know how many otherwise good, effective brethren have been hindered from the Lord’s work (and sometimes even rendered unfaithful) due to a personality conflict with another brother/sister in Christ. (Perhaps it is best that we are not capable of knowing; the discouragement resulting from such would surely be substantial.) Yet, true to the saying, “Blessed are the flexible, for they shall never get bent out of shape,” Barnabas would not allow such a petty difference to hinder the greater, larger work of the Lord’s church. Yes, Barnabas believed with all his heart that John Mark deserved a second chance and yes, Paul was firmly convinced that it was not a good idea to take John Mark. But the point is that this whole exchange could have ended so very differently

than it did. True to his flexible nature, Barnabas simply went a separate path from Paul; it may well be that Barnabas thought (as many have noted even to this day) that it was a “win, win” situation because John Mark received his second chance, and one missionary team doubled into two, increasing the good done for the Lord’s kingdom (Grubb). Many have noted that when Barnabas and Paul went their separate ways, Barnabas virtually disappeared from the sacred record of the early church (Webster 25). While the fact is undeniable, it is this writer’s opinion (based on all that has been previously recorded concerning Barnabas’ character) that this humble servant of God was in no way concerned with whether or not his deeds were “in the limelight”; he just wanted to serve God faithfully to the best of his ability.

Barnabas As An Exemplary Man

The Bible is replete with wonderful examples of men and women who followed God faithfully. Sometimes, we may be tempted to think of these men and women as almost superhuman in their faithfulness to and accomplishments for God. Yet, such is not the case, as is seen with Barnabas, a “regular” Christian who happened to make a real difference in the early church. Barnabas made a difference by living out the characteristics noted previously in this study. Today, all Christians ought to realize and respect that we each can make a difference, as well. Encouraging Christians make a difference; only eternity will reveal how many otherwise wavering Christians were strengthened to Paul-like faithful service by an encouraging Christian brother or sister. Faithful congregations all over the world are eternally indebted to everyday Christians who, like Barnabas, are credible, ethical servants of God; no one ever questions whether such brethren can be trusted to do their very best. Heaven will be filled with

so many “regular” Christians who were not perfect, but who repented when they fell short and went on to endure faithfully to the end. And what a difference easy-going Christians make in the Lord’s church; whether mediating a conflict or being flexible enough to accept “playing second fiddle,” they calm tempers, reconcile brethren, and just generally help the work of the Lord move forward faithfully. Barnabas was no “super-Christian,” but he was an exemplary man who is worthy of emulation. Any Christian can be an encourager; be ethical in all things; endure faithfully; acknowledge errors and make the necessary corrections; and be an easy-going, flexible person. And when Christians today are such, then they are exemplary Christians just like Barnabas.

Conclusion

A case study of Barnabas reveals much about this faithful servant of God. An encouraging, ethical, easy-going, and enduring man, he also was human and erred but was willing to repent when he did. This is what makes him such an exemplary man worthy of this case study. One might just as easily look at the history of Barnabas as a case study of balance, for this man was a great encourager, yet he never feared to stand for right and reprove and rebuke when such was necessary. While Barnabas is typically remembered as the great encourager/exhorter (and he certainly was), Barnabas also followed the injunction to reprove and rebuke, as seen primarily in his dealings with encouraging early Christians “that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22) and his strong stand against Judaizing brethren who sought to bind circumcision on the Gentile Christians (Acts 15:2). As a case study, Barnabas reminds us of Paul’s exhortation, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

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Eli: A Case Study In Failing To Discipline Children

Eric Lyons



Eric Lyons is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University, where he earned a BS with a double major in Bible and history and an MMin. Eric, his wife Jana, and their three children (Bo, Micah, and Shelby) live and worship in Wetumpka, Alabama, where Eric works with the Wetumpka Church of Christ as an Associate Minister. Eric currently serves as a member of the Bible Department at Apologetics Press, where he has worked for the past 14 years. Eric has authored or co-authored several books, including *The Anvil Rings: Answers to Alleged Bible Discrepancies* (Volumes 1 & 2), *Behold! The Lamb of God, Truth Be Told*, and *Wonders of God's Creation*. In addition, he writes regularly for the Apologetics Press Web site and is the editor of the *Explorer* Series and assistant editor of *Discovery*, the monthly magazine on Scripture and science for children published by Apologetics Press.

ELI HELD a unique position of authority in Israel around 1100 B.C. He was not only the next-to-last judge of Israel—a position that he held for 40 years (New King James Version, 1 Sam. 4:18)—but he also served in the tabernacle of the Lord in Shiloh as “the priest” of Israel (presumably the high priest; 1 Sam. 1:9; 1 Sam. 2:11; 1 Sam. 2:30; cf. 1 Kin. 2:27). Holy Writ records very little about Eli’s 40-year reign as judge or about his service as priest. Sadly, most of the inspired revelation that we have about him details the grave

sins of his sons and Eli's tolerance of such iniquity, even in the house of God...before all of Israel.

The Sins Of Hophni And Phinehas

We are first introduced to Hophni and Phinehas in 1 Samuel 1:3. They are only briefly mentioned, described as "sons of Eli" and "priests of the Lord" who served in the tabernacle of God when Elkanah "went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of hosts"—before Samuel was ever born.

After the inspired historian of 1 Samuel recorded the events surrounding the birth of Samuel and his arrival at the tabernacle of God in Shiloh to minister "to the Lord before Eli the priest" (1 Sam. 2:11), he wrote much more detail about the caliber of men that Eli's sons were. What is the first thing we learn about the character of these priests? Sadly, "the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12). These sons of the high priest and judge of Israel were actually "sons of Belial" (KJV). That is, they were "worthless" (NASB), "wicked" (NIV) men, whom the sacred text actually indicates "did not know the Lord." But how could men who are "priests of the Lord" (1 Sam. 1:3) not "know the Lord"? The fact is, the expression *to know Jehovah* frequently means much more than a mere awareness of His name and existence. Rather, "to know" (from the Hebrew word *yada*) often means **to learn by experience** (see Lyons). Similar to "Christians" today who may "believe" in Jesus but do not really **believe** (trust and obey) Jesus in a biblical way (see Lyons and Butt), Hophni and Phinehas "knew" of the Lord only intellectually, superficially, and hypocritically; they did not submit to His will and reverently honor Him with their lives and service. They were worthless in their so-called service to the Lord.

What corrupt actions were Hophni and Phinehas committing? First, like many of the first-century Pharisees (Luke 11:39), **the sons of Eli were full of selfishness and greed.** Though the Law of Moses legislated the priests' conduct in the house of God as they interceded on behalf of the Israelites and helped them with their sacrifices, and even though Mosaic Law detailed which parts of the animal sacrifices were to be graciously given to and for the priests (Lev. 7:31-34), Hophni and Phinehas regularly required **more** than their allotted portions—even taking them by force if necessary (1 Sam. 2:13-16). As Willis explained:

[T]he sons of Eli were appropriating for themselves portions of the sacrificial meat which should have been made available to the worshipers for the communal meal that followed the sacrifice (cf. 1:4-5, 7-9, 18; 9:12-13, 22-24) or were taking by force the portions they desired instead of accepting what the worshipers voluntarily offered them....

One sin of the sons of Eli was that when an Israelite came to offer his sacrifice, while the meat intended for the sacrificial meal was boiling..., a servant of the priest would come and thrust a fork into the vessel. Whatever the fork brought up would be the priest's portion. That this was done **while the meat was boiling** dramatizes the greed of Hophni and Phinehas....

The very nature of the sacrifice would suggest that the portion dedicated to

the Lord be offered first, and then the priests and the worshipers receive their portions. The law specified that first the blood of the slaughtered animal was to be thrown against the altar; then the portion belonging to the Lord was to be burned; third, the portion set aside for the priests (see Lev. 7:31-34; Deut. 18:3) was to be given to the priests; and finally, the remainder of the meat was to be given to the worshipers for the communal meal (see Lev. 3:2-4, 8-10, 13-16; 7:28-36; Deut. 18:3). But the sons of Eli demanded that they receive their portions *first*, so they could get the pieces they liked best and cook them the way they desired. The priest's servant demanded this **before the fat was burned**. (45-46, emphasis and italics in original)

The ungodly greediness of Hophni and Phinehas was only made worse by the fact that they did not just **suggest** that worshippers freely give them what wanted, they **demand**ed it. If an Israelite brought his sacrifice to the Lord's house and offered it to the priest (or the priest's servant), saying, "They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires," the priest (and/or the priest's servant) would still say, "**No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force**" (1 Sam. 2:16).

Hophni and Phinehas openly and shamelessly forced their wicked ways upon Israelite worshipers who only wanted to please their Lord by offering Him their sacrifices. (One wonders if Eli's sons acted this way towards Elkanah

when he went to worship and sacrifice to the Lord prior to, and even after, Samuel's birth—1 Sam. 1:3; 1 Sam. 3:21.) Hophni and Phinehas used their positions of authority (as sons of the high priest and judge of Israel) to bully and intimidate the Israelites in order to get whatever portions of food their hearts desired. According to 1 Samuel 1:17, their arrogant, covetous, coercive sins were so egregious because their wrongdoings resulted in Israel treating “the offering of the Lord with contempt” (RSV). Men “despised the offering of the Lord,” because “the sin of the young men was very great” (NASB). A pure and holy act of worship given to the Most High God had turned into a loathsome chore because the Israelites knew that Eli's sons were making themselves “fat with **the best** of all the offerings of Israel” (1 Sam. 2:29, emphasis added, EL).

Sadly, the shamelessness of Hophni and Phinehas did not stop with treating the sacrifices made unto God with contempt. They further defiled the house of God by committing sexual immorality with “the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting” (1 Sam. 2:22)—making the holy house of the Lord more like a pagan temple of prostitutes. Most likely, these women were actually “the **serving women** who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting” (Exo. 38:8, emphasis added, EL). It would not be surprising if Hophni and Phinehas used their physical strength and positions of authority and forced themselves upon these women, similar to how the two (and their servants) would take whatever part they desired of the Israelites' sacrifices “by force” (1 Sam. 2:16). (Such egregious sexual sins and abuse of their authority would seem to fit their rebellious, immoral character.) Even worse, Phinehas was a married man. His sexual immorality could also be categorized as adultery. What is more, at the time of his

death, his wife was nine months pregnant (1 Sam. 4:19-22), yet there is no indication that Phinehas (nor his brother) ever repented of their wicked ways.

Eli's Inadequate Response

So what would Eli, the priest and judge of Israel, do to his extremely wicked and impenitent sons, whose sins were “**very great** before the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:17, emphasis added, EL) and which they did “to all Israel” (1 Sam. 2:22)? How did he handle their selfish, greedy, sexually immoral, public abuse of power? Thankfully, Eli at least confronted them,

Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him? (1 Sam. 2:23-25)

Sadly, many parents rarely confront their children of sin and open rebelliousness before the Lord. Instead, they may sit by the wayside and naively “hope” that their offspring turn out “okay” one day. Other parents are fond of offering a litany of excuses for their misbehaving children: “My son just needs some extra time to sow his wild oats.” “My daughter wouldn't be this way if it were not for _____.” (Fill in the blank. Whose fault is it? The school's? The church's? The preacher's? The coach's?) The fact is, God no more wants to hear such excuses from parents today than he wanted to hear the “grasshopper” excuses made by the 10 fearful Israelite spies 3,500 years ago (Num. 13:31-33).

To Eli's credit, at least he did not offer excuses for Hophni and Phinehas. When he heard from the people of Israel about his sons' sins (1 Sam. 2:22), there is no indication that he chided the Israelites for being the bearer of bad news. He did not act like a corrupt politician who merely (and childish) seeks to smear the messenger. When an anonymous prophet of God revealed to Eli (among other things) that his house would be judged and that Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day (1 Sam. 2:27-36), again, there is no hint that Eli attempted to cover up his sons' sins. (He did not even play the "age card." Even in his 90s, he knew there were no excuses for his sons' sins or his toleration of them before all of Israel.) And what excuse did Eli offer when Samuel informed him that the Lord said, "I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end" (1 Sam. 3:12)? None. In fact, Eli responded, saying, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him" (1 Sam. 3:18).

Indeed, Eli can be commended for at least confronting his sons and not justifying their wickedness. However, he still failed miserably in his roles as a parent, a priest, and a judge. Confronting the wrongdoings and wickedness of children and others that a person has some measure of authority over is essential, but equally important is the need to take action—to actually **do something** (if at all possible). God was greatly displeased with Eli for his toleration of Hophni and Phinehas' continuous sins before Israel. God judged Eli's house "for the iniquity **which he knows**, because his sons made themselves vile, and **he did not restrain them**" (1 Sam. 3:13, emphasis added, EL). God's anonymous prophet rebuked Eli, asking him, "Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?" (1 Sam. 2:29). Still,

Eli apparently did nothing to curb the spiritual depravity his sons displayed before all of Israel in the tabernacle of God, and predictably, his sons never repented. Thus, the sins of Eli's house were "not [to] be atoned for by sacrifice or offering" (1 Sam. 3:15). Both Hophni and Phinehas died, as the man of God predicted, "in one day" (1 Sam. 2:33; 1 Sam. 4:11). What is more, the priesthood was given to Samuel, "a faithful priest" whom the Lord said "shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind" (1 Sam. 2:35).

Eli should have done all that was in his power to stop Hophni and Phinehas from polluting the house of God with their egregious, public sins. They made the Israelites despise the offering of the Lord. They defiantly seized portions of the offerings that were to be sacrificed first (and only!) to God. What should have been a sacred sanctuary, they corrupted with their pagan-like sexual immorality. And what did Eli do? Nothing.

Yes, Eli was very old, but God would not have rebuked him for not restraining his sons if it were impossible for him to do so. Eli was the high priest of the house of God **and** the appointed judge of Israel. No one in Israel was invested with more power to administer justice and maintain order among God's people. At the very least, Eli should have banished his sons from the tabernacle of God. He should have used his God-given authority to "purge out the old leaven," in view of the fact that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Cor. 5:6). Instead, he cowardly stood by as his impenitent, arrogant sons paved their way to eternal destruction, while negatively affecting the spiritual health of a nation.

Eli knew that God was greatly displeased with him and his sons, and he knew the seriousness of profaning sacrifices made unto the Lord. For offering unauthorized fire before God, the Lord punished the two of the sons of the first high

priest of Israel (Nadab and Abihu) by striking them dead with fire, saying, “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified” (Lev. 10:3). Surely Eli knew that the Law of Moses taught that an impenitent, stubborn, and rebellious son was to be taken to the elders of the city, “then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear” (Deu. 21:21). Undoubtedly, Eli knew that priests were to

be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman...; for the priest is holy to his God. (Lev. 21:7)

In light of the biblical principles and commands to punish evildoers, and with full understanding of the public sins that Hophni and Phinehas had committed, Eli willfully chose **not** to discipline them. As a father, he did not restrain them. As the priest of Israel, he did not order their swift removal from the tabernacle of God. As the judge of Israel, rather than deliver God’s people from his sons’ evil influence, he willfully chose to stand by and allow Hophni and Phinehas to work their wickedness before all of Israel. Eli was complicit in his sons’ sins. In fact, Eli made himself “fat,” at least partly, by eating “the best of all the offerings of Israel,” which his sons stole from God (i.e., in the portions of the sacrifices which were supposed to be set aside for God as a burnt offering) (1 Sam. 2:29). Eli was unwilling to discipline his sons and give up the choice meat that his sons knowingly brought

into his house. Sadly, God rebuked Eli for caring more about pleasing his sons than “rocking the boat” and pleasing the Lord. Thus, God said to Eli these sad words: “You...honor your sons more than Me” (1 Sam. 2:29).

God Demands Discipline

The Bible is replete with examples of God and His faithful servants disciplining the disorderly. The Lord sentenced the grumbling, cowardly Israelites to wander in the wilderness for 40 years (Num. 14:26-35). God removed the kingdom of Israel from Saul and his family because of his disobedience (1 Sam. 13:13-14). The Lord brought much shame and heartache upon David as punishment for his wicked deeds (2 Sam. 12:10-14). God’s spokesman Ezra commanded the Jews who had transgressed and taken pagan wives to put away their unlawful spouses, even if children were already born to them (Ezra 10:1-44). In Acts 5, God killed Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty and hypocrisy (Acts 5:1-11). To the Christians in Rome, Paul insisted that the governing authority “does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake” (Rom. 13:4-5). In his letter to the Corinthian church, where sexual immorality was arrogantly tolerated, Paul instructed them to “put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Cor. 5:13). In fact, Paul commanded the Corinthians “not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person” (1 Cor. 5:11). Why? It is an effort (1) to keep the church pure and (2) to try to get the wayward member to repent, so that “his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5).

Consider the great emphasis in Proverbs on, not only instructing and rebuking children, but on actually **disciplining** children and other rebellious individuals. The wise man wrote:

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights. (Pro. 3:11-12)

Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding, but a rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding. (Pro. 10:13)

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly. (Pro. 13:24)

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him. (Pro. 22:15)

Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell. (Pro. 23:13-14)

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the fool's back. (Pro. 26:3)

The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. (Pro. 29:15)

Not Advocating Child Abuse

Efforts to protect children from legitimate child abuse are to be commended. Every year, thousands of children are unjustifiably abused by their parents. Without question, parents who burn, electrocute, strangle, torture, or kill their innocent children should suffer the highest penalty possible for their ungodly actions (cf. Rom. 13:4). Such treatment of children reveals a lack of emotional control and an inability to distinguish between rational correction that leads to increased wisdom (Pro. 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21) and actual child abuse.

However, simply because **some** parents disregard the health of their children and demonstrate a lack of emotional control in their handling of them does not mean that **all** forms of physical punishment should be rejected. Attempting to refrain from all forms of corporal punishment is extremely foolish and inconsistent with biblical teaching. The decision our forefathers made to spank their children was not because they were not creative enough to think of other forms of punishment. Many of our predecessors were very intelligent men and women who incorporated a variety of disciplinary methods for children (e.g., standing in the corner, grounding, going to bed without supper, surrendering a toy, etc.). But one corrective measure that was highly effective then, and still is today, when done properly, is corporal punishment. It can and should be carried out calmly, rationally, promptly, and effectively. “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc. 8:11).

In April of 2015, millions of Americans watched news reports of protests in Baltimore regarding the apparent wrongful death of a 25-year-old man named Freddie Gray. Thousands of individuals (many of them teenagers) decided to carry these protests to a violent level and riot in the streets of Baltimore. Chaos erupted. Businesses were looted. Property was damaged. Peacekeepers were injured. Police vehicles were destroyed. As mayhem ran wild, one particular story captured the attention of America. A single mother, who had twice instructed her teenage son to stay away from the protests, actually witnessed him participating in riotous actions—throwing rocks and bricks at policemen. Though her son was in a mask and a hoodie, she recognized him and immediately dragged him from the riot, scolding and slapping him publicly. Though this mother was far from perfect in her confrontation with her son, and though some may argue that her form of discipline at that moment was “too much,” what people from all walks of life applauded was the administration of prompt, even public, discipline (cf. Pro. 13:24). This mother may have saved her son’s life, as well as the lives of those whom her son was attempting to harm. She administered prompt punishment and taught him a valuable lesson that could benefit him for the rest of his life. Indeed, “No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11).

**When We Refuse To Discipline The Defiant,
We Dishonor God**

Eli stood idly by while his arrogant, selfish, greedy, immoral sons’ committed vile acts in the house of God. He did nothing to stop the sexual immorality that they

committed in the tabernacle. He did not keep his sons from stealing from God by taking “**the best** of all the offerings of Israel” (1 Sam. 2:29). Eli, as a father, priest, and judge willfully refused to discipline his sons and failed miserably as a leader in his home and over all of Israel.

Why? Why did Eli not act upon his sons’ vile sins? Why did he not punish them and order their swift expulsion from the house of God? We cannot know for sure. Perhaps he simply could not imagine the thought of ever doing something to his own flesh-and-blood sons that would make them upset with him. (If he expelled them from the tabernacle, they might not ever speak with him again. He might not ever get to see the grandkids.) Perhaps his wife begged him not to embarrass their sons by punishing them. Maybe Eli thought that his legacy as priest and judge would be tarnished. Perhaps he feared that his family would be removed from the priesthood (cf. 1 Sam. 2:30-36) and miss out on all of the honors and blessings that came along with such a position, including the food that made him fat (cf. 1 Sam. 2:29; 1 Sam. 4:18). **Whatever Eli’s reasons were for not disciplining his sons, none were acceptable to God.** His cowardly inaction was sinful. “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (Jam. 4:17). By refusing to restrain his sons, he actually honored them more than God (1 Sam. 2:29).

Parents who refuse to discipline their children dishonor the God Who will not hesitate to administer discipline as He sees fit (Heb. 12:3-11). Elders who refuse to discipline sinfully defiant brothers and sisters in Christ in the local congregation that they oversee and shepherd dishonor the Holy Spirit Who says to “purge out the old leaven” (1 Cor. 5:7) and “put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Cor. 5:13). Christians who refuse to withhold their fellowship from a wayward

brother or sister dishonor the God of heaven Who says, “We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 The. 3:6). Various ones in positions of authority (e.g., Christian school presidents and board members, directors of preaching schools, etc.) who willfully turn a blind eye to unrighteousness in their midst and refuse to do that which is within their power to restrain evildoers dishonor the God who gave them their authority in the first place.

Are We Honoring God As Parents?

Parenting is not easy. Period. Rearing children to truly “know the Lord” (unlike Hophni and Phinehas—cf. 1 Sam. 2:12) while living in a culture that so often calls evil good and good evil, that puts “darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isa. 5:20) is difficult to say the least. It seems as if people (and especially youth) can get tangled up in sin more easily and more quickly in the 21st century than any time in history. With all of the potential good that can be done in the digital age through the Internet and on social media with smart phones and other electronic devices, the potential to sin is literally at people’s fingertips at virtually any given moment. Parenting has always had its share of challenges, but rearing children in today’s world is especially difficult.

Simply because parenting is challenging, however, does not give parents the right to give up. We do not have authority from God simply to set aside the authority He has given us as parents. We cannot shirk our serious responsibilities because they are difficult or because taking certain courageous, godly actions may cause hurt feelings, frustrations, embarrassment, or division among family members. Remember that Jesus taught, saying,

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Mat. 10:34-39)

When Christian parents truly submit to the King of kings and Lord of lords, they will not hesitate to do the right thing, even when doing so may cause friction within their family. They will not allow their children to continue in sin without rebuking and disciplining them in an appropriate way. They will not leave the impression with wayward adult children that they will forever enjoy the blessings of family even if they never repent of their sins. Godly parents will not love and honor their children more than Jesus. He is King! He is the Good Shepherd! He desires and deserves our utmost attention, respect, and genuine imitation. May God help us as parents do the right things for the right reasons at the right times.

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How God Chastises His Children— Hebrews 12:7-11

Rob Whitacre



Rob Whitacre was born in Carbondale, IL and was raised near San Antonio, TX. He is married to Nicole of Nashville, TN. They have one daughter, Hannah, and one son, Jared. His education includes San Antonio College, Abilene Christian University, Southwest School of Bible Studies (2 year diploma), Southwest School of Bible Studies (graduate certificate in Sacred History), and Southern Christian University (BA). He has preached in KY and TN. He has done mission work in Panama, New Zealand, and Jamaica. He has authored two books, *The Old Testament Simplified* and *The New Testament Simplified*. He currently preaches for the Willette Church of Christ in Red Boiling Springs, TN and has served as an instructor at the Middle Tennessee School of Preaching and Biblical Studies.

THE VERY title of this lesson is enough to cause some to “observe the Passover.” Our culture spurns all forms of chastisement. Incarcerations are down, corporal discipline has been removed from school, and parents who spank their children are being jailed. And false teaching about love and grace has led some to believe that God does not chastise His children. No doubt this has also contributed to the doctrine of Annihilationism. Our study is one of great importance, for an incorrect understanding of God’s chastisement will lead a child away from Him instead of closer to Him.

Our text of study is Hebrews 12:5-11 (King James Version). Although it is not comprehensive on this topic, there is no better place to begin. The word *chasten* means to train children, to be instructed or taught, to learn. To castigate with words, to correct...to chastise with blows, to scourge: of a father punishing a son (Thayer, “Paideuoo”). Brother Winkler makes three important observations regarding this text by way of introduction.

First, do not arbitrarily equate chastisement with suffering but, rather with discipline. *Second*, be it observed that God does not arbitrarily and capriciously send suffering on his children....*Third*, be it observed that God’s children do suffer, but such is not an indication of His wrath. Rather, let us consider God using the reverses of life—God working through human suffering—to discipline, train, and develop His children, not to punish them. (494)

We must make a clear distinction in our minds between suffering, punishment, and discipline. Jesus suffered and had no sin (Heb. 5:8-9). Paul had a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor.12:7-11). Job suffered, but “sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:22). Hell is a place of punishment, but it is certainly not a place of discipline. God’s discipline is designed to help and heal but never for suffering and sorrow. His motive is love but never hate. God’s chastening is for our benefit. Now that we have defined the word, we ask How does God chasten his children?

God Chastens His Children By Revelation (Hebrews 12:5)

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.

Forgetfulness Of His Children

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children.” Apparently, we are not the only ones who have forgotten about God’s chastisement. These words—Proverbs 3:11-12—should have been familiar to the Hebrew audience. It is called instructive discipline, and it is the first step God takes to bring His children back. Notice that God “speaketh” when He chastens. Our generation has a great need for preachers who will use the Word of God as a chastening tool among His children. Is not the Scripture profitable for “doctrine, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, emphasis added, RW). Those who do not receive this kind of chastisement will never mature into a complete man. “The Father does not want us to be pampered babies; He wants us to become mature adult sons and daughters who can be trusted with the responsibilities of life” (Wiersbe 324). In addition, Paul told Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; **reprove**, **rebuke**, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Once again, the Word is God’s primary instrument to reprove and rebuke. When Peter preached on Pentecost, his listeners were “pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). When Stephen

preached before the council, “they were cut to the heart” (Acts 7:54).

Feelings Of His Children

“My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.” According to Rienecker, the word *despise* means to “think little of, to think lightly, to make light of something, to neglect” (714). At times, we minimize things we do not like or want to do. Some give lip and eye service with no intention of correcting their behavior. Such is the case with children who listen to their father’s words, but as soon as he leaves, return to the same behavior. They have never learned the purpose of the Old Testament; God means what He says! Those who hear but fail to do are despising the chastening of the Lord.

Fainting of His Children

“Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” The word *faint* means “to despond, to become faint-hearted...to have one’s strength relax...to grow weak” (Thayer, “Ekluo”). It implies a person who gives up and quits. Notice how the same word is used in Hebrews 12:3, “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” It is easier to quit when you are disciplined than to make correction. We must keep our eyes on the cross and never forget, “for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). Paul told the Corinthians, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:16-17).

God Chastens His Children By Remediation (Hebrews 12:6)

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” The word *remediation* means

to correct something bad or defective. At times, the strongest words of admonition are ignored and a different approach is needed. This form of chastisement is sometimes called corrective discipline. The remediation of scourging was a gruesome form of discipline. According to Vine, it can refer to the “scourging endured by Christ and administered by the order of Pilate”; or “of Jewish scourging, or metaphorically” (“Scourge,” def B1; “Scourge,” def. B2). In elaborating on the scourging of Christ, he noted:

Under the Roman method of scourging, the person was stripped and tied in a bending posture to a pillar, or stretched on a frame. The scourge was made of leathern thongs, weighted with sharp pieces of bone or lead, which tore the flesh of both the back and the breast. (“Scourge,” def. B1)

This description is necessary to impress upon the reader a contrast between verse five (instructive discipline) and verse six (corrective discipline). The written Word is not the only mechanism of God’s discipline. Since this word (*scourging*) is obviously being used metaphorically, we need to consider other passages in our application. Let us consider four ways that God administers discipline in conjunction with His Word.

Remediation Of Sowing And Reaping

Everyone is familiar with this principle, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8). God has set up the

universe to create consequences for those who violate His Will. For example, when man violates God's law on drinking alcoholic beverage, the consequence is drunkenness and the results of being in a compromised mental and physical state. Those who have caused a serious injury or even death as a result of social drink will reap the consequences for life. Another example of this principle is taught by Paul when he penned, "And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet" (Rom. 1:27). The word *recompence* is only found twice in the Scriptures. It means "a reward given in compensation" (Thayer, "Antimisthia"). I have often wondered if the AIDS virus is God's reward and compensation for those who have chosen to violate the natural use of men and women. Perhaps homosexuality is reaping what it has sown.

Remediation Of The Conscience

God has provided man with a built-in moral "policeman" called the conscience (Crews 704). It is described in Hebrews 5:12-14.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

When trained properly, our conscience will help control our thoughts and actions. When we violate our conscience, it scourges our hearts until we make correction. So strong is its power that it can deprive a man from eating, sleeping, and concentrating. The conscience can be a powerful moral barometer when it works in conjunction with passages like Galatians 5:19-23. As a mental exercise, list all the sins of the flesh and all the fruit of the spirit on opposing sides. Study the definition of each word. Now place in between the two columns any moral dilemma and your conscience will help you make the right choice.

Remediation Of Withdrawing Fellowship

“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” (Mat. 18:17). The church of Christ must execute discipline upon rebellious church members. We must “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). If a brother/sister is found guilty of fornication, Paul said, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators” (1 Cor. 5:9). If a brother/sister refuses to walk in step, Paul said, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 The. 3:6). For those who are materialistic and covetous, Paul said, “Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim. 6:5). This type of scourging is seldom practiced and the reason why many congregations suffer from spoiled and out-of-control children. Remember, all discipline, including withdrawing fellowship, is done out of love for souls and not to destroy or

drive people further away from God. Paul said, “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5).

Remediation Of Divine Providence

Nebuchadnezzar was a man well-acquainted with the chastening of God. As king, he became prideful and arrogant saying, “I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty” (Dan. 4:30). God’s discipline was enacted:

While the word *was* in the king’s mouth,
there fell a voice from heaven, *saying*,
O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is
spoken; The kingdom is departed from
thee. And they shall drive thee from
men, and thy dwelling *shall be* with the
beasts of the field: they shall make thee
to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall
pass over thee, until thou know that the
most High ruleth in the kingdom of men,
and giveth it to whomsoever he will.
(Dan. 4:31-32)

God’s discipline is designed to bring about repentance. Notice what happened at the end, “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (Dan. 4:37). Although we must note that miraculous power was used in this discipline, it does not negate the principle that God uses circumstances in this world to bring about the correction of sinners.

The New Testament speaks of a similar situation with King Herod. Luke records:

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, *saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.* And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. (Acts 12:21-23)

God works in the kingdoms of men. Once again, although He does not work through miracles today (1 Cor. 13:8-10), He does work providentially. One must be very careful when making this point. Due to the nature of providence, no one can say with certainty that any particular situation is the chastening of God. Therefore, we should use every situation as an opportunity to examine and reform our lives.

All of God's chastening methods are done out of love, "For whom the Lord loveth" (Heb. 12:6). The perception that discipline is mean-spirited, hateful, and unloving has greatly contributed to religious error on this topic. Let us notice the following verses and questions on love and discipline. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Pro. 13:24). "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). If your teenage son chooses to forsake the assembly, and as a form of discipline, you take away his car for a month, is that hateful? If a father finds tobacco in his son's truck and grounds him for a month, is that hateful? If you find pornography on your child's electronic device and you take

them all away for six months, is that mean-spirited? I would strongly suggest that those who overlook and minimize the sins of their children are the true haters. “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Pro. 29:15). Brethren, if we do not train our children in the high-chair, they may end up in the electric chair!

Before leaving this point, it is worthy to note that without the chastening of divine revelation, no basis for understanding any of the aforementioned points of remediation would exist. The principle of sowing and reaping comes from revelation. A conscience must be trained by revelation. Church discipline is established and executed through revelation. Providence is learned from revelation. The inspired instructions of God have always been and will always be the key to all forms of His discipline.

God Chastens His Children By Relation (Hebrews 12:7-9)

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

It has been said that rules without a relationship equals rebellion. The clearest picture of this is the family unit. When a father and mother have a close relationship with their

children, discipline brings forth correction. When a father and mother have an estranged relationship with their children, discipline results in greater distance and a deeper divide. This same principle carries over to the local congregation. When we allow our brothers and sisters to remain unfaithful over a long period of time without any disciplinary measures, the relationship grows cold, and the power of correction is weakened. Withdrawing fellowship loses its power and effectiveness when we do not have a relationship.

Our Relation Requires Afflictions.

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons” (Heb. 12:7) Afflictions are not an indication of no God but of a relationship with God. If you are undergoing (“endure”) chastening, it implies you are beloved of God, that He takes care of you. Those who experience no afflictions have every reason to fear that God is neglecting them as a man might neglect an illegitimate (bastard) child. Therefore, the fact that you are being afflicted should be an encouragement and not a discouragement. Eliphaz correctly observed, “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty” (Job 5:17).

Our Relation Reforms Our Attitude.

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence” (Heb. 12:9). God wants a relationship with His children, and we need a relationship with our Father. This relationship is created when we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-4:6). The relationship necessitates a reverential attitude towards God. Consider Matthew Henry’s comments on Hebrews 12:9.

Our earthly fathers are but the fathers
of our flesh, but God is the Father of
our spirits. Our fathers on earth were

instrumental in the production of our bodies, which are but flesh...but then we must owe much more to him who is the Father of our spirits.

The word *reverence* is found thirteen times in the Bible while the word *Reverend* is found once. God is the only one to whom this word is ever used as a title (Psa. 111:9). The word means “to feel respect for” (Vines, “Reverence,” Def. A1). A child who is disciplined develops a healthy respect for authority. Children who are not disciplined are often disrespectful, back-talkers, and proud.

Our Relation Results In Action.

“Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Heb. 12:9). Brother Winkler well said of this passage, “Subjection, not objection, should be our attitude as God’s children” (494). No one wants to submit today. If you do not believe me, just go to a high school basketball game and listen to how the crowd and players treat officials. When an official misses a call, which they will do from time to time, the reaction is often disrespectful and disruptive. Brethren, God never misses a call. He is the perfect referee, official, and umpire, yet people still do not submit. So it is really not about the accuracy of His authority but the unwillingness of the congregation to submit. When He says we have broken a rule, we should immediately submit with reverence and godly fear.

**God Chastens His Children For Reformation
(Hebrews 12:10-11)**

For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for

our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

God's Discipline Is Perfect.

“For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure” (Heb. 12:10). Parents over-discipline, under-discipline, fail to discipline at all, discipline out of the wrong motives, in the wrong way, and at the wrong time (Phillips 179). They do the best they can but are limited by human factors. In contrast, God’s discipline is perfect in man, method, and measure. He will never discipline one who does not need it. He will never fail to discipline one who needs it. His discipline will always be exactly what is needed to bring the sinner back to the Savior.

God's Discipline Is Profitable.

“But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). This point is crucial to have a proper perspective on our topic. God’s discipline is designed for our profit and to make us partakers of His holiness. Paul said the same Scriptures that are for reproof and correction are profitable (2 Tim. 3:16). The Psalmist explained how God’s Word is profitable. “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word... It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Psa. 119:67; Psa. 119:71). God’s discipline helps us grow and develop so we can be like Him. Notice the following illustration:

For two years, scientists sequestered themselves in an artificial environment

called Biosphere 2. Inside their self-sustaining community, the Biospherians created a number of mini-environments, including a desert, rain forest, even an ocean. Nearly every weather condition could be simulated except one, wind. Over time, the effects of their windless environment became apparent. A number of acacia trees bent over and even snapped. Without the stress of wind to strengthen the wood, the trunks grew weak and could not hold up their own weight. Though our culture shuns hardship, we would do well to remember that God uses it “for our good, that we may share in his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). (Akkernnan as qtd. in Rowell 1001)

God’s Discipline Is Peaceable.

“It yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11). A congregation at peace is either dead or disciplined. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It comes from applying the discipline of the Scriptures. Remember, peace is not a passive response. Jesus said, “Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Mat. 5:9). Having strong instructive discipline from the pulpit makes peace in a congregation. Having strong corrective discipline from the eldership makes peace in a congregation. Congregations who fail to discipline the sheep will observe open and public sins causing disruption, dissention, and division within the body. For example, if a congregation does not hear instructive discipline about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, false

doctrine will fill the vacuum and eventually unscriptural marriages will fill the void. The resulting mess will be anything but peace!

God chastens His children through **revelation** (Heb. 12:5). At times, His children forget it, develop ungodly feelings towards it, and faint because of it. Furthermore, God chastens His children through **remediation** (Heb. 12:6). His remediation takes place from the principle of sowing and reaping, the trained conscience, withdrawing fellowship, and through his Divine Providence. Furthermore, God chastens us through our **relation** (Heb. 12:7-9). Our relation requires afflictions and is affected by our attitude and actions. Lastly, God's discipline **reforms** (Heb. 12:10-11) because it is perfect, profitable, and peaceful. May we all thank God for our earthly fathers who gave us discipline, but moreover, may all thank our Heavenly Father for His discipline.

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Training Up My Child In An Anti-Spanking World

Kevin Rutherford



Kevin Rutherford was born in Zambia, Africa to missionary parents Rod and Brenda Rutherford. He grew up in the countries of Zambia, the United States, and Australia. He began preaching at the age of twelve and has been preaching for 36 years, 24 of which have been in full-time work. He has been blessed with the opportunity to work with the West End Church of Christ in St. Peters, MO for the past 17 years. Kevin and Vicky have been married for 26 years and have 3 children. Kevin is a graduate of David Lipscomb University and the Memphis School of Preaching.

LET US make something clear from the outset: The mass media is not our standard of authority in anything. Understand that when I quote uninspired authors in this lesson I am, at times, quoting them to show the foolishness of man's philosophies. At other times, I will be quoting them to show how some men have actually recognized truths from God's Word whether or not they know anything about God's Word. The only author I completely agree with on every matter is the Holy Spirit. You must understand that whatever the Holy Spirit gave us in the Bible is absolute truth and fact, whether I, or anyone else, agrees with it.

The Bible is our standard of authority in everything. The Bible is God's Word. Paul said, "All Scripture is given

by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (New King James Version, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is the mind of God revealed to man in words (1 Cor. 2:1-13). The Bible is the truth Jesus said we can know, and which will set us free from sin (John 8:32; John 17:17). Our culture is being driven further and further away from God by the mass media, social media, and public education. People become more foolish as they go further away from God. In writing about such individuals, Paul said, “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:21-22). The church at Corinth was told “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Cor. 3:19). The foolish mindset of ungodly men is clearly seen in the way the media and public education have attacked the home. The more our culture attacks the home, the more problems we have in society. As we face these problems, the postmodern (no absolute truth) mindset of our society prevents people from accepting reality. Consequently, problems within our society that are caused by the breakdown in the home are often blamed on the wrong sources.

Child Psychology

The theme of the 2015 Power Lectures is *Reprove, Rebuke & Exhort*. This is what gospel preachers should do in their preaching. This is also what parents should do in raising their kids. Yet, parents have listened to far too many liberal psychologists whose thinking is guided by the boxed-in, limiting parameters of Darwinian Evolution and the perverse theories of Sigmund Freud.

We are grateful that a few brave psychologists have learned to think for themselves. John Rosemond is one of the few not blinded by the disastrous combination of Darwin and Freud. A brief description of John Rosemond's view toward psychology is found on page 307 of his book, *The New Six-Point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children*. "John is a family psychologist licensed by the state of North Carolina, but he doesn't believe in psychology. He has long since realized that psychology is a secular religion that one believes in by faith, and he's lost his. He works hard at helping his audiences lose theirs." Concerning the behavior of children, John Rosemond writes, "Not only are incidences of misbehavior increasing, but the problems themselves are escalating in seriousness" (*The Well Behaved Child*, Rosemond 14).

What are we to do when our children misbehave? Should we avoid all punishment and simply reason with them? Should we punish them in various ways, excluding spanking? Are there occasions where spanking may be the best way to deal with a child's bad behavior? Let us begin looking for answers to these questions by discussing what the media is saying about spanking children.

The Internet

The internet is likely to be the first source many people go to for advice and information. Some information on the internet supports the use of spanking as a means of punishing children. For example, *apologeticspress.org* contains an article by Dave Miller entitled *Children and the Rod of Correction*, in which brother Miller defends the use of corporal punishment in raising children. The website *focusonthefamily.com* has an article written by Chip Ingram entitled, *The Biblical Approach to Spanking*. Ingram's article gives recommendations as to

how to spank your children properly without turning the discipline into abuse.

However, most internet articles favor the notion that spanking is never to be used. *Psychologytoday.com* ran the article, by Darcia Navaez entitled, *Research on Spanking: It's Bad for All Kids*. *Cnn.com* published an article by Sarah Kovac entitled, *Spanking The Gray Matter out of Our Kids*. Brendan Smith wrote an article called, *The Case Against Spanking*, for *apa.com* (American Psychological Association).

Books

I found many books in the local public library that address the subject of spanking children. Once again, most of the writing on the matter oppose the use of spanking as a form of punishment. Robin Goldstein writes,

Harsh punishment, including spanking and other physical punishment, makes children angry and resentful. They aren't motivated to change their behavior, only to sneak and manipulate and try to get away with more misbehavior. They'll think about the unfairness of the punishment rather than their own actions.

Goldstein does at least admit, "At the other extreme, discipline that's too lenient is ineffective." (221)

Jane Nelsen is the author of *Raising a Self-Disciplined Child: Help Your Child Become More Responsible, Confident, and Resilient*. In her book, she completely opposes any form of punishment for children. Nelsen believes punishment creates "resentment," "revenge," "rebellion," and "retreat" (13).

Dr. Benjamin Spock cites spanking as a cause in domestic violence (including murder), the nuclear arms race, and an aggressive foreign policy (172).

Although the majority of books I found were opposed to spanking, I was able to find a few books that advocate the careful and proper use of spanking as a legitimate form of punishment for children. Dr. Kevin Leman writes,

The permissiveness that reigns in America today in so many homes is what is really eroding self-esteem and relationships between parent and child. Responsible parents who, at certain times and under full control of their emotions, correct their children by spanking (not beating) are not eroding their child's self-image; I believe they are strengthening it because they are giving the child a loving lesson in reality. (237)

Concerning the media's view toward spanking in general, Dr. James Dobson writes,

The tragedy of child abuse has made it difficult for people to understand the difference between viciousness to kids and constructive, positive forms of punishment. Also, there are many 'children's rights advocates' in the Western world who will not rest until they have obtained the legal right to tell parents how to raise their children...The American media has worked to convince

the public that all spanking is tantamount to child abuse, and therefore, should be outlawed. If that occurs, it will be a sad day for families...and especially for children! (146)

Proverbs

As we mentioned at the outset of this lesson, the media is the authority in nothing, and the Bible is our authority in everything. So let us take a look at what the biblical book of Proverbs has to say about spanking starting with Proverbs 13:24. The inspired wise man wrote, “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Pro. 13:24). Although Dr. Kevin Leman accepts the value of careful spanking from parents “under full control of their emotions,” he does seem to have a problem using the Bible to advocate for the use of spanking (237). Dr. Leman wrote,

Authoritarian parents love the motto ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child,’ which they mistakenly believe comes from the Old Testament. The Old Testament does talk about the rod, but the actual text of the verse says: ‘He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.’ It’s my conviction that when King Solomon used the word ‘rod,’ he meant it as a tool of correction and guidance rather than as a weapon to strike and injure. (26)

However, Dave Miller effectively counters this argument. Dr. Miller writes,

Lest someone get the idea that Solomon used the term 'rod' figuratively, without intending to leave the impression that parents should actually strike their children with a rod, he clarified the target: 'Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.' (Pro. 23:13-14)

The book of Proverbs also records the following statements: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Pro. 22:15). "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Pro. 29:15). The book of wise expressions clearly shows us that spanking a child can help him to become wiser, turn him away from hell, and make his mother proud rather than ashamed.

Discipline And Fatherhood

The relationship between the discipline of children and the purpose of fatherhood is referenced in the Holy Spirit inspired book of Hebrews (Heb. 12:5-11). The aim of this passage is to show us that God may use suffering (specifically persecution in this context) to "scourge" his children in order to help them to refocus on their spiritual priorities (Heb. 12:1-5). In this passage, four key words are used that are of interest to us in our discussion. The word *chasten* refers to education and training involving the appropriate use of discipline (Strong, "Paideuō"). The word *rebuke* means to tell a fault to a person for the purpose of getting that person to feel guilt and shame (Strong, "Elegchō"). The word *scourge* means "to

whip, flog, scourge” (Strong, “Mastigoō”). The word *corrected* means to instruct and discipline (Strong, “Paideutēs”).

God trains us and rebukes us through His Word and through suffering. But He also scourges us through suffering. He chastens, rebukes, scourges, and corrects us in order to help us maintain our spiritual focus. This text shows us that God deals with us in this manner because He loves us. He loves us and wants us to be in heaven with Him. It follows that if He did not love us, He would not chasten, rebuke, scourge, and correct us. It is important for us to see that God relates His love and discipline of Christians to the kind of loving discipline earthly fathers should display (Heb. 12:6-11). This indicates God expects earthly fathers to chasten, rebuke, and scourge their children. Obviously the scourging is within the realm of loving and compassionate discipline and excludes anything that would even remotely resemble child abuse. But clearly, loving forms of corporal punishment are expected of earthly fathers. So that we do not miss the fact that “discomfort” in response to bad behavior is a part of proper discipline the Hebrews author wrote, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful” (Heb. 12:11).

The passage also tells us certain fruits are produced by proper, loving, and caring discipline (Heb. 12:9-11). Those fruits are as follows: (1) Because of the correction given to us by our earthly fathers, we paid them respect; (2) Our earthly fathers disciplined us for our good so that we might be holy; (3) Chastening “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in those who have been trained by it.”

In explaining why He chastens, rebukes, scourges, and corrects His children, God used an illustration that assumes earthly fathers do the same with their children. Furthermore, when earthly fathers are doing this with their children, they

are teaching their children some important facts about the nature of God. A father who is impatient, quick to wrath, overly strict, and abusive to his children is failing to show God the Father to his children. On the opposite end, the father who is too lenient and who does not punish his children is failing to show God the Father to his children. When a father is too lenient or too hard, the children grow into adults who have a harder time understanding their heavenly Father. Surely this emphasizes the significance of properly balanced, loving discipline in the home.

The relationship between discipline and the purpose of fatherhood is also discussed in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus (Eph. 6:1-4). Children are to obey and honor their parents. This is something we must teach our children. But we need to be careful how we teach this.

Teaching our children to obey and honor their parents involves the two important principles brought out in the context of Ephesians 6:1-4. The first principle is found in the words "do not provoke your children to wrath." This refers to excessive, harsh, and overly strict parenting. The second principle is found in the phrase, "Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." The Greek word for *training* is the same word translated as *chastening* in Hebrews 12:5. The definition of this word involves training that includes "disciplinary correction," "reproof and punishment" (Strong, "Paideía").

The word *admonition* refers to a mild form of rebuke (Strong, "Nouthesía"). Therefore, to teach their children to obey and honor them, fathers must not be overly strict. But rather, they must employ training that involves discipline and mild, gentle, or careful rebuke. In other words, God wants fathers to be balanced instructors and disciplinarians who deeply love their children.

The book of Colossians contains a similar passage (Col. 3:20-21). In this text God gives the command for children to obey their parents in all things. Partial obedience is not adequate. Full obedience is required. Children will not obey their parents in all things when left to themselves (Pro. 29:15). Training is required. In training the children to obey their parents (mother and father) in all things, the fathers need to make sure they do not discourage their children. The word *discourage* refers to the breaking of a person's spirit (Strong, "Athuméo"). Fathers must train their children to obey the parents in everything without breaking their children's spirit. Once again, this emphasizes the balance that must be involved in the raising of children. Fathers that are too lenient will not teach their children to obey their parents. But fathers must not be so hard on their children that they break their spirits. Little children are beautifully wonderful, untrained spirits. Some seem to have stronger spirits than others, but all spirits have to be trained. The might, brilliance, beauty, curiosity, and energy of little spirits are tremendous components in God's wonderful creation. Our work as fathers is to increase the power of those spirits by a process of guidance involving discipline that ultimately leads them to the point at which they are self-disciplined. The right approach and attitude in balanced discipline will produce tremendous results in children. We must mold and shape them by our teaching, our example, and by our discipline.

When fathers correctly teach children to respect the authority of the parents in the home, they will also be teaching their children to understand and respect others who have authority. If they attend public or private school, the children will understand the authority of the teacher. They will understand the authority of law and its enforcers

better. They will also be better able to understand, respect, and reverence the authority of God and His Holy Scriptures.

Child Abuse

Terrible things are done daily in this world to beautiful and innocent little children. All over the globe, children are sexually abused, physically abused, tortured, tormented, and deprived in more ways than a moral person can even imagine. Surely if anything would cause the wrath of God to put an end to this world, it would be child abuse. An interesting statement is made about the cause of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. That statement is found in 2 Kings 24:3-4:

Surely at the commandment of the LORD this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the LORD would not pardon.

No blood is more innocent than that of a child. Manasseh had killed his sons in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom (2 Chr. 33:6). He had literally cooked them alive in the arms of a hot metal idol. He filled Jerusalem with the innocent blood of beautiful little children. The Bible says God would not pardon Jerusalem for this. Though there were many wicked practices in Jerusalem that lead God to destroy her through Babylon, it seems the final and fatal cause is the shedding of the innocent blood of these little children. Violence against children does not go unnoticed by God and will not go

unpunished by God. Child abuse will incur the wrath of God. Those guilty of such must repent or face a terrible reality on the Day of Judgment.

Matthew recorded,

Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Mat. 18:2-6)

The Lord will return with flaming fire and fearsome angels to take vengeance on the ignorant and disobedient (2 The. 1:8). All unrepentant child abusers will face terrible retribution in "everlasting punishment" (Mat. 25:46).

Unlike the proper, careful, and sparing use of spanking, child abuse damages children physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Child abuse is a sin because it violates many Bible passages (Mat. 7:12; Mark 12:30-31; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Tit. 2:4; Rom. 1:30; 1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7; Gal. 5:20; Mat. 18:1-10; Rom. 12:9; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 13:4).

Proper spanking does not injure the child physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. It provides appropriate

discipline for some behaviors (Pro. 13:24). Spanking drives foolishness from the heart of the child (Pro. 22:15). Spanking helps send a child in the direction of heaven (Pro. 23:13-14). Spanking gives children wisdom (Pro. 29:15). Spanking helps children understand God (Heb. 12:5-11). In the book, *The Well-Behaved Child: Discipline That Really Works*, John Rosemond advocates occasional and careful spanking when he writes,

the notion that spanking teaches children that it's okay to hit other people is pure, unmitigated malarkey. Research done by eminent and ethical social scientists finds that children who are occasionally (the operative word) spanked score higher on measures of social and emotional adjustment than children who are never spanked. One study even found that children who have never been spanked are more aggressive than kids who have experienced spanking's purgative powers. (15)

Conclusion

I had no idea how complicated and tiring raising children would be until I had my own. When our children were small, the problems were small, though the workload was often tiring. As our children aged, we faced more and more complex issues. Though raising children requires diligent effort, determined focus, and untiring consistency, the Bible gives us the fundamental blueprint for doing it well. Some say that children are fairly well set in their hearts and minds by the age of five. If that is true, parents do

not have very long to get it right. Whether true or not, even eighteen to twenty years is not much time to raise children.

We cannot afford to pass the responsibility of raising children on to someone else, nor can we afford to neglect our responsibility to raise our children. Choosing to become a parent means choosing to be fully responsible as a parent for the rest of your life. Sadly, Satan and society sometimes win over the children of Christian couples who have done a very good job in raising their children. However, far too many Christian parents are losing their children to the devil because they have not properly devoted themselves to bringing their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I cannot imagine a greater tragedy or a more pronounced pain. We must spend a great deal of time and effort raising our children.

Never lose sight of the glory, beauty, purity, and power of little children. Never lose your love for the laughter, affection, energy, and curiosity of little children. “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth” (Psa. 127:3-4). May God bless you in efforts to help your children whatever age they may be.

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As Many As I Love (Revelation 3:19): The Proper Motivation For Reproof

Jim Dearman



Jim is a native of Smithville, Tennessee. Jim is married to Janis and they have three children. He produces and hosts the *Good News Today* television program which White Oak oversees. Jim is a graduate of the University of Tennessee with a degree in communications; he also attended the Memphis School of Preaching and Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Amridge University). He has preached for over thirty-five years and has served as a located preacher in AL, TN, and TX. He also directed the Malaysia School of Preaching and upon returning from the mission field, taught at the Memphis School of Preaching. Currently, he is the minister for the White Oak Church of Christ in Chattanooga, TN.

THERE IS no denying that God is love. A well-known hymn calls out, “Come let us all unite to sing, God is love.” The message of the song is supported by Scripture. Twice within the space of a few verses in 1 John, the apostle affirmed this truth. In 1 John 4:8, John wrote, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (New King James Version). Then, in verse 16, he declared, “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). Of course, in the same epistle, John also asserted that “God is light.” Therefore, we are not to conclude that God

is either light or love—He is both. This is a reminder that one inspired description of God, or His attributes, should not be emphasized to the detriment, if not to the exclusion, of His other qualities.

While God is perfect in His love for mankind, He is also perfect in justice and mercy and in every other quality. The God of the universe has no imperfection or imbalance. Yet man has a strong propensity to place God's grace, goodness, and love above every attribute and to contend that, because God is love, He could never condemn man to an eternity in hell. This prejudiced position springs from wishful thinking rather than from the written Word. To reach such a conclusion, one has to ignore a multitude of passages that explicitly or implicitly reveal that, while God's love for man is unconditional, His salvation is conditional. He offers it to all, but it is only the obedient believer who obtains it.

Yes, God's love prompted the sending of His only begotten Son: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). However, while His love makes possible salvation from sin, the conditions set forth by the Christ must be met. Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). This statement alone is sufficient to show that God's love does not negate His demand for obedience to His Word.

Obedience to the gospel is essential to one's salvation from past sin. Once cleansed by the blood in baptism and added to the church of the New Testament, the Christian must continue to walk in the light of God's Word. His walk should be supremely motivated by love. John declared, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). In one of the greatest statements on love as the controlling force in the

Christian's life, Paul wrote: "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Indeed, God's love for us, which has motivated Him to give us the greatest gift, His only begotten Son, should motivate us to love in return and to manifest that love in obedience. However, God will not overlook man's failure to respond obediently. As the Hebrews writer declared, "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:30-31). Can we not say that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the **loving** God, whose love we have spurned?

One must also understand that a loving God disciplines His own because He loves them. This is borne out in the Bible, time and again, from Old Testament to New. This leads to the key text in this study, Revelation 3:19, where Jesus reveals Deity's motivation for corrective discipline. In so doing, He reminded the church of her responsibility to discipline from that same supreme motive love.

The Demand To Discipline

What right-thinking person would argue that parents who discipline their children demonstrate a lack of love? Such an accusation would be contrary to the clear expressions in Scripture that not only allow for discipline, but which, in fact, demand it. Proverbs 22:6 directs parents to "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Other Proverbs passages specifically call for some appropriately applied "hands on" punishment. For example, the wise man observes that "Foolishness is bound

up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Pro. 22:15).

In Proverbs 23:13-14, the admonition is “Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.” The inspired writer further declares: “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Pro. 29:15).

While many in today’s society cringe at the thought of corporal punishment and call it unloving, the Scripture claims otherwise. In Proverbs 13:24, the inspired writer affirms: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” It is clear from the other Proverbs passages already cited that the discipline in view in Proverbs 13:24 includes the “hands on” variety. Someone has said today’s dilemma is that everything in the house is controlled by a switch except the child.

In the New Testament, the Hebrews writer endorses the practice of discipline in the home, as he uses it to illustrate the spiritual benefit of life’s sorrows and setbacks. This leads to the key question in this study: “What motivates the spiritual reproof that is necessary, at times, in the Lord’s church?” The key text revealing the answer is Revelation 3:19. Here, Jesus, through the inspired pen of John the apostle, declared, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent.”

A misunderstanding and gross misapplication of biblical love has resulted in a failure to exercise proper discipline in the church. Therefore, the ultimate form of discipline—withdrawal of fellowship, has become “the forgotten commandment” in many congregations. Ironically, most who refuse to practice such discipline do so in the name of love, believing it is more loving to refrain from the action

than to engage in it. In so doing, they become guilty in God's eyes of being most **unloving**. An analysis of Revelation 3:19 and its immediate context will reveal this to be the case.

Analysis Of Revelation 3:19

The letters to the seven churches of Asia consist of commendation and condemnation. However, the letter to the church at Laodicea contains nothing but the latter:

And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (Rev. 3:14-18)

The Lord follows His rebuke with a reminder that it was prompted by love. Would anyone who claims to follow Christ contradict His stated motive? It is interesting, also, to note that the word for love the Lord chooses here is *philo*.

It is the kind of love that has an emotional connotation and is descriptive of deep, tender feeling for its recipient. Jesus did not use *agape*, the word that denotes the greatest regard for the welfare of the one loved, whether friend or foe. Certainly Christ possessed perfect *agape* love for the Laodiceans. However, His choice of *phileo* leaves no doubt about the depth of affection that prompted His rebuke of these precious souls.

The word *rebuke* involves correction, the finding of fault, and *chasten* is associated with punishment. A passage in Hebrews makes this clear:

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful

for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5-11)

The kind of correction the Hebrews writer was describing has no present pleasure. However, such correction, allowed and approved by the Lord, is for the good of His children, just as the right-thinking earthly father disciplines for the same reason. The key as to whether good will come to the child from such properly administered discipline depends upon the attitude of the child. Will the child learn and be trained by such discipline? If so, his life will produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness. The Hebrews text assures us of this.

In the next portion of this study, we will look at another example in the New Testament where a follower of Christ, the beloved apostle Paul, issues repeated rebuke. It is his first epistle to the Corinthians. In several chapters of this letter, Paul emulates the Savior in calling, time and again, for correction, but he does so with compassion and love. His parting words to the church in this epistle will demonstrate beyond doubt that discipline flows from love.

Paul's Rebuke Of The Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul expressed deep concern about contentions in the church. He issued a compassionate plea that includes a clear rebuke to the factious spirit characterizing the congregation:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there

be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13)

Following this poignant plea for unity, Paul told the brethren he is thankful to God that he baptized very few of them, lest they should say he had baptized in his own name. This is certainly an unmistakable rebuke of the Corinthians, coupled with an expression of doubt about their maturity. In chapter 3, Paul issued an even more stinging criticism of their carnality:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul" and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Christians have so much to learn from this criticism. The most important lesson is that the child of God must apply himself to spiritual growth. As Peter wrote, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”(1 Pet. 2:1-2). Paul chided the Corinthians for their failure to move from milk to meat in their spiritual development. Had they done so, they would have recognized the truth and avoided the rebuke.

Far too many in the church now behave as the Corinthians did, in their allegiance to personalities over the plain teaching of the New Testament. Therefore, when the church considers taking difficult disciplinary steps toward the wayward, these immature members rush to the defense of the sinner. They will criticize those who initiate the disciplinary process as being unloving. Obviously, the elders who begin the efforts to restore the lost sheep must do so prayerfully and patiently. Adequate admonition to the erring and thorough education of the congregation about this Scriptural action must occur. However, the members must accept the teaching from Scripture and apply it without respect of persons, even when a close friend or family member is the recipient of the reproof. Careful and prayerful study of the Word of God will produce the collective cooperation necessary to carry out the Lord’s clear command to discipline.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-6, Paul issued a sharp rebuke to the congregation over this very matter; and in the second epistle to this church, he commended them for their response. One can sense the indignation in the apostle as he wrote:

It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among

the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

The apostle is appalled by the attitude of the church toward a sin not even named among those of the world. What a pitiful picture this is of a group of Christians who are not simply tolerating this unspeakable sin but, in fact, glorying in it. When Paul describes their attitude as **puffed up**, what does he mean? The statement about their glorying gives further insight into the attitude. They were feeling very good about doing badly, likely based upon the same faulty view of biblical love many possess today. It seems they were operating under the assumption that love manifests itself by overlooking sin rather than rebuking it. Their message to the world seems to have been, “Look at how loving we are!”

In correcting their misapprehension, Paul did not mince words. Following the rebuke in verses 1-6, he wrote: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ,

our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). No passage could be clearer concerning the danger of tolerating sin in the church.

It is difficult to understand how congregations can continue to ignore the commandments of God to discipline in light of such sobering Scripture. Many may not be glorying over the sins of the unrepentant in their congregations. However, if they are mourning over them, their sorrow is not leading them to take Scriptural action.

Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthians continued in chapter 6, where he wrote:

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let

yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! (1 Cor. 6:1-8)

In this matter, Paul chided the Corinthians for exposing their “dirty laundry” to the world, rather than settling matters among themselves. He shamed them for their failure to see the priority of maintaining peace and protecting their influence among the heathen. They should have gone the second mile in their efforts to resolve their conflicts, even to the point of suffering wrong, if necessary, to preserve the purity of the church. Could a rebuke be more pointed than to say, “No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!”? Was Paul being unloving in his reproof?

The final example of rebuke in Paul’s first Corinthian letter concerns cliquishness and the communion in chapter 11. Beginning in verse 17, Paul exposed the shameful conduct:

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses

to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. (1 Cor. 11:17-22)

As in the earlier censures of the Corinthians, Paul leaves no doubt as to the seriousness of the charges against these factious brethren. They were guilty of multiple offenses, which included the mingling of the Lord's Supper with what appears to be the love feasts common in the New Testament church. They compounded the sin by discriminating against certain brethren outside their clique. After reviewing the revelation he had received from the Lord about the initiation of the Supper, Paul warned:

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone

is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.
(1 Cor. 11:27-34)

These sobering admonitions left the Corinthians with no doubt about their condition in Paul's eyes. They were coming together in a manner that would bring judgment upon them unless corrected. They were in the grip of serious spiritual sickness, but Paul's chastisement, if heeded, would be the cure. Paul asked, "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you" (1 Cor. 11:22). But did he still love them? The final verse of the epistle provides the answer.

Paul's Compassionate Closing

As Paul concluded his passionate appeal to the church at Corinth, he wrote: "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen" (1 Cor. 16:24). Let the reader reflect carefully on every rebuke in the epistle. At the conclusion of it all, Paul penned this tender expression of love for **all** his brothers and sisters at Corinth. Can the reader imagine the apostle's pausing to ask himself whether such an expression would be consistent with the reproof and rebuke he had given? No indication of hesitation or hypocrisy appears in the statement. Why? It is because Paul understood what true love does: True love disciplines; true love corrects wrongs; true love rebukes and chastens. Jesus expressed His love in His rebuke of the Laodiceans. Paul, by the Spirit, in emulating the Christ, did the same with the Corinthians.

We are not left to speculate about the church's reaction to Paul's rebukes in the first epistle. In the matter of the erring brother of 1 Corinthians 5, the second epistle reveals the

joyous conclusion. In Chapter 2, Paul reaffirmed his love for the church at Corinth with these words:

But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.
(2 Cor. 2:1-4)

Could one ask for a clearer inspired illustration of biblical love in action? Hearts should agonize and tears should flow over the sins of erring brothers and sisters, and these emotions should motivate the loving reproof and correction designed to reclaim the soul. In the case of the brother in Corinth, the effort produced cause for rejoicing, as these words indicate:

This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. (2 Cor. 2:6-8)

Again, notice Paul's admonition to the brethren to reaffirm their love to him. They had delivered him to Satan—that is, had withdrawn their fellowship. Paul's use of the word *reaffirm* is further evidence that the initial action of withdrawal was an act of love. With the success of the loving action, Paul urged them to reassure the restored brother of their continued love.

Second Corinthians 2:9—A Sobering Statement

In connection with this matter at Corinth, we dare not overlook a final verse. It is a most sobering statement and should cause any eldership or congregation refusing to practice church discipline to shudder. In 2 Corinthians 2:9, Paul wrote, “For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.” The only conclusion one may draw from this statement is that to be obedient in all things, congregations must practice church discipline that must include withdrawal of fellowship from every disorderly member who refuses to repent.

Is there an elder or member among us who is willing to go to the judgment having been deliberately disobedient in one thing clearly commanded and demonstrated in Scripture? Should not every Christian strive diligently to avoid sin, to grieve over it, and to repent of every transgression when it occurs? How, then, can one read of the Corinthians' test of obedience from the apostle Paul, in the matter of discipline, and conclude that one is exempt from the examination? How can one conclude the admonition is not for all Christians for all time to come?

Conclusion

We return to the Lord's words to the Laodiceans: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous

and repent.” Tragically, many congregations demonstrate a disregard for the Lord’s teaching in Revelation 3:19. In far too many situations, “rebuke and chasten” translates into “excuse and embrace.” This is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Church discipline is the Lord’s commandment; Paul’s words to the Corinthians prove it. He claims the Lord’s endorsement in these words: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” The phrases “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ” are unmistakable. Those who fail to discipline are in violation of the Lord’s commandment. What is the Lord’s admonition to those who are guilty of such failure? Is it not “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent”?

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Preaching On The “Taboo” Topics: Modesty, Morality, and Mixed Swimming

Cliff Goodwin



Cliff and his wife, Beth (Williams), are native Alabamians. They are blessed with a son, Cade (14), and two daughters: Kinley (13) and Lakelyn (10). Cliff is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and Faulkner University. Over the last eighteen years, he has labored with the Ironaton Church of Christ, located outside of Talladega, Alabama. During this time, he has done extensive television evangelism—initially in the local market and recently on *Gospel Broadcasting Network* (GBN). As of 2012, Cliff is the host of *Searching the Scriptures* and *Preaching the Gospel*—both of which can be seen on GBN.

SINCE THE Patriarchal Dispensation, God’s redemptive plan has always included preaching. Inspiration describes the patriarch Noah as “a preacher of righteousness” (King James Version, 2 Pet. 2:5). One reads of prophet after prophet in the Mosaic dispensation who stood before Israel proclaiming God’s will to the people. Not only did Israel hear preaching from God’s servants, but the prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh to “preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (Jon. 3:2). In biblical history, God used inspired messengers to reveal and preach His Word to man. This continued into the New Testament era of the first century.

The apostles of Jesus Christ were guided into all truth (John 16:13) as they carried out the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). New Testament prophets were also inspired of God (Acts 13:1-5; Eph. 3:5). No doubt, these were men on whom an apostle had laid his hands (cf. Acts 8:18).

With the death of the apostles and the completion of the New Testament canon long passed in history, one can be assured biblically that no inspired preachers dwell on earth today (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:8-13). Nonetheless, many godly men preach an inspired message—the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible! With the completed revelation and recording of the fullness of God's Word, a need (in God's wisdom) for inspired men no longer exists. Instead, God calls upon faithful men to study diligently and to preach tirelessly His Word (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13-16; 2 Tim. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). We no longer have inspired men, but always an inspired message (the Bible)!

The Bible addresses man's every spiritual need (2 Pet. 1:3). It needs no further "illumination" from the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit revealed it to be understood in the first place (cf. Psalms 119:130; Eph. 3:3-4; Eph. 5:17). The Bible needs nothing else from God—it needs only to be read, studied, believed, and obeyed by man! The all-sufficiency of the Scriptures is clearly taught in the following passage.

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

Thus, the Word of God must be preached. In the same context, Paul charged Timothy to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2). God has revealed His Word to man, providing it in the written form known as Scripture, with the intention that faithful men preach it to the world and to the church!

Preaching On The “Taboo” Topics

It is actually a shame that such a matter as supposedly “taboo” topics from the Bible must be discussed. God’s Word was given that it might be a lamp unto man’s feet and a light unto his path (Psa. 119:105). Those things forbidden therein are forbidden for man’s own good and for God’s glory. Those things enjoined therein are intended for the same. Those who truly consider certain biblical topics to be “taboo” have a skewed perspective. In some way, they have lost sight of what is truly important—going to heaven and taking as many others there as possible.

Almost invariably, topics that are decried as being “taboo” (as far as being treated from the pulpit) are labeled thus by weak and worldly members of the church. Often this cry comes from those who are “stung” or embarrassed when their own worldly practices are condemned in a sermon. The real tragedy is not that such practices are Scripturally addressed from the pulpit, but rather that actual members of the church engage in such things! Preaching on such “controversial” matters—especially matters problematic in current culture—must be done. The preaching of God’s Word is intended to reprove and rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2), thereby curbing the evil influence of sinful practices among God’s

people. Paul instructed Titus, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" (Tit. 2:15).

At least a couple of considerations are raised when discussing the preaching of "taboo" topics. First, "all the counsel of God" is to be preached and disseminated to God's people (Acts 20:27). Man is not at liberty—neither preacher nor hearer—to omit matters that are deemed distasteful or inconvenient. The Pharisees and scribes of old were guilty of such "commandment culling." Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Mat. 23:23). A supposed Gospel preacher is not faithfully doing his job if he purposefully omits the addressing of "taboo" topics. In fact, in this modern world the "taboo" topics are often the ones most pertinent and the ones most needing Scriptural treatment. Even further, a child of God possesses the wrong attitude if he rejects the preaching of God's Word because of the topic. The psalmist said, "Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart" (Psa. 119:2), and again, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments" (Psa. 119:6). God has indeed revealed unto man all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), and He intends that all things be taught and preached.

Second, God's wisdom in organizing the church helps ensure that even the "taboo" topics are not overlooked from the pulpit. This is the case because elders rule over the local church (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17). Again it is the elders who rule—not the weakest and most worldly members of the church! No, elders do not rule in matters of doctrine, for such matters have

been legislated already by the Lord Jesus (Mat. 28:20; Col. 1:18) and delineated in His written Word (Heb. 13:20; 2 John 1:9). However, elders do rule in matters of congregational expediency—how best to expedite the work of the Lord and to carry out His will in the local congregation. One aspect of the local work is seeing that the flock (congregation) is regularly and adequately fed (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4). As shepherds of souls (Heb. 13:17), an eldership must see that the local church is taught the whole counsel of God and is warned of spiritual dangers—especially those dangers most pertinent or imminent (cf. Col. 1:28). In doing this, godly elders are not to be swayed by those with compromising tendencies. They must ever remember the seriousness of their charge. God’s Word must be taught to God’s people! It is altogether Scriptural for an eldership to secure the services of an evangelist to assist in doing this, even as Timothy labored locally with the Ephesian church (1 Tim. 1:3; cf. Acts 18:11; 1 Cor. 9:14). A faithful evangelist working under the oversight of qualified and conscientious elders should be the combination that ensures supposedly “taboo” topics will not be shunned from the pulpit. In short, godly elders see that godly evangelists preach the whole counsel of God, in order that God’s people remain godly.

Modesty

It seems that society and culture are ever changing, and American society in particular has changed greatly over the last sixty years. At one time, a sense of decency and decorum prevailed in this great nation. Those days are no more. In the midst of a culture that has obviously lost its moral moorings, it is all the more important that the church remain true to biblical teaching. God’s truth never changes. As the church stands foursquare on the Word of God, she

will indeed be “the light of the world” and “a city that is set on an hill” (Mat. 5:14).

One of the areas in which the church’s distinctive influence is needed most is in the realm of modesty. While modesty encompasses a wide range of attitudes and actions, the present concern of this essay regards modesty in dress. Nothing says more about a person **initially** than the manner in which one is dressed and the manner with which one speaks. When it comes to the proverbial “first impression,” these two areas rule supreme. Because of this fact, a Christian’s dress (apparel) is one of the primary ways that he exerts an outward influence on others (not to say it is one of the most **visible**). Dress is not the only factor in one’s influence, or even the most important necessarily. Nonetheless, personal dress occupies a place of importance all its own in the realm of influence. As stated earlier, it is obviously visible and therefore far-reaching in its effect. One’s dress even potentially affects those with whom the individual does not come into contact personally (i.e., “face-to-face”).

The “proof-text” often employed by preachers addressing the topic of modest dress is found in First Timothy. “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1 Tim. 2:9-10). This text has its place, no doubt, in a study of modesty. However, it is quickly obvious from reading the text that Paul was addressing somewhat of a different problem than that often faced in churches today. In that day the apostle was warning against those who wore **too much**—that is, clothing that was intended to be showy or ostentatious. It was certainly immodest, because it was designed to make a person feel or look superior to others. The immodesty too

often encountered today, however, arises when individuals wear **too little**. The Bible speaks concerning the dangers of both extremes.

The Lord's people of today must be taught concerning God's definition of **nakedness**. As mentioned earlier, modern society seemingly has no respect for the dignity of the human form and for the personal privacy belonging to an individual's body. People parade themselves in public, wearing clothes that should be reserved only for the privacy of their own homes. They do not blush to expose even the most personal features of their anatomies. Though they are not **nude** in the strictest definition of the term, too many men and women leave their homes *naked* in God's eyes.

The biblical terms *naked* or *nakedness* do not necessarily mean the absolute absence of clothing. In some usages of these terms, the context clearly demonstrates that some clothing was being worn—only it was not enough clothing, or it did not cover necessary parts of the human body. In these instances the individual is still described as naked, even though he or she was wearing some clothing. Following are some examples.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard

thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (Gen. 3:7-11)

One should note that Adam perceived he was naked even **after** having made himself an apron out of fig leaves. Further, God must have concurred with Adam's assessment, for He made coats of skins for both Adam and Eve following this incident (Gen. 3:21).

Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon. (Exo. 20:26)

And for Aaron's sons thou shalt make coats, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and bonnets shalt thou make for them, for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. **And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach:** And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy

place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him. (Exo. 28:40-43; emphasis added, CG)

The above passages pertain specifically to the priests of Israel, as they would be the ones officiating in the nation's worship. It is important to note that, even with all the priestly garb described above, God still required the linen breeches to cover their hips (pelvic regions) and thighs. In doing so these breeches are said to cover "their nakedness." The implication should be clear and unmistakable. Even today those who venture into the public eye with exposed hips and/or thighs are naked in the eyes of the Lord. Yes, the covenants have changed from the Mosaic to the Christian, but basic human anatomy has **not** changed since creation.

That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his coat about him (for he was naked), and cast himself into the sea. (John 21:7, ASV)

The above verse alone does not explicitly contribute to the present point, except for the difficulty in imagining a grown man fishing in the nude. Obviously, such was not the case, and the American Standard Version supplies a helpful footnote to that effect. The footnote reads, "Or, had on his undergarment only." The footnote goes on to supply the following cross-references: John 13:4; Isa. 20:2; Mic. 1:8; Mic. 1:11. This is a most helpful and telling observation. How many people in this modern age leave the privacy of their homes

wearing only what essentially amounts to undergarments? This is especially true of modern swimwear. Sadly, for one to go into public with such scant and revealing attire renders one **naked** in the eyes of God.

More examples could be cited from Scripture, but the foregoing should be sufficient to demonstrate that one can be "naked" without necessarily being "nude," or completely bare of clothing. What is the point of all this? There are actually two. First of all, throughout biblical history, nakedness has been associated with shame. The references abound (i.e., Exo. 32:25; Isa. 20:4; Rev. 3:18; Rev. 16:15). Further, this connection between nakedness and shame originated with the entrance of sin into the world (Gen. 2:25; Gen. 3:7-11). Truly, a redeemed child of God ought not to defile himself or herself with something so shameful. Secondly, when God created mankind, He did so in making them sexual beings. God created the genders, male and female, and created the natural attraction that exists between the two. This attraction, in and of itself, is wholesome and beneficial. It must be carefully governed, however, within the parameters of God's Word. Sexual desires are stimulated at the sight of nakedness in the opposite sex, and this is especially true when males see the feminine form in ways that are immodest and suggestive—that is, **naked** (to a greater or lesser degree).

Understandably, this is a sensitive subject. It must be treated with due respect and caution. At the same time, the author fears that too often the needed information is not effectively conveyed to audiences of God's people because of an extreme fear of offending someone. God's Word treats these matters. It is a subject very pertinent and needed in this age. Church members are often uninformed and, thus, they often mirror the dress styles of current culture—immodesty and all! Some preachers have resigned themselves to ignoring

the problem, saying that modesty is too subjective a matter to be addressed from the pulpit. They act as though God has not provided His people with clear, unmistakable guidelines when it comes to choosing a wardrobe. For these reasons, the following “dress tests” are offered—one for Christian men, the other for Christian women. These are not offered to be “standards” of modesty—the Bible already fills that position. Rather these “dress tests” are simply offered as tools for Christian men and women who sincerely want to understand better the biblical standard and conform thereto. Neither of these was written by this author, but both have been slightly adapted.

Dress Test For Godly Men

By Travis Main (adapted)

In the beginning God created mankind. They sinned and realized they were naked. They covered up their loins, but they didn't cover all their nakedness. God would soon cover the nakedness of both man and woman. There was no “cultural definition” of nakedness. What God established from the beginning is the definition of nakedness for all time. What God covered them with was a “coat.” By definition, such an article of clothing begins above the shoulders and would go below the loins. This means chest, stomach, and back were also covered as naked. However, this term “coat” is not the same as the jacket we know today. It was much longer. What additional nakedness did God cover? By God's

definition of nakedness, the coat would cover the thigh going all the way down to the knee (Exodus 28:42). Dressing Godly does not just involve covering nakedness. Test your own manner of dress by asking yourselves a few questions:

- **Do I meet God's standard for covering nakedness?** (Genesis 3:21, Exodus 28:42) Will any of these areas be exposed when you sit, stand, turn, or bend down?
- **Am I dressing so women will see me as a good man or a good body?** (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6; Galatians 5:19). Lasciviousness is an attempt to draw someone to lust after you. Clothes which allow others to see through them to your skin or are so tight no part of the anatomy is left unnoticed have the end result of creating lust. Yes, women do have desires. See examples of Potiphar's wife and her advances on Joseph (Genesis 39:7-10) or the desire of the Shulamite for her shepherd (Song of Solomon 2:3-7).
- **Am I concerned about keeping the purity of others?** (Matthew 18:7, 1 Corinthians 8:9; 1 John 2:10, Ephesians 5:25-27) Each man should work to protect and keep every woman he encounters pure, as if she were his sister or mother. This means you.
- **Will my clothing help or hurt my influence for Christ?** (Romans 13:10; 15:3; Philippians 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:14) A

man should strive to be without blame in regard to his clothes.

- **Will what I am wearing identify me as something other than Godly?** (1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Timothy 3:7) Do your t-shirts have lewd or suggestive sayings? Are your pants down below your [buttocks, CG] making you look like someone from a gang or prison?
- **Is it appropriate and respectful for the occasion?** (Genesis 41:14; Matthew 22:11-14) Going to the ball game is definitely different than going to [worship, CG]. God deserves your best. Indeed, it may be your best jeans and shirt, but shouldn't you give your best?

When you are in doubt... Remember 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

****Author's Note: I probably would not have expressed every idea in this article with exactly the same wording or illustration, but I feel that the thrust of the article is both true and helpful, CG.*

Dress Test For Women Professing Godliness

By Mary Martini (adapted)

Look at yourself in a full length mirror—front, back and sideways! Ask yourself the following:

- **Will what I am wearing bring God glory** (1 Corinthians 10:31; Exodus 28:40, 43; Isaiah 61:3) **and portray me as**

a godly woman? (1 Timothy 2:9-10) Yes or no?

• **Does what I am wearing meet or exceed God's standard for being modest?** (Genesis 3:21; Exodus 20:26; 28:40-43) Yes or no? You know!

• **Is it appropriate and respectful?** (Genesis 41:14; Matthew 22:11-14) When I dress, would someone think I was going to a picnic or other social activity, or can they really tell I am displaying my best in service to God? (Exodus 20:26)

• **Will my clothing help or hurt my influence for Christ?** (Romans 13:10; 15:3; Philippians 2:3, 4) Am I concerned about the way other think about me?

• **Is it too short? Sit down, cross your legs, bend over, reach up and squat down. At any time, does the garment reveal any of your leg above your knees?** (Exodus 28:42) With tops and blouses, is your midriff showing at any time? (Genesis 3:21)

• **Is it too tight? Am I revealing my body form (which highlights or emphasizes my feminine sexuality), thus tantalizing, enticing, or tempting men (young or old) to have impure thoughts** (Matthew 18:7; Galatians 5:19 —lasciviousness)?

• **Is it too sheer? Can I see my skin or undergarments through the material?** (John 21:7, ASV—undergarments exposed = naked in God's eyes)

- **Is the neckline too low?** Bend over—what can you see? Sit. Have another female tell you what they can see while looking down at you. This is a real situation—be honest.
- **If sleeveless, are my undergarments visible?** (John 21:7, ASV) Why? What does it say about me? What does it say about the God I am trying to serve with my clothing?
- **Is what I am wearing stating that I am dressed to be chaste (pure and holy) or chased (by men)?** What do I really want for my self-esteem? God's approval or man's?
- **Because of how I am dressed, would someone mistake me for a worldly woman?** (A harlot—Proverbs 7:10; Genesis 38:15)
- **Will it encourage a man to lust after me, thus causing him to stumble and sin?** (Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 5:27, 28) Do I want them to sin?

Please remember...God holds me responsible for immoral reactions IF I dress inappropriately. (Yes, I am liable for the reactions produced in others by MY appearance; Matthew 5:27-28; 14:1-12).

Morality

Morality refers to matters of right and wrong. Which practices in life are good and right? Which behaviors are

evil and wrong? These are questions of eternal consequence! Obviously, what is essential when it comes to morality is having the proper standard. Where does one turn for the answers to real-life questions concerning right and wrong? Whom does one trust? Trusting the proper standard is likely just as important as the willingness to do what is right. Without the accurate standard, one is misled into moral error. Without the willingness and fortitude to do what is right, one succumbs to temptation. Both results are disastrous spiritually.

God is the standard for morality, PERIOD. And why not? It is He that spoke this universe into existence (Gen. 1:1-31). It is He that formed man from the dust of the earth, breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). In creating man, God endowed, or "stamped," man with the Divine image (Gen. 1:26-27). God knows man infinitely better than man knows himself! Where else would man turn for a reliable standard of right and wrong?

God is absolutely perfect in His just character. John describes this figuratively in the powerful statement, "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," (1 John 1:5). John's inspired affirmation had been preceded by that of Moses a millennium and a half earlier. "[God is] the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deu. 32:4). It is clear that God is not only Sovereign Creator, but that He is the perfect and truthful Standard as well. God is so perfect in His holiness that evil will not dwell with Him (Psa. 5:4). He cannot even look favorably upon iniquity (Hab. 1:13).

God's goodness alone would not particularly guide man unless it was revealed unto him. Surely man can behold the

goodness, glory, and wisdom of God in the physical creation (Psa. 19:1), but this alone does not instruct man in the particulars of his own duty before the Creator. This is why God has revealed His standard of morality in His written Word, the Scriptures. Under the Mosaic covenant, God revealed to Israel His standard for their lives. To choose obedience and conformity to God's standard was to choose Divine blessing and life. To choose disobedience and rebellion was to choose death.

If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, **I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;** In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that

thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it (Deu. 30:10-16; emphasis added, CG)

It is clear from the above words that God was revealing His standard to Israel—it was not unknowable or unattainable. Similarly, God's standard and will for His people today has been revealed in the New Testament. It is interesting to note that the apostle Paul uses the above words of Moses to describe the accessibility of salvation today through the Gospel (Rom. 10:6-17). The lesson is clear: throughout all ages and dispensations, God's Word has been the standard for morality and the way of salvation.

Mixed Swimming

God's standard of morality comes to bear in virtually every aspect of daily life. Man is confronted with a myriad of choices day by day, and often he must choose between right and wrong. Some of the more difficult decisions arise with regard to man's choice of recreation or entertainment. Neither recreation nor entertainment is inherently evil; wholesome diversion can be quite profitable from time to time. However, a Christian must choose wisely in this area as in all others. His choice must be made in conformity to God's standard of morality.

Christians are often confronted with the question of "mixed swimming," that is, recreational swimming in mixed company (both males and females). One needs to understand that the issue under consideration is not *swimming* per se. Swimming itself is a profitable exercise (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8) and can be a wonderful form of recreation—especially in hot summer months! The real question that arises, and needs to

be addressed, is the matter of modesty. Males and females must always strive to remain modestly clothed in mixed company—regardless of the activity! Swimming happens to be an activity that lends itself to the shedding of clothes. As pointed out earlier, this simply cannot take place in settings where the genders are mingled.

This is **not** to say that males and females may not swim together in any circumstance. It is simply saying that special care must be taken in such instances. First, it should be obvious from God's definition of nakedness that typical modern swimwear is off-limits. Men's swim trunks are often knee-length, and modest in that respect, but bare torsos and exposed chests are immodest even for men. T-shirts (or suitable equivalents) should be worn by men and women alike in order to keep covered the midriffs, chests, and backs. Also, these upper-body garments should be of such material and construction so as to remain "unrevealing" even when wet. The scandalous "wet t-shirt contests" common in the world help to make this present point. Transparency is not the only potential problem, however. The way that a saturated garment clings or drapes over the human form should also be considered. It often proves quite difficult, especially for females, to keep a soaked garment from adhering to the body in a way that is immodest.

Regrettably, it seems that there is no such thing as a modest swimsuit for females (that is, not of the typical varieties). Weak and unlearned members of the church often try to make a case for a "one-piece" swimsuit as opposed to a "two-piece" or bikini. The fact is that **neither** of these even **begins to approach** God's definition of modesty! It goes without saying that "two-piece" bathing suits and bikinis would simply be called **underwear** if they were made out of different fabric. "One-piece" bathing suits are hardly any

better. They expose the thigh (a sign of nakedness; cf. Exo. 28:42), not to mention the way they adhere to both upper body and the pelvic region, accentuating those parts of female anatomy that are most intimate and suggestive. Simply put, no typical modern swimwear for females could seriously or sincerely be described as "modest."

Second, how others will be dressed must be considered also. It is good that Christian families take special care to clothe themselves modestly before the world, but then to go and immerse themselves in "a sea of human nakedness" seems counter-productive. Spouses who love each other's souls and parents who love the souls of their children will realize the unavoidable dangers of such places as the public pool or the crowded beach. To surround oneself and one's family with such glaring nakedness is to refuse the warnings of Scripture (e.g., Mat. 26:41) and to invite sure spiritual trouble.

Conclusion

When the local church assembles from week to week, the opportunity must be taken to preach God's Word, thereby feeding and exhorting God's people (cf. Acts 20:7). God's people are commanded to "come out" from the world and be "separate" (cf. 2 Cor. 6:17). Many members of the church need to be reminded of this charge. Instead of compromising with the world and partaking of its ways, Christians are to keep themselves "unspotted" (Jam. 1:27). They are to be "the light of the world" (Mat. 5:14), shining forth out of the darkness (Phi. 2:15).

Success or failure will depend on the individual Christian's willingness to submit to the will of God. Submission is not glamorous in the eyes of the world. It is not always easy for those within the church. The world exerts its pressure on God's children, tempting them to conform

to its ungodly ways (cf. Rom. 12:2). The world substitutes its own pseudo-standard of morality in the place of God's Word. The Christian is confronted with a choice: buckle and bow to the world's standards or submit unwaveringly to God's standard in all things? James reveals that victory comes through submission to God. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jam. 4:7). "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jam. 4:10).

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Death And Life Are In The Power Of The Tongue—Proverbs 18-21

Bill Irby



Bill Irby was born November 6, 1947 at Al-tavista, Virginia. He grew up in North Carolina and Virginia. He and Ginger were married July 17, 1976. They have two sons, Will (32) and Tom (29). Bill earned a BA in Bible and Communications from Freed-Hardeman University. He has an MA from Southern Christian University. He also has an MA in History from Georgia State University. He has preached in GA and TN. Since 1990, he has been preaching for the West Hobbs Street Church of Christ in Athens, AL. Bill has done mission work in Guyana, Ghana, and the Ukraine.

A MOST FASCINATING thing about our existence is that God made us in His image (New King James Version, Gen. 1:27). I would like to know many things about this passage, and most of them probably fall under the heading of “For My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8). But we do understand that human beings are created and that human beings do have the ability to communicate using the power of speech. These two things, one we learn from the Bible and the other through observation, lead us to the necessary conclusion that God created us with the ability to speak.

When we examine the Bible we find additional conclusions concerning our ability to speak, one of which is that God is very interested in how we use this gift.

Christians are familiar with the third chapter of the book of James as well as Matthew 12:36-37. We will return to both of these passages in this lesson. We begin, however, with a fundamental expression of the power of speech: Proverbs 18:21 reads, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” As with all of the Proverbs, this passage is freighted with meaning.

The power of the tongue is such that it can result in life or death. We have seen recently men give commands that resulted in the death of people simply because they claimed to be Christians. We also know that a Governor can spare the life of a man on death row with just a few words from his tongue. There is no more serious fruit than life and death and the tongue bears such fruit in abundance. It follows then that we ought to be very careful in how we use our ability to speak. It is sad to say that we often are not careful enough and find ourselves speaking too much, saying the wrong things, and speaking too soon.

Let us begin by considering the idea that we often say too much and that much of what we say is wrong. Jack Wilhelm tells a wonderful story about a well-meaning but nosy and loquacious sister who was always on the phone talking to everybody about everybody. One day she asked the elders what she might do to be a greater help to the church. A brave elder suggested that she consider disconnecting her phone. It is a funny story, but it has a point. Many troubles have arisen and much harm has been done by people with loose lips talking about things that are none of their business.

Three practical suggestions might help with the problem of speaking too much: **Be careful with criticism.** We know about constructive criticism, of which the Bible has positive things to say (“Iron sharpens iron,” Pro. 27:17). But to be frank, most criticism, especially the kind not offered directly

to its subject but to someone else, is designed to tear a person down, not build them up. People love to be critical of others because in their own minds they see themselves as superior. Always ask yourself what your motive is when you seek to criticize another. It is also good to consider the consequences of being critical. If you exercise a critical eye on others, they may well do the same toward you. Could you stand it?

Do not be nosy. One of the most prevalent misuses of the tongue is the probing into other peoples' business. We say that nobody likes nosy people, but it must not be so because there are so many of them. If people want you to know the details of their personal lives, they will tell you. You should not ask them. I know that for some folks this is seen to be an expression of caring. But it is not. Being nosy is part of a desire to be in the know which is in turn a part of a desire to be in control.

Do not get in the gossip cycle. A gossip cycle may begin innocently enough, but it rarely ends that way. When we hear someone begin to repeat a juicy story, we ought to turn away. An effective way to stay out of the gossip cycle is to refuse to listen to it. Based on my years of working with people, I can assure you that most gossip is not true. Things get confused with repeated re-telling. Innocent people are hurt by gossip. I cannot imagine anyone really wanting to hurt someone else, but that is exactly what gossip does.

This subject is a tough place for a preacher to work, given that most of our work involves the use of the gift of speech, but I think we need the lesson as much as anyone. Please allow another cultural reference to this problem. If you are old enough, you may remember the old song, "You Talk Too Much." I understand that it was written by Joe Jones and Reginald Hall. Here are a few of the lines:

You talk too much, you worry me to death, you talk too much, you even worry my pet. You talk about people that you don't know, you talk about people wherever you go. You just talk too much.

Great old song, is it not? One reason it remains popular and has been recorded by so many folks over the years is that it is a reflection of real truth. We remember that James has the definitive material on this subject:

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members, that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, and reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. (Jam. 3:6-8)

If you are in a line of work that involves dealing with human beings, you discover quickly that many of our problems are self-inflicted. The weapon is the tongue. Talking too much causes trouble in business, among our families, and in the church. As James also said:

Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts

great things. See how great a forest fire a little fire kindles. (Jam. 3:4-5)

Do you ever wonder why we do this? We surely know that the misuse of our God-given ability to speak is wrong. Consider some observations that may account for folks talking too much and saying bad things about other people:

Most partakers in gossip have issues about their own self-image. Such folks are caught in the trap of comparing themselves with other people. They are thus continually compensating for their own deficiencies by tearing down others. The idea is that by finding fault in another and publishing it abroad, I make myself look better. The solution to this problem is for us to realize that we are all the children of God and that the faults we so readily see in others are common to us all.

Many people who talk too much have an elevated view of their own expertise in areas of life about which they know little or nothing. This leads to saying many wrong things. Think of the person we often meet who might well go by the title, “Expert Critic.” It is amazing that a person with meager preparation and little experience will hold forth on just about any subject. One of the great misconceptions a person can have is that a thought of theirs is valid and true simply because they have it. Such “Expert Critics” abound in fields such as the raising of children, medicine, engineering, and yes, even Bible study. Now, we might well become competent in any field of endeavor and get to a point that what we say might be worth listening to. But to do so will take much more effort, work, study, and time than it does to simply unlatch one’s jaw.

Too many folks talk too much because they want to hurt others without being seen as doing so. This is the type

of person that, when confronted with what they have said, will claim ignorance. They might also say that they were just repeating what others said. Hiding an agenda is malicious and cowardly. An honest heart will not do it.

The damage done to individuals, families, and churches by loose tongues is immense. We would do well to remember James 3 and not talk too much. The volume of our speech relates directly to the correctness of the content of it. The idea that death and life can be determined by a powerful person's pronouncements is familiar to us and we have alluded to this power above. The men and women of the House of Representatives and the Senate have this power and have used it to allow the death of millions of unborn children. We have been told that this is done in an effort to protect the personal freedom of the woman bearing the child. Allowing abortion so that an individual's sexual freedom can be unabated is the use of the tongue for the purpose of death by means of saying something manifestly wrong. It is wrong because it omits consideration of the life of the unborn person. Indeed, such a creature is without doubt a person, a human being, no matter how small or early in development.

I suggest that our culture has allowed this tragic circumstance to happen because of the torrent of wrong and error-filled speech flowing from the tongues of people who want fervently to be absolved of responsibility for their sexual behavior. Beginning in the 1960s and increasingly so today, it is nearly impossible to get a word in edgewise against abortion in any open public forum without being portrayed as misogynistic and ignorant.

A similar situation exists with regard to sexual behavior. The sheer volume of words organized against the biblical perspective operates effectively to shut down opposition in open discussion. The fact that this hurricane of words in favor

of absolute sexual freedom is wrong is clear according to Romans 1:20-32. Just try, however, to express this anywhere in the secular media and you will be shouted down.

We are, of course, familiar with all of this. But there is an even more significant case of the poison fruit of a flood of death-dealing speech. I refer here to the tremendous pressure of false teaching concerning the relationship between God and man. Paul wrestled with such speech in his day, and we have a record of the way he dealt with it. When he wrote 1 Timothy, he said, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). In 2 Timothy he said, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). With these two passages, we see that Paul warned about what was to come.

In Ephesians 6:11-17, Paul described how the Christian can effectively fight the battle against the wiles of the devil. We put on the armor of God and use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. With specific regard to the matter of doctrinal fidelity and the necessity to respond to the vast outpouring of error, we do well to remember 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Paul had received a letter from the household of Chloe listing a number of problems endangering the church at Corinth. His approach to solving these problems was to direct the brethren there back to the central message of the Christian faith, the message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18).

The problems we face today are not so different from those confronting the Corinthian church. Once they moved our from under the shadow of the cross, they found themselves in trouble. That trouble, left unchecked, would result in the

church being divided. So it is today that doctrinal error has resulted in a Christian (using the word as an adjective) world so confused and divided as to be unidentifiable with the church of the New Testament.

As we face the flood of words contrary to the biblical pattern (2 Tim. 1:13), we must do what Paul did for the Corinthians. He drew them back to the cross of Christ. He reminded them of its power: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). He also said, “But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). This is the power that will allow us to be effective in standing for Jesus and the truth about Him today. Bombast will not do it. Sarcasm will not do it. Cleverness will not do it. The message of the cross is the only effective tool to overcome error and draw people to the Lord (John 12:32).

Paul also reminded them that it was the message of the cross that brought salvation: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). Here is a magnificent example of the power of life that resides in the tongue. Just as sure as the use of the tongue can bring about spiritual death by the promulgation of unsound teaching, the use of the tongue to preach and teach the message of the cross of Christ can bring about spiritual life.

Then Paul reminded them that the message of the cross was strong: “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25). This brings back to mind Ephesians 6:10-17. The Word of God equips us to stand against the wiles of the devil no matter the form those wiles might take.

Another element of Paul's argument here will help us today in combating the flood of unwise and incorrect speech. I refer to the underlying foundation of humility that is so much a part of Paul's preaching and teaching work. Proper speech is more than the words that come out of one's mouth. One's attitude, particularly when a man is defending the faith and presenting truth to perhaps an unwelcoming audience, must be right.

Paul told us in Philippians 2:5-11 to have the mind of Christ. The Lord's mind was characterized in that passage by three things: service, obedience, and humility. If the Lord Himself had a humble mind, I can do no less than to work diligently to be humble. Those of us who have taken the responsibility to speak the Word of truth in public must remember that we are mere heralds of a message that begins in the mind of God. Too many tremendous lessons presenting great truth have been damaged, deflected, and even destroyed by the pride of the speaker.

We have considered two of our three problem areas concerning the use of the tongue: speaking too much and saying the wrong things. Our third area of concern is speaking too soon. James provided the proper principle when he wrote, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Jam. 1:19-20). This passage is reflective of Proverbs 10:19: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Pro. 10:19). Indeed, a recurring theme in Proverbs is that the wise man is careful not to say too much (Pro. 17:27; Pro. 14:17). All of these passages show a correlation between speaking too quickly and an inadequately restrained temper.

Speaking too quickly can be wrong in at least three ways. First, when we speak too soon, we do not allow

ourselves enough time to think about the **circumstances** in which we are speaking. Before having something to say, we ought to think about who is going to hear us, where we are when we speak, and if what we are about to say is beneficial and designed to help those who are present when we say it. The privacy of one's home is a different circumstance than public places such as an office, a hospital, and the pulpit. What we say and the care we use in constructing our message will change with the circumstances of our speech.

Not only should we consider our circumstance of our speaking, we should also think about the **content** of our speech. If we speak too quickly, we might not devote adequate time to having something worth saying. People sometimes want so much to be a part of a conversation that they blurt out comments that do not in any way contribute to the matter being considered. We may all know the person who just has to put in his or her two cents' worth whether or not what they say is actually worth two cents.

Another problem with speaking too quickly is that we may not take the time to consider the **consequences** of what we say. It is possible that our desire to speak quickly causes us to be blind to the harm that could be done by what we are saying. Preachers, in particular, need to measure their words. We must never compromise the truth (2 Tim. 4:2). We must be bold like Peter and John who said, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). But speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) surely includes training oneself to use the gift of speech efficiently and with awareness of the circumstance, content, and consequence of our speaking. The Bible is a powerful weapon (Eph. 6:17) that must be used with great care. The power is in the text itself (Heb. 4:12), and we must use all of our contemplative

abilities to apply that power to the minds of the people who need it as effectively as possible.

Preachers are not alone in giving in to speaking too quickly. I knew a dear Christian woman who was most diligent to visit the hospital. She also enjoyed having quite a bit to say on the occasion of those visits. More than once I was present when she arrived and began to hold forth in the patient's room. She would inquire quickly about the nature of the patient's illness. Without fail she would then begin, before anyone could stop her, to give an account of someone she had known or heard of who "had the same thing." At this point, the encounter could have gone in a positive direction. But it never did. Everyone she knew who had an illness like that of the poor captive patient had died. This is a sad example of speaking too quickly without concern for circumstance, content, or consequences of what was said.

We have seen some of the ways that death and life are in the power of the tongue (Pro. 18:21). As James told the church long ago and continues to tell us today, we have to be careful with this great God-given ability to speak. Let us be diligent not to speak too much, say things that are ethically or doctrinally wrong, or speak too quickly. Instead, let us use our ability to speak to the glory of God.

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Preaching Against Sin: Homosexuality

Ben Giselbach



Ben Giselbach is married to the former Hannah Colley. They have a son named Ezra. Ben is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University and lives in Montgomery, AL. He is the minister at the Lightwood Church of Christ and also works with Lads to Leaders, equipping churches with the effective tools to train the next generation of sound church leadership.

IF YOU attended this lecture or own this lectureship book, you are probably a member of the Lord's church. More specifically, if I were a betting man (I am not, because I, too, am a Christian), I would bet you are a gospel preacher. You are a diligent student of God's Word and have dedicated your life to teaching souls the gospel, helping those around you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (New King James Version, 2 Pet. 3:18). No higher calling exists.

Therefore, you are probably convicted that homosexual behavior is wrong. I assume that I do not have to convince anyone reading this chapter about what God thinks about homosexuality. We understand that homosexual actions are contrary to the Will of God (Gen. 19:1-13; Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; Jude 7).

Though we know the truth about homosexual sin, it is still possible to handle the Word of Truth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15)

incorrectly. For example, it is wrong to focus on the sinful LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders) agenda **at the neglect of other sins**, such as unscriptural divorce (cf. Mat. 19:9), the use of pornography (cf. Mat. 5:32), and equally grievous sexual sins. It is wrong to focus on the homosexual sins of others while grossly ignoring any sinful attitudes or impenitence over sin that may exist within your own heart (cf. Mat. 7:1-5). Let us never be guilty of bowing to the various political forces pressuring us to silence any aspect of God's Word from the pulpit.

Some people are filled with fierce animosity toward those who embrace homosexuality; some are unnecessarily hostile toward homosexuals in our secular, post-Christian society; others are downright antagonistic towards homosexuals who have nothing more than a vague understanding of Holy Writ. We must remember the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Along with those who engage in any other sin, practicing homosexuals “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This

should cause the heart of the Christian to break. They will “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 The. 1:9).

Christians should not be characterized by their anger and disgust toward homosexuals, but rather by their compassion and mercy as they plead with homosexuals to leave their sinful lifestyle (Jude 22-23). Homosexuality makes the heart of Jesus ache (cf. Mat. 9:36; Mat. 14:14), and it should cause us to feel the same way. Like the scene in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, we have all been guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23), and we must help one another—with all of our unique temptations and inclinations toward various sins—live faithfully to Christ (Rev. 2:10).

The Gospel’s Power Over Homosexuality: An Exposition Of Romans 1:16-32

The Bible’s most extensive treatment of homosexuality is found in Romans 1. It begins with a glimpse at the power of the gospel, and then this gospel is contrasted with the wrath of God toward all unrighteousness. Paul vividly argues that homosexual activity, like idolatry, is rebellion against God and His design for creation.

The Power Of The Gospel

At the end of Paul’s introduction (Rom. 1:1-17) to his letter to the church in Rome, he wrote,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith. (Rom. 1:16-17)

As ridiculous as the gospel might be to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18), it is the medium by which God has chosen to redeem mankind. If we truly fear the One Who has the power to cast us into hell (Luke 12:5), how could we possibly be ashamed of the gospel? The gospel is what saves us **for** God and **from** God. We may be ashamed of things we have said and things we have done in the past, but we cannot be ashamed of Jesus Christ and His New Testament.

The gospel is more than just the historical account of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Within Christendom, it is common for modern heretics, even infamous men like Rob Bell and Joel Osteen, to proclaim the historical truth about Christ (yet they are still leading thousands to the gates of hell). No, the gospel also necessitates a doctrinal aspect. The gospel clearly contains commands that must be obeyed (cf. 2 The. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rom. 10:16).

When we obey the gospel, repenting of all unrighteousness and then being immersed into the death of Jesus (Acts 2:38; cf. Rom. 6:4), God's power is faithful. He saves us from sin, including sins of the homosexual variety.

Therefore, we are not ashamed of the gospel. What gives us the right to modify the clear command of the New Testament to repent of sin, as countless apostates before us have done? God has not asked us to be His editors—He has asked us to be His spokesmen. Thus, when the world pressures us to soften God's Word about repentance (especially repentance from a homosexual lifestyle), we must "live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). And because society is saturated with a hybrid concoction of postmodernism, liberalism, secularism, and political correctness, **today** requires a particularly strong faith.

When we read "the just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17), we cannot afford to get fuzzy in our application. Unlike the denominational world, we understand what it means to be

saved “by faith” (cf. Eph. 2:8; Rom. 10:9; John 3:16). To be saved by faith clearly means to believe in Christ and the authority of His Word, trusting His commands, and obeying them. Belief cannot be separated from obedience (John 3:36; Jam. 2:17; Jam. 2:26). Subsequently, living by faith (Rom. 1:17) cannot be reduced to a fluffy, feel-good Hallmark card (characteristic of how denominationalists treat being saved by faith). To live by faith, therefore, means to obey courageously the entire New Testament for the rest of our lives.

The Recipients Of God’s Wrath

The power of the gospel is necessary because of the promise of eternal damnation to all who **do not** obey. God’s grace cannot exist without God’s wrath; otherwise no need for His grace would exist. Paul continued,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.
(Rom. 1:18-19)

God’s wrath is directed at “*all* ungodliness and unrighteousness” (emphasis added, BG). His wrath is not merely reserved for what our temperamental society calls “really bad.” His fury is not merely reserved for “alternative” sexual lifestyles. His anger is not merely reserved for denominational dogmas. No, His wrath is reserved for **all** rebellion against Him.

As a result, man has tried to suppress the truth. Man as a whole is actively opposed to God’s Word as it has been revealed. Scripture exposes our sin. Both natural and

supernatural revelation declare His glory. Subsequently, His revealed Word necessitates repentance from sin so we can glorify Him.

Once again, we are tempted to be God's editors instead of God's messengers. Even within the church, many are inclined to soften God's Word about sin, repentance, and God's wrath. No one can claim ignorance of the plain truth of God's revelation. God has made Himself known; therefore, man has no excuse for not acting in accordance with God's Will (Rom. 1:20-21).

Everything is "futile" when we do not live our lives for God's glory (Rom. 1:21). When we choose not to know God, our hearts are darkened (Mat. 6:22). God's Word illuminates the heart and provides direction (Psa. 119:105). Jesus is the light of the world (John 14:6) because He is "the glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). We deny ourselves the ability to see things clearly when we turn away from God. "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

The Gentiles exchanged the glory of God for an image of "corruptible man—and birds, and four-footed animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:23). While the modern American man may not struggle with graven images as ancient man once did, idolatry is nonetheless rampant today. Whatever it is for which people exchange the glory of God is rather beside the point. In Romans 1:23, it happened to be literal images, whereas today it happens to be pleasure, self-image, or the philosophies of men. But the root of man's problem is exchanging the glory of God for something else.

"All have sinned" (Rom. 3:23); what does each man's sin have in common? "[Falling] short of the glory of God." Sin is

to trade the glory of God for anything else. The great unifying theme of the Bible is the glory of God. And the fundamental problem mankind faces is his failure to magnify God. This is the problem beneath all marriage problems, sexual problems, parenting problems, financial problems, addictive problems, criminal problems, etc. Unless a person begins realigning his life in a way that will give glory to God, he will be putting Band-Aids on the cancer of sin that can only be healed by facing the glory of God. If people were consumed by the glory of God, instead of themselves, God would take care of the problem of sin.

The Cause And Effect Relationship Between Idolatry And Homosexuality

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. (Rom. 1:24-25)

What was the result of man diminishing the glory of God and choosing to worship idols? God “gave them up to uncleanness” (Rom. 1:24). What does this mean? It should not be interpreted as He no longer cared for them. When God gives sinners over to sin, He does so wanting them to return to Him (2 Pet. 3:9). God is an optimist by nature. Rather, “God gave them up to uncleanness” means that God chose not to stop mankind’s self-destructive path, allowing him to feel the full consequences of his sin (cf. Gen. 6:3).

God “gives them over to uncleanness” (Rom. 1:24) when people exchange Him for something else, whether it is ancient forms of idolatry, modern forms of idolatry, or self-worship. You know society is rebelling against God when it becomes particularly confused about sexuality. What God calls sin, society calls “civil rights.” What God calls an abomination, society calls “constitutional liberties.”

Because human sexuality has become so politicized today, many preachers will not preach Romans 1. But we must remember this is not a political issue—it simply has political implications. We cannot be ashamed of the gospel and cower from the healing it offers to the “uncleanness” of homosexuality.

Some people genuinely struggle with homosexual urges. To them, homosexual passions spring out “in the lusts of their hearts” (Rom. 1:24). Homosexuality feels entirely natural to them. But as Christians, we cannot afford to follow our hearts; we must guard them. The difference between the sinner and the saint is that the sinner follows his own intuitions and feelings (cf. Pro. 3:5; Jer. 17:9), whereas the saint places his trust in the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:17; Jer. 17:7).

Because God “gave man over” to choose his own course of action, man “exchanged the truth of God for the lie” (Rom. 1:25). In our contemporary age, preachers need to be abundantly clear about this fact: **There is such a thing as a lie.** Our post-modern, pluralistic society says that there are multiple truths, lifestyles, and worldviews. God says there are only two worldviews: the truth and the lie.

God’s Word says that there is a distinction between the Creator and the created, whereas the lie says there is no difference. The truth categorizes things: There is God, and there is creation; there is the Bible, and there are false

religions and ideologies. In contrast, the lie—similar to what the serpent said in the garden—says, “You can be equal with God and choose what is good and evil” (cf. Gen. 3:5). Society reaches a particular level of confusion when the boundaries of sexuality are blurred, as Paul continued:

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (Rom. 1:26-27)

It is no accident that Paul connects man exchanging the glory of God for images, and then shows man exchanging a subordinate relationship with the opposite sex for the same sex. Again, **homosexuality is a result of exchanging the glory of God for something else**. Man begins by falling short of God’s glory (Rom. 1:23; cf. Rom. 3:23), choosing to believe a lie rather than the truth (Rom. 1:25) and then refusing “to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28). Sin is a result of disordering the object of our glorification.

Notice, Paul did not begin with perverted sexuality. **Homosexuality is not the biggest problem**. Yes, homosexuality is a problem, but it is not the root problem. A supreme wickedness far deeper than perverted sexual desires lives in people. This spring of evil is caused by exchanging the glory of God for something else (Rom. 1:23), and it is a dilemma everybody faces.

Paul used the widespread practice of homosexuality as a type of barometer to gauge just how much society has distanced itself from the glory of God. **Paul specifically illustrated homosexuality in Romans 1, yet other sins are just as insidious.** Paul details the full scope of the problem when society exchanges God for something else:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all **unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.** (Rom. 1:28-31; emphasis added, BG)

If God does not exist, then there is no such thing as sin. “Morality” becomes a relative concept. Therefore, when men do not retain God in their knowledge, the wickedness that will ensue is without limit. Not only does man become evil himself, but he encourages others to engage in the same sin.

Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom. 1:32)

When it comes to homosexuality, the LGBT community devises clever marketing tactics and engages in a vast PR campaign. They hold rallies and they elect officials. They infiltrate our schools and our government. They enact laws and overturn other laws, sometimes so swiftly that it takes our breath away.

Is there any limit to the wickedness of man? God's faithful children, who are living in the midst of this world (John 17:14-15), justly cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

Viewing Homosexuality From The Right Perspective *The Biblical Position On Homosexuality*

We cannot control others, but we can control ourselves. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Jos. 24:15). Though the LGBT community has an army of good lawyers and their think-tank groups are actively planting seeds of doubt about Biblical teachings on homosexuality, God's Word could not be clearer. Will we glorify God or believe the lie (Rom. 1:25)?

The Bible teaches that there is a creation order for human sexuality. From the beginning, God designed sexual relationships to be comprised of one male and one female for the duration of their lives (cf. Gen. 2:21-25; Mat. 19:3-10; Eph. 5:22-33). God has always been clearly opposed to homosexuality, which is abundantly evident in both the Old (Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13) and New Testaments (Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; Jude 7).

Just as the church must clearly teach against all sin (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15), we must clearly communicate God's Word about sin. We must warn and rebuke Christians who persist in homosexual practices, and the church must teach that homosexual affection is sinful.

1 Corinthians 5 And Judging Those Inside The Church

A world of difference, exists, however, between someone who has been carefully taught God's Word and someone who is ignorant of the truth. Those who know God's Word are held at a higher standard than those who do not. "For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Pet. 2:21).

First Corinthians 5 is particularly relevant to the attitudes of many in the church today concerning homosexuality.

I wrote to you in my epistle **not to keep company with sexually immoral people**. Yet I certainly **did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world**, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? **Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges**. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."
(1 Cor. 5:9-13; emphasis added, BG)

Many Christians are eager to pummel non-Christians for their practice or acceptance of homosexual behavior. And in turn, and understandably so, this vengeful spirit perceived

among some in the church is repulsive to the world. Non-Christians, who obviously do not know God's glory or the nature of sin, need to be taught the gospel first long before being taught that their homosexual practices make many in the church uncomfortable. **Why should homosexuals repent if they do not yet understand the necessity of repentance?** The homosexual sins of those outside the church are no different than your own sins before you became a Christian. All sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2), and all sinners are in need of the same gospel.

Those in the church, however, have been taught the truth. We demand a greater degree of holiness from those who have been learning the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). We are commanded to judge the unrepentant spirit of a brother or sister who has drifted into homosexual behavior. Those who refuse to deny their same-sex passions have crucified "again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:6). Paul commanded us to withdraw from Christians who practice homosexuality (or any other form of sexual immorality) (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Answering Common Arguments Made In Favor Of Homosexuality

Space does not allow an exhaustive response to the countless arguments the world makes supporting homosexuality. However, allow us to consider four arguments I believe Christians often fail to respond to adequately.

Skeptic: "Paul Was Homophobic, But The Gospel Is About Love."

Attempts are sometimes made to demonize Paul, claiming his denunciation of homosexual practices was merely his archaic opinion. This attempt is a clever one,

because if the LGBT community can undermine Paul's writings about homosexuality (i.e., Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9), they need only concern themselves with Jude 7. Some are eager to say, "We accept Jesus, but reject Paul," claiming his writings are somehow inferior to the rest of Scripture.

There is no room for disagreement about the inspiration and authority of Paul's letters. Paul claimed inspiration (1 Cor. 2:13); therefore to reject Christ's words given through the apostle Paul is to reject Christ. The apostle Peter referenced Paul's letters, equating them with inspired Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). This is in accordance with the words of Jesus; He said He would send His words to His apostles (John 17:8) and that by listening they would be His apostles (John 15:20). Jesus said that He would send His disciples His Spirit in order to instruct them into all truth (John 14:26; John 16:12-13). Subsequently, Paul wrote to Christians who doubted his apostleship, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37).

The inspired apostle was not the only man condemning homosexual practice; other men inspired by the Holy Spirit were teaching the same thing. Christians in the first century, guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were commanding repentance from homosexual behavior. In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he commended what they had **already** been teaching and practicing regarding same-sex attraction. "Such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11), meaning **Christians had a clear message about homosexuality before Paul's writings ever arrived.**

Skeptic: "The Church Should Be A Place For Broken People."

Yes, only Christ is perfect (cf. Mat. 5:48); yes, all of us have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23); yes, we are

all in desperate need of God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9). But that does not mean that God's grace is unconditional, and it certainly does not mean that sin can be allowed into His church. Sin can never be permitted a seat among God's people (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

We have all heard “The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” But we must also remember it is not a museum for sinners. While the church is comprised of sinners, those sinners must be **penitent** sinners who are obeying the gospel. Members of the church should not be defined by their sin, but by their constant desire to walk “according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

If we think Christ will forgive people who are unwilling to forsake their sin, we do not know Christ. “For such were some of you” is the call to holiness every sexual sinner must answer if they wish to enter the church.

The idea that one can be both a Christian *and* a practicing homosexual comes from a fundamental misunderstanding of repentance. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament repeatedly demand repentance. Ezekiel said, “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions... which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit” (Eze. 18:30-31). John the Baptizer said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Mat. 3:2). Jesus said, “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted” (Acts 3:19). Paul said God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

The reason people need the church is because they hate that which is broken about themselves. Christians are people who have made sin a foreign element in their lives (cf. 1 John 1:7). They may be tempted to sin in homosexual (or heterosexual) ways, but they fight that temptation and continue to keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

We must preach a message of repentance in regard to **all sin**. Shame on congregations if they merely denounce homosexuality **at the neglect** of other sins, such as adultery, gossip, idolatry, heresy, drunkenness, hatred, and uncleanness (cf. Gal. 5:19-21). All sin must be resisted. “Repent,” Jesus said, “[or] you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5).

Skeptic: “Why Hate On Gays At The Neglect Of Other Sins Like Gluttony Or Divorce?”

The LGBT community frequently makes this argument due to the perception that Christians are imbalanced in their denunciation of sin. There is some truth to this argument. **Let it never be said about us that we wink at some sins (sins which may be less egregious to us than others) while lambasting sins that are easier for us to target.**

We must recognize that practicing homosexuals, and those who approve of homosexuality cannot enter heaven (cf. Rom. 1:26-31; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Jude 7). We must also recognize that anyone (including a heterosexual) who is in an unscriptural marriage (cf. Mat. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:39; etc.) or practicing any kind of sexual immorality (cf. Gal. 5:19-21) cannot enter heaven. Since we are indiscriminate about whom we think should go to heaven, we must also be indiscriminate in our hatred of sin—even the most docile of sins (like gluttony).

Sometimes the statement is made, “Christians are serious about sin until the matter of gluttony is raised.” But many are surprised to learn the supposed “sin” of gluttony does not appear in any of the Bible’s big this-will-keep-you-out-of-heaven lists (i.e., 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:15). If the Bible has anything to say about food, it is that Christians should not be overly concerned about it. It is clear that Jesus has always been more concerned about what His people do sexually than with the

food they eat (cf. Mark 7:21-23; Rom. 1:24; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). When gluttony is mentioned in the Bible, it is much more serious than just eating too many Girl Scout cookies. The Bible's view of gluttony should be better understood as lazy, wanton, riotous living without any concern for tomorrow (cf. Pro. 23:2; Pro. 28:7; 1 Cor. 6:13; Phi. 3:19). Being overweight does not necessarily equal gluttony. The type of gluttony God is concerned about is that of the man who desires to exhaust his life on the pleasures of this world, saying, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32), giving no concern for the Kingdom (Mat. 6:33).

Should Christians speak against gluttony? Yes, anything that dulls our senses and distracts us from the Kingdom should be avoided. But when we understand the nature of true Biblical gluttony, it should be obvious that faithful Christians are already outspoken about this issue and all other Biblical prohibitions.

Skeptic: "Christians Should Not Force Their Views On Society."

This argument concerns the issue of laws regarding morality. Some will say, "It's okay for Christians to have their own opinions, so long as their opinions do not affect me." Others say, "Christians just need to keep their views to themselves." Still others say, "Christians should not attempt to legislate their morality."

However, honesty demands this important admission: **It is impossible for government *not* to legislate morality.** Is not every man-made law created because of a moral value? Is there a law that is not a result of morality? Even tax codes and traffic laws are examples of legislating fairness (which is a moral value) among citizens. The morality behind laws against murder and stealing are even more obvious.

Christians understand that we cannot force people to give glory to God, but **we can support legislation that is for the betterment of our fellow man.** We are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mat. 22:39; Mark 12:31). While we cannot force our secular citizens to hate sin, **our love for them demands that we make sinning more difficult for them.** We want our neighbor to have a better life, and legalized forms of homosexuality simply decrease the quality of their lives.

Conclusion

Without doubt, homosexual relations and actions are sinful. Christians must use wisdom, however, when proclaiming the truth to our secular, pluralistic society. We must boldly and courageously stand for truth when God's Word is being attacked by radicals in our government and in our media. We must sympathetically and patiently help people who are trying to fight against the homosexual temptations they may actually feel. We must encourage and strengthen Christians who may be weakened by the politically correct lies told to them by the world. We must not fellowship brethren who embrace or support the LGBT agenda. And we must correct Christians who have an imbalanced hatred toward those who practice homosexuality.

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If Your Brother Sins Against You, Rebuke Him—Luke 17:3

Sam Willcut



Sam Willcut is married to Melissa. They three have children: Christopher, Courtney, and Cameron. He earned a BS in Computer Information Systems from Faulkner University, Summa Cum Laude and a BS in Business Administration with emphasis in Accounting from Faulkner University, Magna Cum Laude. He has been preaching for more than twenty years in full-time located work in FL, AL, TN, and currently with the Southwest congregation in Austin, TX. He is the past Director of the Annual Southwest Lectures (2012-2015). Sam is the Editor of the *Christian Worker*, the second-oldest publication among churches of Christ.

WE LIVE in a strange time. We see two types of Christians—those who like to rebuke and do it often and those who are scared to rebuke and never do it. With email, Twitter, and Facebook, rebuking has never been easier, but in a generation of hurt feelings and thin skin, rebuking has never been more suspect. The irony is that both types of Christians are prone to sin, because those who enjoy giving a good rebuke are usually the least qualified, and those who would rather wash a cat are often the very people who would do so much good with their correction. Which are we? Are we trigger-happy with our rebuke or are we wet noodles?

We do not like the word *rebuke*. It sounds so negative. We want to encourage, edify, and uplift! We do not like to rebuke. Yet, the soul-winning physician Luke quoted the soul-saving physician Jesus when He said, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (King James Version, Luke 17:3). By means of further introduction to our subject and text, let us define the all-important word *rebuke*.

The term *rebuke* (Greek *epitimaō*) is a compound word which Thayer defines as “to tax with fault, rate, chide, rebuke, reprove, censure severely” (“*Epitimaō*”). It refers to the action of censuring or admonishing, and by implication, it refers to the action of charging and offering a strong rebuke. It conveys the idea of expressing strong disapproval, to censure someone with a view of preventing wrong or ending it. Counting our text, we find this term twenty-nine times in the New Testament. Consider a few examples:

- It is this strong censure that Jesus used to rebuke the winds and the waves of the turbulent Sea of Galilee to bring about a great peaceful calm (cf. Mat. 8:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24). It is also this strong censure that Jesus used in exorcising demons who knew His identity (Mat. 17:18; Mark 1:25; Mark 9:25; Luke 4:35; Luke 4:41; Luke 9:42) and even in rebuking the fever in Peter’s mother-in-law to heal her (Luke 4:38-39).
- It is this type of strong rebuke that Peter himself gave his Lord—“Be it far from you, Lord! This shall not be unto thee”—that prompted Jesus to respond, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” (Mat. 16:22; Mark 8:32-33). On another occasion, the disciples showed their ugly side when they rebuked children approaching

Jesus, but Jesus lovingly responded, “Suffer litte children and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-14; Luke 18:15-16). In similar fashion, the multitude rebuked the two blind men—one of whom was blind Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, (Mark 10:46-48)—from crying out to Jesus, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David” (Mat. 20:30-31; Luke 18:35-39), but Jesus heard their cry and healed them.

- Jesus even rebuked James and John (the Sons of Thunder) for their unmerciful attitude towards the Samaritans (Luke 9:55).
- The penitent thief rebuked his fellow criminal on the cross in Luke 23:42 prior to his humble request, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

Paul uses a similar word—*reprove*—in the theme of this lectureship. Thayer defines the term *reprove* (Greek *elegcho*) as “to convict, refute, confute, generally with a suggestion of the shame of the person convicted” (“Elegcho”). It conveys the idea of correcting one who is wrong. We find this term eighteen times in our New Testament. Consider a few examples:

- The offended Christian is to reprove the sole offender (Mat. 18:15).
- John the Immerser reprovved Herod for his marriage to his sister-in-law, Herodias (Luke 3:19).
- We may even reprove ourselves with a godly conscience, as the crowd with stones in hand did from the oldest to the youngest (John 8:9).

- Through our instruction, we reprove the sins of the non-Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24).

The apostle Paul declared, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). We are even to reprove guilty elders whom the entire congregation knows to be sinful (1 Tim. 5:20).

Jesus said to rebuke our brother who sins against us but really did not explain how to do so. This is where the apostle Paul aids us, for he gives some instruction as to how we are to rebuke our erring brother—with both longsuffering patience and instructive teaching. Thayer defines the term *longsuffering* (Greek *makrothumia*) as “patience, forbearance, long-suffering, slowness in avenging wrongs” (“Makrothumia”). It is the opposite of being short-tempered. The apostle Paul penned, “Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). This quality is a part of the description of the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22). It is a vitally important quality of our Christian lives (Eph. 4:1-3; Col. 3:12-13). Moreover, we must rebuke with doctrine (Greek *didache*), which Thayer defines as “teaching, viz. that which is taught” (“Didache”). It refers to the message taught and not the act of teaching itself. In Matthew 7:28-29, the crowds of disciples were astonished at both the teaching of Jesus and the manner in which he taught them (cf. Luke 4:32). After Jesus explained to His apostles, “Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Mat. 16:12). Jesus declared, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If anyone will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16-17). Luke

records, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42). The Sanhedrin accused the apostles: “Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name, and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us?” (Acts 5:28). The apostle Paul emphasized the importance of doctrine when he proclaimed, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom. 6:17). Moreover, the apostle John emphatically declared,

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not the doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. (2 John 1:9-10)

Therefore, through our introduction, we see that rebuking is biblical. Why should we rebuke our brother who sins?

Because “It Is Impossible But That Offenses Will Come”

In our text, after Luke recorded several occasions when Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their covetousness and their pride, Christ then turned to His disciples and warned them to avoid the very thing that happened to the Jewish leaders—they were to avoid offenses, especially to the disciples that society deems to be insignificant: “one

of these little ones” (Luke 17:1-2). It is in this context that Jesus discussed the importance of correcting people who do wrong. Trust me; it will occur at one time or another!

Yet, they also have the responsibility of repenting. Sometimes the question arises, Can I forgive a person who is impenitent? The answer is No! If God cannot forgive an impenitent person, then why do I think that I can? Nevertheless, I must display an attitude that is ready and anxious to forgive. I must be willing to encourage the person to correct the sin, and if he repents, I must forgive him (Luke 17:3-4). I cannot hold a grudge!

Therefore, the sequence of dealing with sin is rebuke, repentance, and forgiveness—in that order! In the verse subsequent to our text that Jesus explained the process of forgiveness when repentance follows rebuking. The reference to forgiving a brother seven times reminds us of the imperfections that belong to all of us. The need for forgiveness is continuous. For example, the Pharisees did not believe that they needed any forgiveness, not even once (cf. Luke 18:9-14; John 8:1-11), and one of the reasons that they were unforgiving was because they never saw a need for their own forgiveness. As we look inward, offenses will come! We still make mistakes, and our brethren will make mistakes. Moreover, we need to learn to take people at their word—Jesus said that if a brother turns to us seven times in a day and says, “I repent,” then we are to forgive him each and every time! Brethren, we cannot read people’s hearts. We ought to accept people at face value. If a brother later disproves his repentance otherwise, then we can deal with it differently, but if I am to accept what Jesus says, then should it happen multiple times in a single twenty-four hour period of time, I ought to accept it and forgive him.

Yes, offenses are going to come. In fact, the apostle Paul foretold Timothy that a time would come in which brethren would not endure sound doctrine. Unfortunately, some (even in the church) will refuse to tolerate gospel preaching any longer. They will not yield to the rigorous demands of the truth. They desire something more pleasing. They have “itching” ears. The metaphor here suggests an eagerness to hear. A philosopher asked in a passage in Seneca, “Why do you tickle my ears? Why do you entertain me?” This is just what these rebellious people want—entertainment in the place of substance. Maybe they want relief from the “itching” irritation of sound doctrine. How familiar this sounds—even in modern times. Accordingly, they “heap” unto themselves teachers according to their own lusts. Here is the gospel of self-centeredness. They will accumulate a handpicked hoard of clergy that will play any fiddle tune they request.

Not only that, Paul says that they will turn away their ears from the objective truth from God and in its place, they will turn to fables. As Wayne Jackson wrote in his commentary, “These proto-Gnostics were fascinated with theological fairy tales, as many are today (those who believe a frog, over eons of time through natural processes, can evolve into a man)” (278). False teachers and religious error are real evils. The Bible warns us repeatedly of their reality and ruinous results.

Therefore, rebuking brethren is an act of protection. It protects one from hurting others and hurting oneself. It protects the flock from false teachers and wicked individuals. As God described Ezekiel (Eze. 33) as being a guard on the city wall, elders are to cry out and correct when they see the enemy in our midst (Acts 20:26-31)! In other words, they are truly keeping watch for our souls (Heb. 13:17) when they protect us with proper rebuke!

**Because The Time Is Now That I Should Be More
Concerned About The Soul Of My Erring Brother
Than My Own Personal Feelings**

How do we handle rebuke when needed? Do we get angry and harden our hearts? We live in an age where people are emotionally fragile, easily hurt, and quickly offended. People do not offer correction; they e-mote their feelings! Yet, sometimes, the most loving thing someone can do is to rebuke the error of another! The reason that we do not rebuke is not that we are so full of love, but that we do not truly love. Yet, if we rebuke or discipline, people will say that we do not love. We like people to think well of us. We like our relationships to be easy. In spite of that, as one unknown writer stated, “The opposite of love is not correction, but indifference.”

Unfortunately, I believe we allow our own personal feelings to get in the way of rebuking when such is necessary. We should not become easily hurt, offended, or angry when others are doing us a favor! We talk ourselves quite easily out of it for a number of different reasons. Some misquote Matthew 7:1 and believe that we should not rebuke because such would be a form of improper judging. Some are afraid of an angry or negative reaction we may or may not receive. Some may be so self-centered that they are simply unconcerned about the conduct and behavior of others. Some blind themselves to this responsibility by stating, “Their business is none of my business, and I will stay completely out of their business.” Some may be hypocritical in their own personal behavior, and as a means of not wanting others to rebuke them, they choose not to do so to others.

We are to rebuke as a parent to a child—with love and concern: “As many as I love, I reprove and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Is it easy? Was it easy for

Nathan to deliver his crafty rebuke to King David in response to his horrible sins? Yet, God sent him to David for this very purpose (cf. 2 Sam. 12:1). Was it easy for Paul to withstand Peter “to the face, because he was to be blamed” in Galatians 2:11-14? Paul did not take the position, “I am tolerant of the viewpoints of everyone, including Peter. Unity in diversity is the name of the game. Who am I to judge? Be at peace, my brother.” Bravo to Nathan and Paul for dishing it out, and kudos to David and Peter for taking it to heart! Of course, it is not easy, just as the Hebrew writer explains in Hebrews 12:4-13.

What can we do now to practice this more?

- We need to follow the Golden Rule (Mat. 7:12).
- We need to remind ourselves that every single member of the church is important. The bond of fellowship is to be strong (Acts 2:42-47). The balm of comfort and the lift of encouragement are vital (Heb. 10:24).
- We do not need to fear unknown reactions.
- We do not need to wear our feelings on our sleeves and become defensive every time someone wishes to help us!
- We need to be sure that we are rebuking for the right reasons in the right way (cf. Gal. 6:1). We are not trying to act “holier than thou.” We are not trying simply to win an argument or make a point!
- Above all, we should pray for wisdom as we engage in the unpleasant act of rebuking (cf. Jam. 1:5).

Most of the time, sharp words and railing judgments are out of place (cf. 2 Pet. 2:11; Jude 9). Though Paul was scorching in his words to Elymas (Acts 13:10), he was mild

with Alexander, the coppersmith, of whom the apostle simply said, “The Lord reward him according to his works” (2 Tim. 4:14). Although Jesus used burning words for hypocrites in Matthew 23:23, he was gentle in judging a sinful adulterous woman: “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). While Jesus knows all hearts (John 2:24), we do not. Nevertheless, we should carefully heed the words of Jude:

Keep yourselves in the love of God,
looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus
Christ unto eternal life. And of some,
have compassion, making a difference:
And others save with fear pulling them
out of the fire; hating even the garment
spotted by the flesh. (Jude 21-23)

**Because The Time Has Passed In Which We Have
Lost Loved Ones Because We Failed
To See The Benefits In Rebuke**

What would necessitate such a need to rebuke our erring brother? Dear friend, behind all of this is the reality of sin and error (cf. Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23)! We must see the ugliness of sin in contrast with the holiness of God and become alarmed so that we will rebuke with the goal, not of destruction, but of restoration—this is the goal of all rebuke! A loving rebuke is not supposed to be as a gunshot, but as a flu shot, it may hurt, but it is supposed to help. Listen to the closing words of James: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jam. 5:19-20). Thus, elders need to become alarmed to save the souls over whom they watch by rebuking! In fact, the ability to deliver a rebuke

to those who contradict sound doctrine is a qualification to becoming an elder, because it is a necessary part of their work (Tit. 1:9; Tit. 1:13). Preachers need to become alarmed to rebuke with the authority of the gospel from the pulpits in this world (Tit. 2:15)! Christians need to become alarmed to rebuke their erring brothers and sisters in Christ when they sin! Possibly, at times in our lives, elders, preachers, or close Christians have either gently spoken words of reproof or have literally shaken us with words of rebuke. In looking back, we can see the correctness of such an action and we consider these individuals among our closest of friends because we are better today as a result! As Solomon stated, “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Pro. 27:5-6).

I believe we have failed in this necessary attribute for at least two other reasons. First, our generation generally does not respect the authority and wisdom of those who are older and wiser. Whenever we refuse correction, we blame others for all of the wrongs in our lives and we are stuck in a cycle of destructive behavior by not understanding that we are to blame for much of our problems. Second, our generation embraces relativism—truth is opinionated. Thus, it often reduces the constructive criticism of correction to an oppressing opinion.

Conclusion

Why should we rebuke our erring brother? It is biblical. It is protective. It is a loving action, and the goal of it is to restore.

Reproving and rebuking together implies balance. Reproving indicates a slap on the hand; it changes what one believes. Rebuking indicates the time to go the woodshed; it changes how one behaves. May God grant us wisdom to

be able to know when to do each as is necessary, and may God help us to soften and mold our hearts to accept such for the benefits therein. As the psalmist stated, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psa. 141:5).

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Overcoming Negativity And Learning To Be An Encourager

Frank Shepard



Frank and his wife Jane have been married over 46 years. Both are from Birmingham, AL. They have two daughters, Sheri Blackwell and Brandy Holston and six grandchildren. Frank is a US Navy veteran and served seven years. He and Jane obeyed the Gospel in 1973 and 1972, respectively. He is a graduate of the former East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions. He has preached in TN, SC, WV, and NC . He is one of the preachers at the Warners Chapel congregation in Clemmons, NC and is the Interim Director of the North Carolina School of Biblical Studies.

MANY TIMES when the word *rebuke* is heard, it is thought of in negative terms. Some events which took place in Antioch may cause one to think of a rebuke in negative terms. Those events are the ones involving Paul, Peter, Barnabas, certain brethren from James, and of course, the Gentiles (New King James Version, Gal. 2:11-14). What Peter did was hypocritical. His actions were negative and had a negative effect upon the church in Antioch. Because of that, Paul rebuked Peter to his face. Paul wrote, “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all” (Gal. 2:14a). Some in our brotherhood seem to think that any reproving is a negative thing. It is not. In fact, the negative element is that action

that causes one to be in need of rebuking. The exhortation for one to change his actions can **sound** negative, but the actions that are the framework for these lectures are not negative things. This is especially true if our efforts turn a brother back to the truth (Jam. 5:19-20). The negativity comes when a brother reproveth, rebukes, and exhorts in such a harsh manner that it drives the erring further into their error and away from the light (1 John 1:5-7). The purpose of reproving, rebuking, and exhorting is to turn brethren back to the light. First, we will define some terms. Then, we will consider some examples of rebuke. Last, but not least, we will find how to overcome negativity and learn to be an encourager.

Defining Our Terms

Overcoming

In defining our terms, we establish a firm place from which we can obtain a clearer understanding. Our first word, then, is *overcoming*. It means “to get the better of, to surmount [overcome difficulties] (“Overcome”). The idea of overcoming implies something that needs to be changed. Many times the things we need to change are things that will prevent or hinder our efforts to be pleasing to God. It pleased God to overcome sin and death. It pleases us when we overcome sin in our life. The things we are to overcome, then, are the negative things.

Negativity

Negativity is defined as “the expression of criticism or pessimism about something” (“Negativity”). It is a way of expressing oneself in a pessimistic way with little regard for constructive information.

Learning

Our next word to define is *learning*. It means to “gain knowledge or understanding of or skill in by study,

instruction, or experience” (“Learning”). This definition tells us one must do something to become an encourager.

Encourager

Encourager is the last word in the title of our lesson to define. *Encourage* means “to inspire with courage, spirit or heart; hearten” (“Encourage”). It follows, then, that to be an encourager, one will inspire others and interact with others with courage, spirit, or heart.

What, then, is our net result? We must overcome a negative, pessimistic attitude by gaining the knowledge and the skill of giving others courage and heart by studying how to do so and gaining experience by doing so.

Reproving, Rebuking, Exhorting

These words constitute the setting or context in which we are to overcome negativity and learn to be an encourager. Again, we need to understand what these words mean in order to get a clearer understanding.

Reprove

To *reprove* means to “bring to proof,” or “to expose” (Vine, “Reproof”). Ephesians 5:11 is given as an example of the use of the word, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose** them.” By comparing those works with what the Scriptures say, we expose them.

Rebuke

The next word is *rebuke*. While related closely to *reproof*, *rebuke* means to chide. It is like a correction with words of warning or admonishment. In Luke 17:3, we are shown just how closely reprove and rebuke can be. “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).

Exhort

Our last word to examine this way is the word *exhort*. It means to call on, to entreat; it can also mean to admonish or urge (Vine, “Exhort”).

The Appeal To Reason And Command

It has been pointed out that these three words, especially when used together, appeal to reason, conscience, and will.

Reason

Whenever we read what the Scriptures say, we are easily reminded that we need to change our thinking and learn to utilize God’s way of reasoning.

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable will of God.
(Rom. 12:1-2)

Our minds need to be transformed into thinking like God would have us to think, not the same old way we were used to thinking for “It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” (Jer. 10:23b).

Conscience

Rebuke carries with it the idea of an the appeal to the conscience. A rebuke can remind one of what his conscience needs to be. “For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom,

but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you” (2 Cor. 1:12).

Will

Exhortation is given as an appeal actually to do the right thing: repentance, restitution if needed, and having the will to actually do these things. “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jam. 1:22). From these things, we come to understand that reproving, rebuking, and exhorting are things we are commanded to do.

How This Action Is to Be Done

The last part of 2 Timothy 4:2 tells us how we are to do it—“with all longsuffering and teaching.” We need to define *longsuffering* and *teaching*. *Longsuffering* means “forbearance, patience, and longsuffering” (Vine, “Longsuffering”). Teaching is doctrine. We might recall that in Acts 2:42, the disciples continued in the apostles’ doctrine. It is what is taught. So when a person needs reproving, rebuking, and exhortation, it is to be done with patience, forbearance, and beseeching. The teaching of those things that are believed among us need also to be applied to our thoughts and actions. Some would call these “things of the Christian system of faith.”

Examples Of Reproving, Rebuking, And Exhorting

The examples of rebuke found throughout the Bible show us that this action is actually a positive one. When this type of action is used, it is for a person’s benefit, not his detriment. Sin is always sin and needs to be pointed out. The motive for pointing out sin should be to help a brother out of error that could cost him his soul. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

Paul's Rebuke Of Peter

It is written that Paul withstood Peter to his face (Gal. 2:14). Several things should be considered here. Peter's actions were hypocritical. He had been eating with the Gentiles before certain brethren came from Jerusalem. After they exerted their influence, Peter felt pressure not to eat with the Gentiles. This was particularly a public thing because before those men came, Peter had been eating with the Gentiles. In fact, Paul said to Peter, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of the Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" (Gal. 1:14). Paul confronted Peter in a public fashion. After all, Peter could have not done anything much more public to show his error. Paul also confronted Peter directly. He did not go and tell mutual friends about Peter's sin. He went directly to Peter. If we consider why Paul did this, we can see the positive aspects of it. The hypocrisy could have cost Peter his soul. It could have also discouraged many Gentiles from remaining faithful or even becoming Christians. It could have persuaded other Jewish Christians to do the same. It had that exact effect on Barnabas. When we consider all these things, we realize that for Paul not to have done as he did would have been not only sinful, but it would also have hurt the church. It would have brought reproach upon the church. It would have besmirched the reputation of the bride of Christ. Many times when the rebuke of Peter is talked about, it is easy to overlook what we find in Galatians 6:1. Paul would have certainly rebuked Peter in the same manner in which he commanded others to do. Paul's approach is directly tied to the idea of overcoming negativity and being an encourager. This is part of how we are supposed to learn to overcome negativity and learn to be an encourager.

Peter's Rebuke Of Simon

There is some irony in this incident of Peter being rebuked. At an earlier time, Peter had to deal in a similar fashion with Simon of Samaria who had just become a Christian (Acts 8:14-24). Simon wanted to buy the miraculous powers that he had seen in Philip, Peter and John, and those on whom Peter and John had laid hands. When Simon saw these things, he offered money wanting to purchase that power. Recall what Peter said to Simon. Peter told him that he was in peril because he thought he could buy that power. He also told Simon that his heart was not right with God. But then Peter told Simon to repent and pray that God would forgive him (Acts 8:14-25). If Peter had not rebuked Simon, Simon would have lost his soul. The things that Peter said to Simon were the result of longsuffering and teaching. Peter could have just told Simon that he needed to repent and left it at that. He could have said nothing at all, although not very likely. The teaching that Peter did was found in telling Simon the nature of his sin, to repent of his sin, and then specifically to pray for that forgiveness. What was Simon's response to Peter? "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me" (Acts 8:24).

Nathan And David

When we read the passage in which Nathan rebuked David for his sins (2 Sam.12), we find a slightly different approach. Nathan did his teaching first and then came the rebuke, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7). Even though the approach was different, the same elements—reproving, rebuking, and exhorting as well as longsuffering and teaching--were used. David's response as the story progressed is thought by some to be a manner of rebuke. However, until Nathan made the application, David was unaware the rebuke was for him.

Consider the effect of Nathan's approach. David recognized his situation and said immediately, "I have sinned!" (2 Sam. 12:13). The King, being the kind of man he was, was deeply moved. We have as probable evidence Psalms 51 and 32. In one, sin is acknowledged. In the second, thanksgiving for the forgiveness of sin is offered.

The Purpose Of These Actions

How David and Simon responded show the desired effect of those actions. In both instances, we see the responses to be what God would have them to be. Simon asked Peter to pray for him. David said, "I have sinned." The desired result is that one acknowledges his wrongdoing and repents. How did this come about with these two men? When confronted with what he had done, David responded positively. Nathan told him the problem, but how he told him made the difference. His method suggests he was longsuffering and used teaching. He did not browbeat David, nor did he talk from a superior attitude. This comes from following what the rest of 2 Timothy 4:2 has to say, "With all longsuffering and teaching." Nathan practiced that very idea. Without question, Nathan cared for his king. Without doubt, Nathan stood for the truth. Nathan's approach allowed David to reason within his own heart the sinfulness of his own actions. We are also shown his desire to be right with God. Nathan presented God's opportunity for David to return to God. It would appear that David did not escape the consequences of his actions. But if you doubt David's repentance, read Psalm 51 and then read Psalm 32.

Do we need to tell a parable every time we reprove, rebuke, or exhort? It is a rhetorical question. We do, however, need to teach. Being longsuffering is one thing. But being longsuffering and teaching is another. Nathan illustrated for David the severity of his sin. In one sense, the story has a pastoral quality to it. In another sense, it shows the wickedness

of what was done. It aroused David to anger, so much so that he could have thought that such had actually happened. He would make the offender pay four-fold. Nathan did not compromise the truth, however. He told David forthrightly, "Thou art the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7). The point is that Nathan reproved, rebuked, and exhorted with all longsuffering and teaching.

What Do We Practice?

Which do we have the most of in the church today? Do we have those who love to reprove and rebuke and exhort, or those who reprove, rebuke, and exhort with longsuffering and teaching? What is your answer concerning yourself? To cover the next part of the assignment, we will take a look at how to learn to be an encourager.

Learn To Be An Encourager

The Place To Start

The place for us to begin is Galatians 6:1 which was previously cited. The word *overtaken* suggests the idea that this not about intentional or deliberate sin. J. Noel Meredith wrote, "The word does not mean a deliberate sin; but a slip as might come to a man on an icy road or a dangerous path" (215). This is not to say that such a sin is not a sin, but it was not planned or deliberate. After recognizing such, the spiritual brother makes the effort to restore the brother who has sinned. The idea is like that of fixing something broken or realigning a car's wheels that are out of alignment. James writes that we are to confess our sins to each other (Jam. 5:16). Sometimes that appears to be easier said than done. It is difficult to confess sins to each other. So the spiritual brother should watch to see if his brethren are overtaken in a sin. John let us know that if we confess our sins to God, He

is faithful and just to forgive us of our sin (1 John 1:9). When a brother helps a brother to see the need to repent, he has become an encourager.

Continue With Gentleness

Paul wrote that this restoration was to be done in gentleness. We could examine the Greek definitions here, but something is more important than the Greek. We need to ask ourselves what gentleness means to me. We are instructed to treat our elders as we would our fathers. Jesus taught in John 8 that we need to have humility when dealing with the sin of others. After all, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). He told the men who had caught the woman in the act of adultery, “He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone” (John 8:7). James wrote that we are to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up (Jam. 4:10). We are not above our brethren. We stand in the same place as they do—in need of our Savior. I think again of Nathan and David. I cannot imagine Nathan, Peter, or Paul scathingly rebuking the brethren. I can see them detesting the sin, and I can see them loving the brethren. Paul also wrote that we need to look to ourselves because we can be tempted as well. Perhaps we might be tempted by the other’s sin. We might possibly be tempted to look down on our brother. The man who thinks he is in good standing above his brother is warned to take heed. Why? Because he could very easily fall (1 Cor. 10:12-13.)

Add Knowledge

I would also recommend to you a book written by Aubrey Johnson. The title is *The Barnabas Factor*. It is an excellent work on how to become a “son of encouragement” like Barnabas. It is a well-written detailed study on how to become an encourager. It is not the scope of this paper to

recount the pages of that book. It is recommended that all read and study the book.

Reason, Conscience, And Will Revisited

It has been stated that these three actions appeal to reason, the conscience, and the will, respectively. *Reproof* is to censure, to warn, and to admonish. The use of Scripture and biblical principles such as “repent or perish” appeal to reason. *Rebuke* has the idea of an implied demand for restitution when error is pointed out. This is to appeal to the conscience. Recall the wrongness of your actions. Think about who paid the price for your sin. Do not go back into the way of darkness. *Exhort* can also be translated *encourage* or *comfort* or *appeal to*. Hand in hand with the conviction of the sinner and a reprimand must be an exhortation or encouragement that comes from love and concern for the brother.

The Desired Result

Others have suggested that no rebuke or conviction should ever be such that it causes a man to feel that he is beyond repentance, restoration, and righteous living. Nevertheless, men must be rebuked when it is needed. Men must also be encouraged. Encouragement is as much a part of process as rebuke. An old saying suggests preachers should “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” If we seek only to convict and not to encourage, we have added to a burden and not helped to bear it (Gal. 6:2). But if we encourage those who have been reprovved and rebuked, we are assisting them in overcoming sin. We are helping them to learn to bear their own burden (Gal. 6:5).

Reproof, Rebuke, And Exhortation From The Pulpit

Biblical preaching must be balanced. Prove sinners wrong, correct, and comfort with all kinds of patience

and teaching. How do you overcome negativity from the pulpit? You do so by pointing out sin and providing the invitation to repentance. No matter how important it is to follow this command, most men find it not within themselves to be longsuffering. In the heat of the rebuking, it is often forgotten that teaching must be done with all longsuffering. It is somewhat like the father who disciplines when he is angry. The discipline becomes more important than the teaching of the child. Sometimes it is necessary for children to hear “Because I said so.” But when we are dealing with sin and Christians, the goal should be to help them grow. Usually, it is more like “I really mowed them down.” Can you imagine Nathan saying that about David? Can you imagine Nathan saying to David, “Because I said so”?

It Is God’s Command, Not Ours

Let God lift you to the level **He** wants you to be. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Mat. 5:3). “Blessed are the meek” (Mat. 5:5). That is where the preacher begins; he starts with himself. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mat. 12:34). What comes out of our hearts? We are to make righteous judgments, but we are not qualified to pronounce judgment on one another (Mat. 7:1-5). With an honest heart, one is better able to become an encourager.

Outlook

Outlook is another tool for becoming an encourager. If a person sees only negative things, then he is indeed going to have to change that attitude. The pessimist is one thing, but a Christian who is a pessimist—well, that is an oxymoron. We could start with the fact that one must believe that God is. But he must also believe that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). The pessimist would likely think his reward would not be as great as everyone

else's. One must also believe that his work in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). One must believe that all things work together for good for those who love God and keep His commandments (Rom. 8:28). One must believe he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him (Phi. 4:13). One must know in whom he has believed and be persuaded that He is able to keep his soul (2 Tim. 1:12). One must know the meaning of longsuffering, and one must realize that God is that way toward us (Psa. 86:15). One must learn to esteem others better than himself (Phi. 2:3). If one is strong, he must help the weak (Rom. 15:1) If one is weak, he must seek to grow in strength (1 Pet. 2:1).

Conclusion

How do you overcome negativity and learn to be an encourager? Read the Scriptures and put into practice the things we find there. Consider Nathan and David, Peter and Simon, and Paul and Peter. If one is not given so easily to being longsuffering, he must learn to be like Barnabas or like Christ. Jesus came into the world not to condemn it but to save it (John 3:17). How longsuffering was He? How much teaching did He do and still does through His word? I would take my stand with the publican. I would pray that the Lord would hear my plea, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Will you be like the Pharisee to your brethren? Or would you be like Jesus? "Reprove, rebuke exhort, with all longsuffering, and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

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The Hateful Rebuker—Rebuking With Love Without Compromise

Neal Pollard



Neal Pollard is married to the former Kathleen Gillaspie, with whom he has three sons (Gary, Dale, and Carl). He began preaching in 1987. He was educated at Faulkner, Freed-Hardeman, and BVBID (BA, MBS). He has done local work in AL and VA. Currently, he is the pulpit minister for the Bear Valley Church of Christ where he has served since 2006. Neal also works as a part-time instructor at Bear Valley Bible Institute. He is the author of *Rise Up And Build*. Neal has preached in 25 states and 7 foreign countries. He directs the Future Preachers Training Camp in Denver. Neal serves as the Director of the Bear Valley Lectureship.

FRANKLIN CAMP once said in a sermon,

I think it's unfortunate that when I first began preaching and I suspect when I preached here in East Gadsden before, that I did not fully understand and appreciate that above everything else that my ministry was to be a ministry of healing. That does not mean that truth is to be compromised because Jesus never did compromise truth, but I wonder sometimes if I really understood and

appreciated the fact that it was my work to be engaged in healing the hurt that sin had done and doing what I could to bind up broken hearts, to heal the bruises that come about because of sin. I am afraid that sometimes because I did not realize that instead of my ministry being one of healing that it may have been one of hurting, I may have caused hearts to be broken, hearts to be hurt. I may have caused lives and spirits of men to be bruised by things that I said, maybe in the tone in which I said it, maybe sometimes in the spirit of self-righteousness without understanding my own need of the grace of God or God's mercy.

This was consistent with the attitude of so many great men of brother Camp's generation—knowledgeable, fearless gospel preachers whose godliness and humility was apparent in every sermon. Thanks to a close relative of brother Camp, I have many of his personal files—including personal correspondence he had with other brethren concerning matters of truth and error. In some of these, he was rebuking another brother, but he always did so with transparent love and concern for him without retreating from the truth.

We have lived for some time in an argumentative culture, one that has steadily seen the erosion of courtesy and civility in public discourse. Nearly 20 years ago, I was asked by a Christian college to lecture on "Christian Courtesy." In the intervening years, the ability to rebuke in a loving manner has become as seemingly rare as civility in our culture. So

many have chosen either the route of loveless rebuke or their perception of love which is never to rebuke or condemn sin. Consequently, many are unfamiliar with and unconditioned to what loving rebuke looks like.

Perhaps the hateful rebuker sees himself as spiritually superior, casting down his eyes upon the lowly sinner or erring brother as one far beneath him in matters of faith. Yet, the argument culture is a clearly defined phenomenon of western culture. Thanks to our global interconnectivity through social media and the internet, the argument culture has increasingly become a communication tactic of the global culture. Deborah Tannen has written as much about the argument culture than any single writer. Her books, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue* and *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*, deal with this phenomenon head-on. She has written many other books on conversational interaction and analyzing discourse in several types of relationships. Dick Meyer has more recently analyzed the further morphing of the argumentative culture with his 2008 book, *Why We Hate Us: American Discontent in the New Millennium*. Far from agreeing with all of their premises and conclusions, we would be impressed with how so much of **how** we discuss matters of disagreement in the body of Christ mirrors so much of what we see in the world. Is it spiritually superior to refer to brethren as “liberal cess-pools” (Coats, “People” 1999), “cracked nuts” (Coats, “People” 2000), “a gullible gathered group” (Pogue 4), or “sheer stupidity” (Whitlock 5)? Or is it helpful to consider a different tack—one like brother Camp and his ilk employed, in lovingly dealing with brethren with whom we disagree?

A distinct challenge faces anyone who firmly believes in and loves God and His inspired Word. Whether an offender

is a local church member or a well-known preacher, he or she can stir righteous indignation within us. The spirit and example of the apostles and prophets was certainly a plain-spoken, bold, and unapologetic stand for truth and against error. However, when we examine the tactics and preaching of men in the New Testament, we see a love and concern for the lost and erring that undergirded the necessary rebukes. When we look at the nature of God, we see the same long-suffering and patience toward weak and sinful mankind. While we certainly read of Jesus' excoriating condemnations in the gospels, His perfect discernment of hearts was aimed most ardently at religious professionals who had erected human laws to be on a par with Divine law and established their views as lines of fellowship. He undoubtedly showed remarkable restraint, patience, and evident concern for anyone who was alienated from God.

How can we avoid a vitriolic, obnoxious spirit when rebuking is essential? What principles will aid us in striving to preach the truth in love, even when this involves speaking against something or someone that opposes the truth?

Cautions

James 3:1-2 says, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body" (New King James Version). James emphasizes a **sobriety** for teachers—"a stricter judgment." He elucidates a **stumbling** common to all, including teachers—"we all stumble in many things." He encourages a **striving** for all, including teachers—not to "stumble in word." He evinces a **strength** possible for all, including teachers—to be "a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body." James indicates that it

is hard for the one with the weighty responsibility of teaching to do so with perfect restraint of motive, means, and mouth, but that it is not only possible but expected. Our struggle with the tongue is lifelong and arduous. I have never known anyone to do it flawlessly for a lifetime, but “he who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction” (Pro. 13:3). Each and every one of us who wields any influence at all, especially as preachers and teachers, quickly develops a reputation. When it comes to “truth speakers,” hearers soon learn whether or not rebukes are delivered lovingly or hatefully. What are some cautions to be exercised in avoiding the earning of a reputation as a hateful rebuker?

Tone

Too often, well-meaning, passionate members of the church have been guilty of lacking adequate kindness and gentleness in responding to individuals in sin and error. I can understand righteous indignation and love for Christ and His church. But let us remember that it is never right to do wrong. To personally attack anyone, to allow righteous anger to become sinful anger, to be insulting, demeaning, ridiculing, or sarcastic is unjustifiable. Any defense of such tactics falls short of the ethical and moral standard taught in the New Testament. I have often heard it said, and I agree, that “if you’re not kind, you’re the wrong kind” or “you can be right, but be wrong.” We must study more and sting less, being more knowledgeable and less nasty. Divine truth is powerful enough to stand on its own merit. We must “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) and be known for our love (John 13:34-35).

Excess

I cannot figure out how some renowned for addressing perceived and real error find adequate time to minister

and evangelize. The amount of time required to churn out infinitely long diatribes and responses on a daily basis strains the ability to visit (Mat. 25:35ff), to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5), and fulfill their ministry (2 Tim. 4:5). First and Second Timothy inform that ministry involves ignoring endless, strife-bringing matters (1 Tim. 1:4), having a robust prayer life for many earthly matters (1 Tim. 2:1-3), building up the local church from the leadership to the membership (1 Tim. 3:1ff; 1 Tim. 5:17-22), demonstrating discipline in spiritual and physical arenas (1 Tim. 4:7-8), guarding example and influence (1 Tim. 4:12-16), aiding in benevolent and familial situations (1 Tim. 5:1-16), avoiding a personal, morbid interest in divisive controversies (1 Tim. 6:3-5), encouraging struggling members (1 Tim. 6:7-19), avoiding worldly and empty chatter (1 Tim. 6:20-21), avoiding striving about words to no profit (2 Tim. 2:14), preaching and teaching in defense of truth and defeat of error (2 Tim. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:22ff; 2 Tim. 3:1ff, etc.), growing in greater Bible knowledge (2 Tim. 2:15), and edifying church members (2 Tim. 4:19-20). If we cherry pick one or two of those to the exclusion of the entirety of that job description for a preacher, how can we be fulfilling our ministry? Are we faithful who excel in an area or two to the neglect or exclusion of the totality of our work as preachers? Will the poor stewardship of time, money, and influence cause more to be lost than the matters they endlessly, exhaustively wrangle over and wrestle with?

Excess can also ensue from the repetitive, *ad nauseam* approach to subject matter, a proverbial beating of a dead horse. If we get fixated on one or a few subjects, we can easily become obsessed. Obsession can easily give way to what looks to the casual, objective reader like hateful

rebuke. For example, one magazine (*Contending For The Faith*, September 2013-February 2015) put out by brethren devoted fourteen articles in their last ten issues to the related subjects of fellowship and guilt by association—those same 10 issues included not even one article on heaven, baptism, or evangelism, and further examination reveals a good many, similar subjects neglected. It would seem that any sampling done in the several years prior would yield similar results. Through the years, I have talked with many of our formerly non-institutional brethren who were restored from denominationalism or apostasy that could articulate every argument against eating in the church building and supporting orphans who could not remember a sermon on the uniqueness of the church, women's role, the sin of instrumental music in worship, and the like. The point is, the excess of their preachers and teachers in repetitively hitting their pet issue(s) left these members unprepared for other vital matters in the whole counsel of God.

Assumption

I have experienced writers and editors of journals inaccurately stating something about me based on either assumption or misinformation that was unverified (cf. Brown 3). I have read statements about other men that were malicious and I knew to be untrue. In a zeal to drive a point home or for emphasis, one must avoid presumption and surmising. One's rebuke loses credibility and love for the object is questioned when motives are assigned and assumptions are made about the intent, character, and heart in matters where such are not or cannot be fully known.

Choice

In other words, great care must be given to what matters are elevated to the level of stern and harsh rebuke. Some of the matters that have drawn the harshest rebuke regard matters

that are not inherently condemnatory. A congregation, exercising autonomy, may make unwise choices, decisions that could cloud their priorities, or otherwise be questionable judgment. These choices and decisions may warrant words of caution or prompt urgent pleas. Yet, a rant or tirade is never warranted. Especially is this true in what is ultimately in the realm of judgment.

Heart

I wish to tread lightly here and emphasize that this a caution. None of us can read the hearts of other men, so it is impossible to know what may drive brethren to engage in hateful rebuke. In some cases, ardent love for the Lord is the genesis of such contending for the faith. Likewise, an abhorrence for sin and disappointment in rebellious brethren stirs the passion. Devotion to Christ above all leads to such honorable reactions. Sometimes, we can get lost in our honorable pursuits. Suspicion, ascribing motives, jealousy, bitterness, hurt, sinful anger, and the like can become implanted and rooted in the heart. How often did the Pharisees, zealous protectors of the law, struggle with heart problems (cf. Mat. 15:8-9; Mat. 21:25; Mark 2:6-8; Luke 20:14)? We must be careful that in defending the truth we do not pollute our own hearts.

What a tremendous responsibility befalls us who seek to instruct others! Paul said,

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of

the devil, having been taken captive by
him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

Our rebuking is to be done with “longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2; “great patience and instruction,” NAS).

Counsel

Think It Through.

Often, when we read, watch, listen, or otherwise access the ideas and positions of one (or those) who hold a divergent or even sinful position, we feel ready to strike back in reply. Reaction can trump reasoned response. Have you ever hit send on a personal email or written article only to experience sender’s remorse? Maybe what you said was essentially right, but it was couched in sarcasm, insults, or *ad hominem* attacks. Such reaction cuts the heart out of our effectiveness. A good rule of thumb is to let something sit in a document or email for at least a day before replying to a controversial, sensitive matter. David and Solomon both urge a measured, thoughtful response from the godly. “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psa. 141:3; cf. Psa. 39:1). “He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles” (Pro. 21:23; cf. Pro. 13:3).

Season It With Prayer.

Well-seasoned speech is seasoned with earnest, vigilant prayer (Col. 4:2; Col. 4:6). I am not strong enough to know how I ought to answer every man without depending on and praying for God’s wisdom and strength. Pray specifically for self-control, godliness, “a wholesome tongue” (Pro. 15:4), and characteristics the Lord expects of His servants (2 Tim. 2:24ff). Prayer must be wed to self-discipline on our part, but may prayer never be a neglected part of the process.

Remember Who You Represent.

As an ambassador of Christ, what I say and how I say it are vitally important (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19). I have been mortified to see the name of the Lord's church or someone claiming to represent it attached to hateful, acidulous words. Brethren will defend biting sarcasm, name-calling, personal attacks, and the like under the banner of defending the faith that condemns the very approach they take (cf. Gal. 5:15; 3 John 10).

Search Your Motives.

Tannen draws an excellent distinction between “thought-provoking” and plain “provocative.” She writes, “What a world of difference is implied in that small change [of wording, NP]: how much better to make people think, rather than simply to ‘provoke’ them—as often as not, to anger” (*Debate to Dialogue* 7). There is a difference in drawing people's attention to a matter and drawing attention to ourselves. If we will remember that we are to be striving to please God and also bring the hearer back to Him, we will choose our manner as well as our message with circumspection and prudence. We can be assured that “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits” (Pro. 16:2; “weighs the motives,” NAS).

Do Not Allow How You Say It To Overshadow What You Say.

We should guard our reputation and influence carefully. People can fail to hear what we say if it is couched in vitriolic venom. Yet, if we can genuinely earn a reputation for demonstrating love and care, even in discussing the most difficult, controversial subjects like homosexuality, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, women's role, and the like, we can allow the power of the gospel to be what convicts the honest heart. If acerbic, sharp-tongued barbs are essential to persuade someone, he will not be reached by the true power of God's Word (Heb. 4:12).

Conclusion

Gary Pollard, III put this well in a recent blog article. He looked back to the famous “Christmas Truce” on December 25, 1914, the first Christmas of World War I, when British and German soldiers called a ceasefire and exchanged food and gifts. He appealed to Paul’s words to Ephesus to “Always be humble and gentle, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love” (Eph. 4:2). He pointed out that tolerance literally means “to endure something unpleasant or difficult” or “to permit the presence of something.” This is true concerning overlooking the faults of church members who might get on our nerves. Yet, the principles hold true even in the face of the daunting task of rebuking the erring. We have a dire need to uphold the purity of God’s truth. We cannot back away from the eternal truths which will ultimately judge all mankind. We cannot change the unchangeable. We must, however, keep fervent in our love for one another (1 Pet. 4:8).

Some seem convinced that a choice must be made between upholding the truth and doing so in a loving manner. Paul weds the two (Eph. 4:15). Certainly, love for God must be foremost, but that primary love for Him does not negate the need to be loving even when we must correct the lost. May we let our gentle spirit be known to all men (Phi. 4:5).

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Am I “Shepherd-Able”? Submitting To The Authority Of The Elders

Eric Owens



Eric Owens is married to Vanessa and they have three daughters. He is the pulpit minister at the Avondale Church of Christ where he has been since 1997. Eric graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1994. He was appointed as an elder at Avondale in 2009. He has written a book entitled *So You Want To Be Happy*. Eric is a frequent speaker in gospel meetings, lectureships, and marriage seminars all over the country.

THE THEME of this lectureship—*Reprove, Rebuke & Exhort*—is necessary and relevant because the Lord and His church are under constant attack. Specifically, leadership in the Lord’s church has come under the harshest and most critical attacks. Shepherds are leaders and this is ultimately what our topic is about. The question before us is a personal question that each person must answer for himself. The second half of the title explains the question. Being shepherd-able is really to ask, “Will I submit to the authority of the elders?”

We will answer the question by studying the following:

- Who needs to answer the question?
- What is God’s plan and purpose for leadership?
- What are the qualities of those who are shepherd-able?

Who Needs To Answer The Question?

Humanity

Sheep are docile animals who have no natural defenses to ward off predators. This leaves them vulnerable to attacks and susceptible to danger. For these reasons, sheep need a shepherd to watch out for their well-being. This danger is intensified because sheep cannot direct or guide themselves. Therefore, the first group that needs to answer the question is the whole of humanity. The God of heaven made us in His image (King James Version, Gen. 1:26-27). Since God made man, man is dependent upon God.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all
ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness:
come before his presence with singing.
Know ye that the Lord he is God; It is he
that hath made us, and not we ourselves;
we are his people, and the sheep of
his pasture. Enter into his gates with
thanksgiving, and into his courts with
praise: be thankful unto him, and bless
his name. (Psa. 100:1-4)

The world is God's pasture; humanity is His flock. We are dependent on God; we did not make ourselves. For this cause we should praise God, thank God, and bless His name. Being sheep we cannot guide ourselves, so we are in need of His leading us. As Jeremiah declared, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23). Despite our self-belief, we do not know our way and our history proves it. Paul described the world's past in Romans 1-3. In chapter one, Paul told us the Gentiles refused to be shepherded.

Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts and creeping things. (Rom. 1:21-23)

God gave them up to their own lusts and Scripture details the sad, destructive lives they led. The numerous sins they committed and the devastating effect it had on their lives cannot be ignored. It was all because they refused to retain God in their knowledge.

The Gentiles were not the only ones who refused to allow God to lead them. Instead of lighting the path for the world to get back to God, the Jews turned off their light and became like the world around them.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things...Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? (Rom. 2:1; Rom. 2:22)

The Jews' chief advantage was having God's Word (Rom. 3:1-2). But they cast it behind their backs, stiffened

their necks, and hardened their hearts. In time, they became like all the nations around them: unprotected, misguided wandering sheep, doomed to fail, and fitted for destruction.

Paul summarized the state of humanity, “What then are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin” (Rom. 3:9). “For all (Jew and Gentile) have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Humanity has an enemy—the Devil—and on our own we have no natural defenses to ward him off. We cannot protect ourselves nor guide ourselves. Therefore, we need God and His Word to help us (Psa. 119:105). Human beings who refuse to submit to God are like sheep alone in the jungle. Without direction, guidance, or protection, the lion will find them, and he will devour them. Humanities’ past tragedies evidence sheep refusing to follow their shepherd.

“Am I shepherd-able (will I submit to the God of heaven)?” is a question that all mankind must answer. The answer one gives will determine his happiness, peace of mind, and contentment in life. This answer will also determine whether one lives eternally in everlasting joy with God in heaven or in everlasting pain and torment without God in hell.

Elders

One may not naturally think that elders have to answer this question, but they do. The elders who shepherd God’s people must first be shepherd-able themselves. This is because shepherds have a shepherd.

The elders which are among you I exhort,
who am also an elder, and a witness
of the sufferings of Christ, and also
a partaker of the glory that shall be
revealed: Feed the flock of God which is

among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples of the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Pet. 5:1-4)

It has always been a requirement of God that in order to lead His people, one must be willing to follow Him. When Jethro instructed Moses to find men to help him judge Israel, the future leaders had to first be good followers of God. "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens" (Exo. 18:21).

Submission to the Chief Shepherd is reflected in the character traits one should have before being appointed as an elder.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity...Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report

of them which are without; lest he fall
into reproach and the snare of the devil.
(1 Tim. 3:2-5; 1 Tim. 3:7)

It is neither reasonable nor scriptural for elders to ask, even demand that the sheep over which they watch follow them while they themselves refuse to follow Christ. Indeed, with sad regularity shepherds are leading God's people away from Him. Some are attempting to change the Lord's church into a denomination. They are speaking strange things from pulpits and bringing innovations into God's worship.

The doctrine of God is not to be changed even by elders, and those who refuse to follow God are leading God's people astray. Women are not authorized by God to preach or lead (1 Tim. 2:9-15). Instrumental music is not authorized by God in worship to Him; we must only sing (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16-17). Shepherds must lead God's people only in that which God has authorized.

Paul's charge to and prophecy about elders, once fulfilled, seems to be occurring again,

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and
to all the flock over the which the Holy
Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed
the church of God, which he hath
purchased with his own blood. For I
know this, that after my departing shall
greivous wolves enter in among you,
not sparing the flock. Also of your own
selves shall men arise, speaking perverse
things, to draw away disciples after them.
(Acts 20:29-30)

The Chief Shepherd will certainly have a reckoning with all of the shepherds who fleeced his flock instead of feeding them. He will call into judgment those who, instead of leading them in paths of righteousness, led them astray. He will condemn them who, instead of serving and seeking their good, lorded over them and sought their own self-interests. “Am I shepherd-able?” is a question that must be asked by every shepherd.

Preachers

Peter refers to Jesus as the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4) and also the Bishop of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25). Jesus knows what it is like to be a shepherd (John 10:1-18). So all shepherds can find comfort in knowing that the Lord understands the blessings and difficulties of the office. Jesus was also a preacher, so preachers can also find comfort in knowing that the Lord understands this unique charge with all of its blessings and difficulties.

Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ is a labor of love filled with complexity and challenge. Generally, the older a man gets as a preacher the better, wiser, and more able he is to preach. This is partly due to his growth, experience, and maturation. Usually, these experiences are tied to his being a husband and a father.

The young preacher knows what the Bible teaches on subjects and can convey them accurately. But the older preacher has lived them, been changed by them, and has an insight and understanding that comes only from living. It is no fault of the young man, but you cannot be 40 before you are 20. And if you preach from 20 to 40, you will surely be a different preacher.

Sadly, it is common for the aging preacher to be terminated right about the time he is rounding into shape as a preacher. His knowledge has grown, his experiences

have forged him, and dealing with people has matured him. He can now empathize and sympathize. He can preach with mercy and an overflow of experience and knowledge. He knows the Master more intimately than ever and now he is fired. Whether this is a modern phenomenon or an older occurrence repeating itself, I do not know. Typically, however, it hurts the congregation, elders, and preachers, and the cost to all is underestimated.

These and other issues are what make preaching challenging. But no matter the cause of the preacher's challenges, preachers have a very specific charge and so do elders. They are not the same and each must do what God requires. Elders are charged with feeding the flock of God over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers (Acts 20:28).

Preachers are charged with preaching the Word. This was Paul's charge to Timothy and it remains God's charge to every gospel preacher. The charge has three parts,

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. (1 Tim. 4:16)

Let no man despise thy youth; but **be thou an example of the believers**, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. (1 Tim. 4:12)

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. **Preach the word;** be

instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. (2 Tim. 4:1-2)

Gospel preachers are to learn the Word, live the Word, and preach the Word. Part of the message of God is that elders, not preachers, oversee God's people, (unless the preacher also serves as an elder in which case he helps lead). The two roles are not adversarial in Scripture. Unfortunately, they are often viewed and lived that way.

Elders have authority over the congregation of which the preacher is a member (Acts 20:28). No one knows this better than the men who preach God's Word. He knows this because his life is committed to rightly dividing the Word of truth. And a plurality of spiritually experienced men who serve as elders, overseeing God's flock, is what the Scriptures teach.

Therefore, preachers must ask and answer the question, "Am I shepherd-able (will I submit to the authority of the elders)?" If he will please God, he must submit to the elders because God is the one who established the arrangement. Elders have the authority to hire a preacher and fire a preacher. Again, preachers know this better than anyone because most of them were hired and fired by the same elders. Gospel preachers preach for the Lord and His cause, and they submit to God's organization of His church. And if they are right doing, they never harm God's church to get back at elders.

Members

Every member of the Lord's church must ask and answer the question, "Am I shepherd-able (will I submit to the authority of the elders)?" Ultimately, it is the same for us all including elders, deacons, and preachers. The question is not really about submitting to elders; it is actually, Will I submit to

God? Because representative leadership is how God interacts with His people, it is God's organization for His church, and it is summarized in Philippians 1:1. The church, properly organized, has elders, deacons, and members.

To obey and submit to those God puts over us is to obey and submit to God. And when we refuse to submit to those God places over us, we refuse to submit to God. There are many good examples of this dynamic: parents to children, government to citizens, husbands to wives, masters to servants, and elders to members.

We can appreciate this when we notice Moses' leadership in Israel. After coming out of Egypt, Israel complained against Moses. The interchange is recorded in Exodus 16 and illustrates God's expectations of His people.

And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that he heareth your murmurings against the Lord: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat and in the morning bread to the full: for that the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord. (Exo. 16:6-8)

Moses made several important observations as he suffered under the complaints of Israel. He said, "God

had delivered them out of bondage.” His point was that he himself had not personally delivered them. He also made the point that God heard their complaining, but he took it a step further. Moses did not simply say God heard it; he added that their murmuring and complaining were against God.

This conversation needs to be understood by all members of God’s spiritual Israel. When members murmur and complain against God’s leaders, God hears it. But also, the complaints are actually against God. Members are told by God, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

Elders have authority to make decisions for the congregation. Members must submit to their rule understanding that God is the one being obeyed. Often members are concerned about how the elders rule and spend their time debating the decisions. This is not the disposition members should have. Neither should members feel that every decision of the elders needs to be approved or agreed upon by the membership. The most obvious reason for this is that the elders must give an account to God, not the members.

The members must see themselves as individual sheep, within the flock of God, over which He has appointed shepherds. The sheep do not lead themselves, neither should they get into small groups to debate to decide if they agree with the direction of the shepherds. Instead, each person should submit. Submission is not a bad word; it is simply arranging oneself under the rule of another.

Interestingly, everyone is both a leader and a follower depending on the setting. For instance, parents rule over their children and children are to order themselves under

this rule. Those same parents come to worship, and they are to submit to the rule of elders. A wife rules over her children but submits to her husband. A husband rules over his wife, but if not an elder, he submits to the elders. Even if he is an elder, he submits to the eldership.

When Israel spoke against Moses, God spoke on behalf of Moses and punished those who spoke against him. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses (Numbers 12) and so did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16). God addressed both groups and punished them. In defending Moses, God was defending His organization of leadership. Rarely are we challenged when we are leading. The difficulty seems to arise when the leader in one capacity becomes a follower in another. When we understand why God chose leadership, we will not speak against His leaders.

Why Leadership At All?

We know that men abuse power even when God gives it to them. Peter warned elders not to lord it over God's heritage. Paul lamented perverse men would arise in the eldership and draw away disciples after themselves, and they did (Acts 20:28-32). Many members have had bad experiences with poor elderships and are hesitant simply to follow elderships without question.

Like preachers, the relationship between elders and members is sometimes adversarial. Many members are full of doubt and suspicion about elderships. Anyone who is led can be afraid of leaders abusing their authority. This can create a feeling of helplessness and be a challenge to those who follow. This is a real concern, but it must have a biblical solution.

God never intended to have direct contact with His people always. However, He did want His people to be

cared for the way He would care for them. So God devised representative leadership: the leader represents God!

The benefits are for God's people. First, they would never be alone; God through His leaders would always be with them. Second, His people would never be ignorant of Him because the leaders would teach the people of God about Him. Third, His people's needs would be met. God through the leader would tend to the needs of His people. In these ways, God would be connected to His people and care for them.

If we change the thoughts we have about the arrangement, both leaders and followers would enjoy the rich blessings God intended when He created leadership. The solution is to better understand why God established representative leadership at all. Understanding God's order provides peace and comfort.

God's Care For His People

The burning bush is one of the more memorable accounts in Scripture. Moses saw a bush on fire but not consumed. He approached the bush to see why it was not consumed and a voice spoke to him out of the bush. If the first part was interesting, we can only imagine what Moses was thinking after the voice spoke. He was told to remove his shoes for the ground he was standing on was holy ground. Being in God's presence is always a holy occasion. God introduced himself to Moses as the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Here is where the point begins to be made. God called Moses and chose him to go and deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. Let us read the text and then discuss the point.

And the LORD said, I have surely seen
the affliction of my people which are

in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. (Exo. 3:7-10)

God's care for His people is one of the driving forces behind leaders. Those who lead must know they represent God and those who are led are to be comforted by their place in God's heart.

Why did God call Moses? Read again the exact same text, but this time notice the highlighted portions.

And the LORD said, **I have surely seen the affliction of my people** which are in Egypt, and have **heard their cry** by reason of their taskmasters; for **I know their sorrows**; And **I am come down to deliver them** out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to **bring them up** out of that land unto a

good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, **the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me:** and I have also seen **the oppression** wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and **I will send thee** unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth **my people** the children of Israel out of Egypt. (Exo. 3:7-10; emphasis added, EO)

If you were asked, Why did God send Moses to lead Israel, what would you say? These passages make it clear that God saw His people suffering and He was going to deliver them. Therefore, God sent Moses to bring His people out of Egypt; read it again and count the “I’s” of God. It was God’s care for His people that moved Him to call Moses to lead Israel. This is not about Moses. It was about God’s love for His people; the same is true of elders.

God’s Solutions To His People’s Problem

In every arena of godly leadership, leaders are to be problem solvers and peace providers. God desires His people to be at peace and He is not pleased when His people are scattered and shattered. Neither is God pleased when His people are agitated and irritated because this is not the way He would lead His people. David may have said it best: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in **green pastures:** he leadeth me beside the **still waters**” (Psa. 23:1-2; emphasis added, EO).

Green pastures indicate provisions and still waters indicate peace. It is said that sheep will not eat or drink unless they feel safe and secure. Leaders in Israel and the church were put in place to alleviate the sheep's problems, not cause them. Israel came to Moses all day and night to present their cases before him so he could judge them (Exo. 18:13-20). Jethro watched and told Moses that what he was doing was not good, and that if he continued, he would wear himself out.

His solution for Moses was to get capable men to help him. The men were to help Israel and provide solutions to their problems.

Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. (Exo. 18:21-23)

It is exciting to consider that the leaders were put in place to provide solutions for God's people and to bring peace to their lives. The same can be seen in the early church when

she encountered problems. Compare the apostle's actions to those of Moses (Acts 6:1-5). Men were selected, solutions were provided, and peace was enjoyed by all. God's leaders solve problems and bring peace to His people, because that is what God would do.

God's Protection For His People

God desires the safety of His people. In the Old Testament, men like Moses, Joshua, the judges, and the kings protected God's people. The wars were physical and the defense of God's people paramount. In Christ, the leaders are charged with the spiritual protection of His people. Elders are charged with the spiritual welfare of God's flock. Shepherds are to protect them from false teachers and false doctrine (Tit. 1:5-10). They are to teach God's Word faithfully and insure that those whom they allow to preach to them do the same. This charge involves tough and often unpopular decisions.

God's Provision For His People

Every leader was to provide something for God's people. Moses provided Israel with God's Word, direction, and instruction. Government is to provide protection and safety for God's people (Rom. 13:3-4). Elders are to feed, lead, and retrieve God's people (Luke 15:1ff). Parents are to provide a godly example, instruction in God's Word, discipline, and correction for their children (Deu. 6:7-9; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15).

There have been abuses of leadership, but history is replete with people who led God's people as He would have led them Himself. Moses, Joshua, and a host of others led Israel as God desired. They were not perfect, but they were faithful. Many elders have been faithful, committed, and sacrificial in

their service to God. And countless congregations have been blessed because of it.

Elders are responsible for the health and faithfulness of the church. They are the ones left when everyone else has gone. They are the ones who stay when preachers go, despite how he goes. Sometimes the preacher finds a better or more desirable work. Preachers should not be begrudged for seeking and taking better opportunities when presented. Everyone else does in their perspective fields, and no one says anything about it. However, preachers sometimes leave congregations and elders are charged with failing. Other times, elders fire preachers and elders take the hit for this decision as well.

Being an elder requires time away from one's family to commit to every other family in the church. They are the Shepherds of God's pasture, caring for His flock and family. Three good examples of shepherds are Jacob (Gen. 31:36-42), David (1 Sam. 17:34-37), and Jesus (John 10:11-18). There is no greater work and responsibility. There is no greater joy and privilege. Simply put, it is the highest office in the land and among the most honorable things any man can do.

Qualities Of Shepherd-able Sheep

Godly

Christians are those who have obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ. They answered the gospel call, turned away from sin, and committed their lives to God (1 The. 2:14; Luke 13:3). Christians are sheep of the Lord. As such, they hear his voice and follow him (John 10:10-17). The reasons sheep submit to the authority of their local shepherds is because they submit to the Chief Shepherd. Shepherd-able sheep are those who honor God and follow His organization.

Submissive To God

I know I am shepherd-able if I submit. Submission is voluntary and personal. It is one of the things **we do**; it is not done to us. We submit to God by arranging ourselves under His authority. When God delegates that authority to someone else, then we are to arrange ourselves under that person or in the case of eldership, a group of people. Submission ultimately carries with it the notion of obedience. If one refuses to obey, follow and do what is requested, then one cannot be said to submit.

In every place God has designated leadership, those who follow are told by God to obey. As citizens, we are to obey the government if they do not demand that we disobey God. Paul and Peter address God's saints in the midst of an ungodly nation and both tell the saints to obey, because God ordered government (Rom. 13:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:17).

Spiritual

The two ways of living in the New Testament are living spiritually or living fleshly. The brethren in Corinth were carnal, immature, and fleshly. Paul said he could not speak to them as if they were spiritual because they were not.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ...For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?
(1 Cor. 3:1-3)

The proof was in what they were producing in Corinth. Carnal, immature living produces envy, strife, and divisions (1 Cor. 1:10).

God's people are to see the elders through the spiritual lens of His leaders. They are not to be carnal and create strife when decisions are made with which they disagree. Shepherd-able saints are spiritual and would never seek to divide the Lord's church.

Faithful

Without faith, we cannot please God. Faithfulness is trust, and trust is predicated upon actions past and present (Heb. 11:6). Christians have a God-given right to question elders. It might be argued that shepherd-able sheep are those who question their leaders. The eldership is not leadership by popular opinion. Sheep are being led by men who are supposed to follow God and if those men cease to follow God, should not the sheep question them?

Elders have the right and authority to lead and make decisions in matters of judgment. The sheep can question and ask for clarity without rebelling, being disagreeable, or sowing discord. If the elders make a decision, the sheep should follow. But the sheep have a right to question where they are being led. Even God was questioned (Gen. 18:25), and if He can be questioned, everyone He delegates can also be questioned. Christ was questioned and if those asking had been honest, He would have given them an answer (Mat. 21:23-27).

Asking questions, seeking understanding, or requesting clarity does not make one unshepherd-able. Even if a sheep disagrees with the decision of the shepherds, such does not mean that one is unshepherd-able. But, if one questions and becomes contentious, if one disagrees and becomes disagreeable, or if one sows discords and undermines the eldership, then this person is manifesting an unshepherd-able disposition. We are all sheep to someone and we must all submit to the authority God has placed over us. When we submit to those whom God delegates, we submit to God.

Conclusion

God is the ultimate authority in the life of His children. He provides for them and to do so, He delegates authority to others to carry out His will. In the local congregation, elders are those given authority by God to care for and lead His people. Their function is to shepherd God's sheep.

But our topic is not about the elders shepherding, it is about the sheep following. "Am I shepherd-able (will I submit to the authority of the elders)?" is a personal question that each person must answer. Like so many other things in life, my options are limited. If I will please God, I must be a sheep who is "shepherd-able." Are you?

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When It's My Toes: When The Rebuke Applies To Me

Phillip Hines



Phillip Hines is married to Julia Rose Hines. They have two adult children and two grandchildren. He has preached in AR, MS, TN, WV, GA, and AL. Since 1980, he has served as the pulpit minister at the Hartselle Church of Christ in Hartselle, AL. He earned a BA in Bible from International Bible College and an MA from Southern Christian University. He makes annual mission trips to Brazil or Romania.

AFTER A sermon the minister often hears the statement, “Preacher, you sure did step on my toes today.” However, we usually see the brother or sister walk away and never make any change in his or her life. He simply goes home, soaks his feet in Epsom salts, and comes back later for another toe-stomping. When rebuke is just, repentance is needed.

As one studies the Bible on this subject, he will notice the connection between *rebuke* and *repent*. In Matthew 11:20, we find that Jesus rebuked the cities where He had performed great works because they would not repent (New King James Version). Then in Luke 17:3, Jesus spoke to his disciples and warned of offenses: “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.” Jesus rebuked the church at Ephesus for leaving its first love (Rev. 2:4). His instruction to them was to “repent and do the first works” (Rev. 2:5). The church at Smyrna was rebuked for

holding on to false doctrine (Rev. 2:14-15). Jesus commanded Smyrna to repent (Rev. 2:16). Sardis was rebuked for being a dead church (Rev. 3:1). This church was told to “hold fast and repent” (Rev. 3:3). The Laodiceans were rebuked for being lukewarm (Rev. 3:16). Jesus said to them in Revelation 3:19, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” From these verses alone, we can see the great connection between rebuke and repentance.

Repentance is a word that is not used in modern pulpits. Listen to denominational preachers on television, and in most cases, you will not hear the word. It is sad to say, but in some pulpits in the churches of Christ, you seldom hear this word. Whenever we preach repentance, we are in good company. The first word that Jesus used in the first sermon He preached was the word *repent* (Mat. 4:17). When the apostles were sent out two by two, they went out and preached that people should repent (Mark 6:12). As Jesus was about to ascend to heaven, he gave final instructions to his disciples. He told them, “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Jesus even said if you do not repent, you cannot be saved (Luke 13:3). When New Testament Christianity had its beginning in Acts 2, the people in Jerusalem were told by Peter to repent (Acts 2:38). If I am going to preach what Jesus preached, I have to preach repentance.

Could it be that many Christians feel that by simply saying, “You stepped on my toes,” they have repented? Is this the reason they are able to walk out of the door after hearing a sermon that rebuked them and never change? Let us take the time to see what real repentance is and what ought to be taking place when brethren have their toes stepped on.

We could go to many places in the Bible to understand what true repentance is. For our study, we will spend our

time in 2 Corinthians chapter seven. In this text, we will see a rebuke given by Paul to the church at Corinth and a call to repentance. The Corinthians repented which gives us a great picture of this matter.

In verse eight of chapter seven, Paul spoke of a letter he had written to the Corinthians. This had been a letter of rebuke (2 Cor. 2:9). Scholars have several different ideas about the letter. Some believe it is referring to First Corinthians (McGarvey and Pendleton 206). Others feel the letter was lost or is found in chapters ten through thirteen of 2 Corinthians (Thompson 31). The point is that Paul sent a letter of rebuke to the church at Corinth. Also, Paul spoke of someone who had done wrong (2 Cor. 2:4-8; 2 Cor. 7:12). Several ideas about this person come to mind. Those who believe the letter is referring to 1 Corinthians feel that the man is the incestuous son of chapter five (McGarvey and Pendleton 208). Others feel there was an offender in Corinth who had attacked Paul's work as an apostle in a particularly offensive way (Thompson 32). Apparently, the Corinthian brethren had continued to fellowship this person and allowed him to go without rebuke. Paul's letter was to call to their attention this error and their need for repentance. Paul recognized the rebuke was well deserved. However, he had some concerns about the way the brethren would receive the letter and how they would think of him. He had some fear that the letter would not bring about the change that he desired (2 Cor. 2:1-4; 2 Cor. 7:2-5; 2 Cor. 7:8). These doubts were put away when Titus came to visit him in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:6-7). Titus informed Paul how the Christians at Corinth knew they had done wrong and corrected the problem. He also informed Paul that the brethren there were anxious to see him again and wanted to be restored once more to fellowship with him. Once again, in Scripture you

have a rebuke and then a call to repentance. In verses eight through twelve of our text, Paul shows us the steps involved in the Corinthians' repentance.

Conviction

Paul wrote, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while" (2 Cor. 7:8). The letter Paul had sent brought about a deep regret and awakened the Corinthians to their past sin. They were convicted of their wrong. This was a wonderful thing.

Real repentance always begins with conviction of wrong. It is a wonderful thing that when you sin, you have a broken heart. When the concept of sin is diminished, the practice of sin is increased. When the practice of sin is increased, the guilt and shame over sin disappears. We are living in a culture today where, by and large, shame and guilt over sin is a thing of the past. As the old time preachers used to say, "Sin that used to sneak down the back alley now struts up the front street." Why is this? It is because sin is no longer a sin. Sin is now a "mistake," a "faulty judgment," and a "miscalculation." You usually do not apologize for a mistake. A mistake is a mistake. You apologize for sin. Until we realize sin for what it is and call it what it is, we will never take the proper steps that lead to repentance.

When thinking of our sins, we substitute words like *my weakness*, *my mistake*, *my misstep*, or *my problem*. Each of these expressions carefully camouflages the ugliness of the offense. It lessens the impact of a full admission of sin, allowing a person to escape some of the guilt. After all, does not everyone make mistakes and have to cope with problems? We carefully construct an elaborate rationale for why we do what we do. Our conscience is appeased. In this way, we

never fully face our wrong. Not long ago, another politician lied to us. I watched on television as this person came to the podium. Instead of saying, "I lied to the American people," the phrase used was "I misspoke." Until we call a lie, a lie, we will never repent of lying.

In Psalm 51, we have a picture of a repentant man. This Psalm was written after David's sin with Bathsheba. David had covered up his sin and never repented. God finally forced him out of his hiding in a dramatic confrontation with Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 12). David had been fooling himself for nearly a year. He saw his sin through the eyes of Nathan. His immediate realization was expressed in the words that came out of his mouth in Psalm 51:4, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight." David admits his sin six times in the first four verses of this psalm. A person begins the road to repentance with conviction of wrong.

Repentance involves the conviction of sin, but it is not just the conviction of sin. Through the years, during the singing of the invitation song, I have watched men and women grip the backs of pews so tightly that their knuckles turn white. I have seen the sweat pop out on their brows as they shifted from one foot to the other. I have even seen them stand and weep with tears coming down their faces. But they would not step out and give their heart to the Lord. They were undoubtedly under tremendous conviction, but they did not repent.

Contrition

The Corinthians had a godly sorrow for their sin.

Now I rejoice, not that you were made
sorry, but that your sorrow led to

repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Cor. 7:9-10)

Here Paul speaks of two kinds of sorrow over sin. He speaks of a worldly grief and a godly grief. One type of sorrow leads to the freeway of forgiveness and one type leads down a dead end to death.

Tears That Leave You Where You Are

Have you ever been caught doing something wrong, but you were not sorry that you were doing what you were doing? You were sorry that you got caught for doing what you were doing. If we would be honest, most of us would have to admit that this has occurred in our lives, I think. This is an example of the worldly sorrow which Paul wrote about.

You may be wondering, How do I know if this is the kind of sorrow I have? or How do I know that I have a worldly sorrow and not a godly sorrow? Worldly sorrow has some definitive signs. Worldly sorrow will lead to denial. We deny our wrong in several different ways. First, we minimize our sin. We say things like “It is no big deal” or “It was not that bad.” However, if it is not that bad, why do we continue to remember it? Why can we not forget it? Why does it still bother us? Secondly, we rationalize. We say things such as “Many other people have done it” or “Others have done worse things.” It is irrelevant what other people do or do not do, because you will always be able to find people who have done worse things than you. Another common excuse is “That really is not me.” But it is you. What is down in the well will come up in the bucket. Thirdly, we compromise.

We lower our standards to soothe our conscience and start saying that the sin is not wrong. The denial process becomes a smokescreen and a cover-up. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 28:13, “He who covers his sin will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”

Worldly sorrow leads to despair. This is the despair that people feel because of the consequences of their wrong. They are sorry because of the possibility of losing their marriage, job, children, or even freedom. Worldly sorrow means individuals think about what their sin has done to them.

Worldly sorrow leads to death. Paul says, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10). When we deny, explain away, or try to justify the wrong, it kills our conscience and soul. This keeps one from repenting and leads to eternal destruction (Luke 13:3). Worldly sorrow is sorrow, but it is the wrong kind of sorrow because it does not lead to repentance. Judas is a biblical example of what it means to have this kind of sorrow. Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Mat. 26:15). After the betrayal, he realized he had done wrong. He was remorseful. Judas was sorry, and his heart was broken. He went to the priest and admitted that he had sinned (Mat. 27:3-4). What happened next? He committed suicide. Instead of going to the One who hung on the cross, he hanged himself. Judas’ sorrow was a worldly sorrow because it did not lead to repentance. His tears were tears that left him where he was.

Tears That Lead You Where You Need To Be

Second Corinthians chapter seven, verse ten speaks of the sorrow that will lead you where you need to be. Paul wrote, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted” (2 Cor. 7:10). Worldly sorrow

involves feeling sorry for yourself. Godly sorrow causes you to feel sorry for your sin. Worldly grief has you as the focus, while godly grief has God as the focus. We are not to feel sorry for what our sin may do to us, but we feel sorry because of what it has done to God. The right kind of sorrow is not when we feel sorry because we have broken our own heart, but because we have broken His heart. I like the wording of Willie W. White:

There is one source of contrition: that is to go to Calvary, and see a sinless man die. Realize that He is dying for no sin of His own, but that it is your sin that placed Him there. It was your sin that plaited that crown of thorns and pressed it on His brow. It was your sin that put those stripes upon His back. It was your sin that laid that cross upon His shoulder. It was your sin that drove those spikes. It was your sin that broke His heart upon that cruel tree—and how you ought to love Him for it! How this love gift ought to prompt you to bow in godly sorrow and full repentance before Him!
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Notice carefully that Paul did not say godly sorrow was repentance. He said, “Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10). One can have godly sorrow and still not repent. On Pentecost the Jews were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37). They realized that they were guilty of the blood of Jesus Christ. They had a godly sorrow, but to those filled with sorrow, Peter said, “Repent” (Acts 2:38).

The Corinthians had a conviction of wrong and a godly sorrow. As we continue to look at 2 Corinthians seven, we see the final stage of repentance.

Change

In verse eleven, Paul spoke to the Corinthians,

For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (2 Cor. 7:11)

These brethren brought forth the fruit of repentance (Mat. 3:8). First, they experienced an inward change. They had to make things right with God because they had been lax in their discipline. Next, the outward change took place. Action was taken against the offender for having harmed the cause of Christ.

The Greek word for *repentance* is *metanoia* which means “to change one’s mind or purpose, always in the N.T., involving a change for the better” (Vine). White defines repentance as “A changing of the mind, brought about by a godly sorrow for sin, and issuing in a change of life or conduct. Between the godly sorrow and the reformed life something happens, and the ‘something’ is repentance” (97). It involves one’s mind: “I am a sinner.” Then the emotions are involved: “I am sorry for my sin.” Next, the will is involved: “I will turn from my sin.” Real repentance gets into a person’s feet and hands and affect the way he lives. When toes are stepped on, a life is changed.

Real repentance is not like one wife I heard about. She was horrible to live with. She nagged, berated, criticized, and put her husband down continually. She came home from church one day and said to him, "I have become a Christian." He was so excited. He thought, "This is going to be great! Things are going to get better now." However, nothing changed. She kept nagging, berating, and putting him down. This continued day after day. Finally, one day he looked at her and said, "I don't mind that you were born again. I just wish you had not been born again as yourself!" When you repent, a tremendous shift will take place in your heart and life.

Repentance is a very unpopular subject today. The word has been turned into a religious joke. When a cartoonist wants to depict a narrow-minded religious person, he will draw an individual holding a sign with the word "Repent." Many today do not have a good feeling about the word. Let me remind you that it has always been that way. The prophets preached it, and they were stoned because of it. John the Baptizer preached it, and he was beheaded for it. The very Son of God preached it, and they crucified Him. The apostles preached it, and they suffered for it. Why has the message of repentance been such an unpopular subject? It is because we do not like to have our sins condemned and rebuked. We do not mind if the preacher rebukes the sins of others, but we do not want him to condemn ours. When the rebuke applies to me, I need to repent!

Let me end with a final word to preachers. Keep stepping on toes! If you are not preaching repentance, you are not preaching what Jesus told you to preach. Always keep in mind that you will have to give an account for what you preach. Certainly our preaching needs to have balance. However, we preachers face a great temptation today to preach about

forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love, but not repentance. Listen once again to the fiery words of Willie H. White:

God give us men like good old Nathan; unafraid to face King David and cry out, "King David, you have sinned. You are guilty of lust; you are guilty of adultery; you are guilty of murder; you need to repent!"

God give us men like stalwart John the Baptist, who could face the cruel king, saying, "King Herod, you have your brother Philip's wife. King Herod, you are living in open adultery. King Herod, you ought to repent!"

God give us men who will face the worldly church members and say to them, "Your ungodly living is sin; your worldliness is sin; you need to repent and turn back to God!"

God give us men who will face crooked business men and tell them that their crooked business deals are sinful, and they need to repent.

God give us men who will face the weasel-eyed old gossip and declare, "It is a sin. You need to repent, and to endeavor to make restitution for all of the grief and heartache you have caused with your acid tongue. Repent!"

God give us men who will call sin sin, and call upon sinners for repentance.
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Church Discipline: How To Do It Successfully—Proper Motivations, Methods For Winning Back Souls, Etc.

Timothy Wilkes, Sr.



Tim Wilkes is a native of Southaven, MS. He is married to the former Lynn Morris. They have three children, all of whom are Christians and married to Christians. They also have nine grandchildren. He and Lynn worship with the Coldwater (MS) Church of Christ, where he serves as an elder. Having preached since 1979, Timothy is the director of the Fishers of Men Ministry. He first took the Fishers of Men course in the spring of 1982 and began immediately to teach principles of FOM to local congregations where he preached. In 1988 he began to teach the entire course on a part-time basis and by 1992 was teaching the course regularly. He began as a full-time instructor in 1994.

DISCIPLINE IS at the core of Christianity. It is what Jesus did to make disciples; it is what He commanded His disciples to do; and by implication, it is what we are commanded to do today. Discipline means to teach (“Discipline”) or train; a disciple is learner (Vine, “Disciple”), one who is being, or has been, taught or trained. Jesus began His ministry by disciplining the twelve. The Great Commission commanded the apostles to teach (King James Version) or make disciples (American Standard Version) of all nations and baptize them (Mat. 28:18-20). Once baptized,

the newly converted are to be taught to go and do the same (i.e., to observe whatever Jesus commanded, which included making disciples).

Discipline, like many other words, has connotations. It denotes teaching, while it could connote a positive or a negative, i.e., instructive or corrective. It seems most associate discipline with a negative connotation, when in reality it is regularly practiced in the positive.

Instructive Discipline

Instructive discipline, in general, is positive. Also called edification discipline (Taylor qtd. in Skaggs 40), or preventative discipline, it is practiced in person-to-person evangelism (making disciples), in our assemblies by our Bible class teachers and our preachers through sermons, where reproving, rebuking, and exhorting occurs (2 Tim. 4:1-2). We are to teach or discipline ourselves (Rom. 2:21). The Holy Spirit disciplines or teaches us though the Word (1 Cor. 2:13). The grace of God disciplines or teaches us how to live in this present world (Tit. 2:11) which has a punishing connotation, e.g., the same word is used regarding Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom Paul delivered unto Satan that they “learn” not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20).

Corrective Discipline

The practice of corrective discipline carries a negative connotation. It hurts! (Butt). However, the end result should be considered positive. Although rarely seen or heard, corrective discipline is sometimes practiced by denominations. Baptists recognize the Divine authority of corrective discipline (Keathley). One cannot help but notice the incongruence of “once saved always saved” and practicing corrective discipline. Why try to save someone who cannot be lost? The Catholics

practice excommunication. The Methodists also practice it. In fact in 1828 the Illinois newspaper, *Amboy Journal*, reported that after being a member of the Methodist church for less than a week, twenty-three-year-old Joseph Smith was forced to resign his membership or face investigation of necromancy (Tanner 162). He chose the former.

Although used frequently, the word *disfellowship* is not found in Scripture. Some object to the term and ask how can we “DIS-fellowship” someone? *Dis* is a Latin prefix which means to take away, or remove, e.g., a criminal can be “disarmed.” How do we “take away” another person’s fellowship? We can remove, or withhold our fellowship, but not theirs; so the point is taken. *Withdraw fellowship* is a term commonly used. However, this is not found in the Bible either (Padfield). We are to “withdraw” ourselves (2 The. 3:6), “not to keep company...with such an one no not to eat” (1 Cor 5:11), “have no company” (2 The. 3:14), and to “have no fellowship” with certain ones (Eph. 5:11).

To a faithful Christian, “walking in the light” fellowship is a precious thing:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7-9)

The very thought of losing fellowship with likeminded brethren and especially the Lord is dreadful. However, to an

unrepentant brother or sister, losing that fellowship might not seem like much of a loss, especially since he probably has not experienced much fellowship recently. Why not use biblical terms? Instead of telling the disorderly that we are “withdrawing fellowship,” or “disfellowshipping,” why not tell them we are “delivering you to Satan” (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 5:15) which “is the equivalent of ‘put away the wicked man from among yourselves’ (5:13)” (Jackson, “1 Timothy”), or “purge out therefore the old leaven” (1 Cor. 5:7) (Meadows). To a believing, unrepentant member of the church, hearing he or she is about to be delivered unto Satan might evoke the emotion of godly sorrow necessary for repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

The idea of corrective discipline evokes a variety of emotional responses among members of the church. Some are happy; some are sad; and some are angry when corrective discipline is applied. Regardless of how we feel, whether it is about the sin, the unrepentant brother or sister, or those enacting the discipline, sober-mindedness and respect for God’s Word should always prevail. Some claim, “It will not work!” It is a shame the Lord did not have the benefit of their counsel, because He surely thought it would work—and of course, it does work. Some ask, “Have you ever seen it work?” Corrective discipline works every time it is scripturally practiced. Does that mean the disciplined member always repents? Sadly, no. Our desire must be for the disciplined brother or sister to come home, but that is not the only indicator of success. If Christ is glorified in the act, then Corrective discipline was successful.

How Is Corrective Discipline To Be Done Successfully (i.e., Scripturally)?

That depends on the offence. Many agree corrective discipline must be practiced but fail to give it the analysis it

demands. There are differences in offences and differences in corrective responses. Instead of marking the teacher of a publicly taught false doctrine, or a disorderly member (Rom. 16:17), some would have them approached the same way a private offender is to be approached (Mat. 18:15-18), or vice versa. Consider some offences and how we are to respond. First, notice what the Lord said about private offences:

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. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mat. 18:15-18)

Application: If brother Offender privately sins against brother Offended, brother Offended must go to brother Offender **alone** and explain the offence. If Offender accepts the grievance and repents, the issue is **over**. However, if brother Offender disagrees, then brother Offended must bring one or two brethren as witnesses to Offender to recite his grievance again in their presence. This is the **first** time the witnesses hear the matter, i.e., they are not to be primed beforehand.

It may well be they disagree with brother Offended and say no wrong-doing was committed, or they may see the offence and admonish brother Offender to repent. If Offender does not repent, then the matter is to be taken before the church for the **first** time. If after being admonished by the church, brother Offender refuses to repent, the Lord commands that we view him as a “heathen man and a publican.”

Paul’s instructions regarding public offences are somewhat different than Jesus’ instructions regarding private offences. A divisive man (“heretic,” KJV) was to be rejected after the first and second admonition (Tit. 3:10). He instructed the Corinthians to discipline the fornicator as soon as they gathered together (1 Cor. 5:4-5). He commanded the Thessalonians to withdraw themselves from the disorderly (2 The. 3:6). In the context, Paul is including those who did not work and instructed that they should not eat (2 The. 3:10). Would that not make for an interesting fellowship meal—refusing to allow a couple of deacons to eat because they missed the last few work days, or some other members for not helping canvas the neighborhood.

Motives For Corrective Discipline

Some have improper motives for corrective discipline—vengeance, church politics, jealousy, family feuds, or simply having the attitude of Jonah. But proper motives do exist. What are these proper motives?

(1) Glorifying the Lord should be our primary motive. How does enacting corrective discipline glorify Christ? We are telling the world **and** the congregation that the Lord does not accept the offender’s behavior. It is our responsibility to be lights for the world (Meadows 27):

Ye are the light of the world. A city that
is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither

do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Mat 5:14-16)

Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. (Phi. 2:15-16)

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme. (1 Pet. 2:11-13)

When we ignore the sin, when we fail to show the church and the world that the Lord does not approve, we have failed

the Lord and the church. We have also failed the world by not being the lights we are commanded to be. If Christians cease being lights to the world, then whom will the world have as lights? If congregations have the authority not to practice corrective discipline, they also have the authority to refuse to partake the Lord's Supper with the frequency and specific day set forth in the Bible as well as any other point of New Testament doctrine. Wayne Jackson asks a sobering rhetorical question: "Can a church that utterly refuses to practice discipline truly be a New Testament church?" ("Church"). How presumptuous of an eldership to decide **not** to practice corrective discipline! This preacher knows firsthand of another preacher who left his wife and the church for the church secretary. The elders decided to say nothing publicly about it. The Lord was not glorified. His Word was not upheld. The church was not warned; the world was not informed that such behavior is unacceptable. Woe unto those cowardly "elders." Woe unto any "preacher" too fearful to publicly proclaim the whole counsel of God to ensure job security. Woe to any congregation interfering with or ignoring another congregation's attempt to save the soul of an erring member. Too often we see one congregation "taking in" a disciplined member from another congregation. One is trying to save the soul; the other is helping him or her go to hell.

(2) The salvation of the disciplined member should also be a motive.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
when ye are gathered together, and my
spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus
Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan
for the destruction of the flesh, that the

spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord
Jesus. (1 Cor. 5:4-5)

Corrective discipline is an act of love (Skaggs). During the recent Baltimore riots, a spotlight shone on the mother of a sixteen-year-old boy. She saw him on the news participating in clashes with the police. She went and found him; even though he was dressed in black head-to-toe, wearing a hoodie and ski mask, she knew her own. He recognized her voice yelling, “Drop that brick!” We saw her administer corporal punishment while she forced him home. Few would approve of her language, a few might disapprove of her method, but what she did was an act of love. She did not want her son to become another statistic. We want our brothers and sisters to be saved, not lost like the majority of the world (Mat. 7:13-14), so out of love we practice corrective discipline prescribed by the Lord, so they might be saved.

(3) The saving of the congregation is also a motive. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for tolerating the fornicator’s sin and warned them of the spread of leaven (1 Cor. 5:1-7). He commanded them to “purge out the old lump. Why? The purpose was to save the rest of the church, another success indicator. If the sin spreads to the rest of the congregation, the whole can be lost. But if the sin is removed, the rest can be saved. After applying various non-effective methods to save a diseased member of a human body, a surgeon might have to remove the diseased member to save the rest of the body. If the body were to be saved, would we not call the surgery a success, even though the member was lost?

Methods For Winning Back Souls

Jesus is our example. He would not compromise, but He would leave the ninety-nine to bring back the one:

And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Luke 15:3-7)

The woman and the lost coin also teach us about the importance of the one:

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:8-10)

Jesus' message to us regarding those in sin is to be proactive. We should take the initiative. The shepherd would

“go after that which is lost.” The woman would “sweep the house, and seek diligently.” If we would be Christ-like, we would do the same. If we love lost souls, would that not include lost brethren?

The Father of the prodigal son was watching for his son:

But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.
(Luke 15:20-24)

Too many are like the elder brother—a brother beset with jealousy, overwhelmed with resentment, and inundated with his own self-righteousness. Some members are like Jonah; they become angry if the sinner repents before discipline is enforced—like they have been cheated out of something. Imagine the rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents, but meanwhile, back at the home congregation, elder brethren are throwing verbal stones at the repentant. The Lord is smiling while brethren are snarling.

Paul had to admonish the Corinthians in his second epistle to forgive and confirm their love for the one they had

earlier disciplined, who was now sorry (2 Cor. 2:6-8). Paul commanded the Thessalonians not to count the disciplined as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother—he is still a brother (Robertson)!

How can we admonish the disciplined? Paul said they need to “learn” (1 Tim. 1:20). So, be willing to study with them, help them learn. Something is wrong in the life of a disciplined member of the church. It may well be that the member was not taught properly regarding doctrine or Christian living; he simply has not grown intellectually (i.e., in the knowledge of the Lord, 2 Pet. 1:6; 2 Pet. 1:8). This is not uncommon with new Christians. Maybe they were baptized too soon, not having been taught to observe all things. On the other hand, we see older Christians, who know better, enter into sin. Usually, this is not an intellectual problem but rather an emotional problem. They simply have not grown emotionally—spiritually speaking, they are emotionally dysfunctional. Often we fail to recognize the problem and appeal to their intellect by telling them what they have done is sinful, only to hear the response “I know.” They know they are in sin, but they do it anyway. The problem is not intellectual; it is emotional. Peter tells us how to grow as Christians:

And beside this, giving all diligence,
add to your faith virtue; and to
virtue knowledge; And to knowledge
temperance; and to temperance patience;
and to patience godliness; And to
godliness brotherly kindness; and to
brotherly kindness charity. (1 Pet. 1:5-7)

One of the areas of growth is knowledge, i.e., intellect. The other areas of growth are emotional growth: virtue,

temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (charity). Consider the qualifications of elders. Some are intellectual qualifications (e.g., convince the gainsayer, apt to teach, etc.), and some are emotional qualifications (e.g., patient, not soon to anger, etc.). The same is true for deacons. If a brother or sister has committed adultery, that is a virtue problem; if he is foul-mouthed or abuses alcohol, that is a temperance problem, etc. We would serve these brethren well to recognize their needs and how to address these needs. If the problem is an intellectual growth problem or an emotional growth problem, we should deal with it accordingly. The Fishers of Men Ministry teaches brethren how to teach a person's intellect and emotion.

Conclusion

The Lord has placed the responsibility of church discipline, both instructive and corrective, in the hands of Christians. If otherwise faithful brethren have failed in their God-given responsibilities, it would be in carrying out the Great Commission and enforcing corrective discipline. Let us strive to obey and glorify the Lord and help one another be saved. John 14:15 is just as applicable to Christians as it is to non-Christians: "If you love me, keep my commandments."

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Rebuking: Is It Sinful To Call Names? Must I Go Privately To A Public False Teacher?

Rick Popejoy



Rick Popejoy has been married to Mona for 33 years. They have four children and six grandchildren. Rick graduated from the Brown Trail School of Preaching and has been preaching for 30 years in TX, OK, and WY. He presently serves the 9th & Main Church of Christ in San Angelo, TX as a shepherd and a preacher. Rick is also an instructor for the Online Academy of Biblical Studies where he teaches First Principles and The Book of Jeremiah. Rick directs campaigns where he leads a team of workers from several states in evangelistic door-knocking campaigns every year. He is the former editor of *Reflections* and is the co-host of a daily live call-in radio program entitled *Reflections upon the Precious Book Divine* that can be heard on thegospelradio-network.org (M-F, 11:30 AM-12:30 PM CST). He is also the co-host of a weekly television program entitled *Renew*. Rick also works part time for a private, non-profit foundation as a research analyst and is on the board for Tullstar.

DEALING WITH sin can be a difficult subject indeed. Emotions often run high; people can lose their sense of godliness and spiritual training when dealing with one another. We have all seen it. If one is dealing with sin, he is dealing with a sinner, another human being.

Students of the Bible understand the serious nature of sin. If God were not holy, His law not immutable, and sin not

so horrible, we could just let it slide, right? But, in fact, God is holy; His law is immutable, and sin is so horrible that it cost Jesus His life. McGarvey spoke very clearly of the preacher's responsibility herein: "I wonder if any of us has ever realized what it is to commit sin. I would esteem above every other gift that could be bestowed upon me as a preacher, the power to adequately conceive what sin is and to adequately set it before the people."

J. W. McGarvey, after confessing his failure in being able to set forth the enormity of sin, he said, 'So I have come to the conclusion, after a great deal of reflection, and a great deal of mental effort, that about the only correct gauge we have with which to measure the enormity or heinousness of sin, is the punishment that God has decreed against it' ...Sin is the only thing that will keep you out of heaven; it is the only thing that will put you in hell. (Jn. 8:21, 24; 14:1-4). (Winkler 119)

So the matters that we speak of today are of a most serious nature. We are not asking about how many pounds of pressure should be in a football in the NFL nor are we seeking to ascertain the punishment to be meted out for those who do not comply. This is a Bible lectureship and we are dealing with spiritual responsibilities and eternal matters.

Reprove, Rebuke, And Exhort

In Second Timothy, the preacher is given three very serious responsibilities to counteract the rebellious, rotten,

and rancid characteristics of an untoward generation (Acts 2:40; cf. Phi. 2:15). He must reprove, rebuke, and exhort (2 Tim. 4:2). Our questions in this lecture fall under the category of rebuke. This triple triad of legal terms are in succinct, consecutive order.

God's Man Must Preach A Convicting Message.

To reprove is to present your case in such a manner as to persuade the sinner of his wrong. *Reproof* is a word that refers to preaching that brings conviction. Here is preaching that corrects the errors of men's beliefs and practices. This kind of preaching holds the light of the glorious gospel against the darkness of sin, thus exposing it for what it is! Biblical preaching exposes rather than exonerates evil and brings the sinner under the certainty of the wrath of God (cf. Rom. 1-3). God is looking for a man who has a backbone of steel, one who will boldly stand up and thunder against wickedness. God's man will expose sin as he carefully preaches the Word of God. Therefore, after the evidence is assembled, classified, and adjudicated, then the reproofing process is the first step in dealing with sin and the sinner.

God's Man Must Preach A Confronting Message.

To rebuke is to assign value to something; to mete out due measure as is fitting for a particular situation. This is where the process of blaming takes place. Nathan is a wonderful case study in reproofing and rebuking (2 Sam. 12:1-14). The prophet delivered a scenario that infuriated the king (2 Sam. 12:1-5a); David then offered his own reproof and rebuke (2 Sam. 12:5b-6). In preaching, the man of God must confront and counsel the sinner regarding the dangers of his sin.

God's Man Must Preach A Comforting Message.

To exhort is to urgently call to one's side. This is a sermon that summons the sinner to come home. It requires an immediate action or attention to one's condition. When

we preach, we are to compel the sinner. When the man of God reproveth and rebukes the sinner, he is also responsible to exhort him to repent, pray to the Lord, and confess his sin (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Is It Sinful To Call Names?

According to David G. Stephan, in the *Biographical Bible*, 3,237 characters are named in the Bible. Nobody seems to mind when those names are mentioned. It was not deemed as sinful for the biblical writers to call names. In addition, bulletins across this nation are filled with names of people doing good deeds or having birthdays or anniversaries, and no one seems to mind at all regarding this procedure. Yet, many today believe that it is wrong to expose error and to name names. Those who are faithfully exposing error according to the biblical mandate and oversight are now being denounced and are accused of being unloving and unkind. Within the general atmosphere of religion today, an unsettling disposition regarding open confrontation abounds, and this atmosphere has, sadly, permeated among many within the Lord's church. Within the church today, an ever-growing group of Christians believe and are teaching that if you question or call out a preacher or leader in the church as a false teacher, you are the troubler (cf. 1 Kin. 18:17).

My friends, the Bible is filled with examples of people calling out false teachers. In Paul's correspondence with Timothy alone, as our example, the apostle names a number of false teachers: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20); Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15); Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17); Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim. 3:8); Demas (2 Tim. 4:10); and Alexander, the coppersmith (2 Tim. 4:14).

To expose false teachers and name names may violate the etiquette of modern culture. When you call names from the pulpit, you may even run the risk of offending the delicacies of some who would be visiting our assemblies or even some members who are not well-versed in the need to name names. So, I thought it might be good for us to spend a few minutes discussing the reason names need to be called.

Naming Names Defends The Saint.

The apostle Paul speaks directly to this issue in his directive regarding how to handle false teachers. It is within the nature of the wolf to attack the most innocent and vulnerable among us. Paul declared, “And by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18). The wise man Solomon wrote, “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going” (Pro. 14:15) and “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished” (Pro. 22:3). Remember Eve fell prey to the wicked devices of the Devil (2 Cor. 11:3; cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). Those who are strong have a spiritual responsibility to protect the weak (Gal. 6:1) by pointing out the false teachers (Rom. 16:17). Thus pointing out who the false teacher is, is essential to God’s purpose for the church. Unity without the truth leads to a departure from the true gospel itself. This grievous error must be defended against.

Naming Names Guards The Gospel.

As Peter wrote about the true grace of God (1 Pet. 5:12), Jude wrote about those who would (by sleight of hand) transpose the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 3-4). That was why he needed (the necessity, imposed by the circumstances) to change his purpose in writing about the common salvation which he diligently desired to write about.

That men “crept in unnoticed” should give us pause that such could happen today, despite the many warnings given. How much easier, then, for this to happen today when we live in a time far removed from those initial warnings! In light of this, Jude’s call to “earnestly contend for the faith” becomes even more relevant for us today. We ought to appreciate “the need” to contend for the faith: since God entrusted the gospel to us (Jude 3); counterfeits have infiltrated the church (Jude 4); their promotions of lasciviousness pollute the church (Jude 8-10; cf. 1 Cor. 5:6; Eph. 5:25-27); and because God will execute judgment (Jude 14-15).

Naming Names Protects The Innocent.

When names of the perpetrator are mentioned, both the guilty are identified and the innocent are eliminated from suspicion. Would it be fair if I stated that there are three preachers in attendance of the lectureship this week who are committing fornication with their secretaries? No, because I would have now stained every preacher and secretary in attendance this week. In this, I made the work of elders more difficult. I have actually given rise to “evil surmising” (1 Tim. 6:4; cf. Luke 17:1). But by telling you their names, I would be identifying the guilty and eliminating any suspicion regarding the rest.

Must I Go Privately To A Public False Teacher?

The question itself presents an oxymoron. As men, we try foolishly to deal with sin after our own fashion: Adam sought to cover his sin by hiding himself among the trees in the garden (Gen. 3:8; cf. Psa. 139:2-8; Psa. 139:11). The first family tried to transfer their guilt to another (Gen. 3:12-13). Aaron blamed the people to conceal his sin (Exo. 32:22; Exo. 32:2-4; Exo. 32:24). Achan tried to hide the “accursed thing” in the earth (Jos. 7:21). David tried to cover his sin by deception

(2 Sam. 11:6-13) and then by conspiracy to commit murder (2 Sam. 11:14-17). Some of the Jews attempted to cover their sins by murdering the one who exposed them (Acts 7:51-60; Eph. 5:11-13). What does the Bible say about sin and how the church is to handle its responsibility therein?

A Few General Principles

Principle Number One: Is it a hateful thing to leave a brother in sin without speaking to the sin? “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev. 19:17; cf. Pro. 13:24; Heb. 12:6). *Principle Number Two:* A public rebuke is better than silent tolerance. “Open rebuke is better than secret love” (Pro. 27:5). *Principle Number Three:* Rebuke is not the objective of the encounter. Jesus said, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). *Principle Number Four:* It is never better to side with peace, just for the sake of peace. “They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). *Principle Number Five:* Restoration is the duty of the spiritually mature child of God. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). *Principle Number Six:* Good men appreciate the rebuke above the praise. “He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue” (Pro. 28:23; cf. Heb. 12:11-17). *Principle Number Seven:* God holds people accountable if they know of sin and say nothing (Lev. 5:1; Lev. 20:10; John 8:4-7).

Not All Sins Are To Be Dealt With In The Same Manner.

The following examples clearly demonstrate different categories of sin and that each is to be handled uniquely different in some ways and consistently similar in other ways.

The Personal Transgressor (Mat. 18:15-17). The procedure is crystal clear. Because this is a personal matter between two brothers, the brother who has been wronged is to go directly and privately to the one who has perpetrated the offense. By the way, two assumptions are made in the text: first, that this is a real offense and second, that the brother being accused is actually guilty. If the matter is settled at this juncture, then the matter is closed. The word *if* makes this abundantly clear (Mat. 18:16). On the other hand, if the perpetrator refuses the first gesture of the brother to repent, then one or two witnesses are to be taken to bear witness to the perpetrator's unwillingness to repent (Mat. 18:16). At this juncture, the procedure has an implied semi-private status. Again, if the matter is settled at this juncture, then the matter is closed and the word *if* makes this obvious (Mat. 18:17). If the perpetrator still refuses to accept the gesture at this point, then the offended brother is to "tell it to the church" and if the offender refuses to hear the judgment of the church, Jesus said, "Let him be as an heathen man and a publican" (Mat. 18:17). The terminology is clear that this man is to be withdrawn from by the local brethren. Just for clarification purposes, the perpetrator may realize the infraction and begin the process even before the brother who was trespassed against (Mat. 5:23-24). In such cases, the procedure above may not be necessary at all.

The timetable for such an event we have described is as soon as the offence has taken place (Mat. 18:15) or before the offender seeks reconciling with God (Mat. 5:23-24). This seems to be a matter that can be handled rather quickly, at least within weeks.

The False Teacher (Rom. 16:17-18). The assumption in our text is that at least three things have occurred: (1) The evidence has been gathered; (2) The assessment of the evi-

dence has been handled; and (3) Some kind of adjudication on the matter has been completed (Deu. 19:18). The examination of a prophet/teacher in the Old Testament was a very serious matter and not to be taken flippantly (Deu. 13:12-14). First, the prophet/teacher was considered false if his prophecy did not come to fruition. Thus, he did not evidence complete truthfulness (Deu. 18:20-22). Second, if prophet/teacher taught some doctrine that was not in harmony with prior revelation (Deu. 13:1-5)—after the evidence has been considered in full and the man is determined to be a false teacher—he is to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17).

A timetable is nowhere suggested, but the seriousness of this crime against God and the truth demands that as soon as the evidence is in—assuming no repentance—such a man must be marked and avoid.

The Immoral Individual (1 Cor. 5:1-13). Due to the serious crime of bearing false witness (Pro. 19:5; Pro. 6:16-19; Eph. 4:25), the procedure herein is similar to the false teacher above in the gathering and sorting of the evidence. Not all cases are as clear cut as the Corinthians case, but once it is determined that the brother is engaging in immoral behavior and refuses to repent, the local congregation is to “put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor. 5:13). The congregation is admonished “not to keep company with...such an one no, not to eat” (1 Cor. 5:11).

Once the evidence is adjudicated, our timetable is made clear. The following Sunday, the saints are to deliver such a one unto Satan (1 Cor. 5:3-4).

The Disorderly Walker (1 The. 5:14; 2 The. 3:6; 2 The. 3:14-15). After the warning against his misbehavior—“warn them that are unruly” (1 The. 5:14)—the apostle admonishes his brethren in Thessalonica to “withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions

which he received of us” (2 The. 3:6). The context clearly indicates that any who fail to follow apostolic doctrine/tradition (2 The. 3:6; Acts 2:42) whether by spoken or written (2 The. 2:14) are to be withdrawn from by the local congregation. Therefore, this category would naturally include anything that the other four categories do not.

The timetable herein is somewhat noteworthy, because of the six-month time span between First and Second Thessalonians. Paul is also letting us know that the Thessalonians have taken too long in their responsibility to deal with these unruly brethren.

The Heretic (Tit. 3:10-11). The procedure and timetable is crystal clear. The local congregation that gives more than two admonitions is clearly in violation of this command. God does not use numbers nor does He deal with the matter of heresy frivolously. Once the second admonition, is delivered the congregation is to reject this man.

All Discipline Within The Church Eventually Is Public In Nature.

Everyone of these situations is of a public nature, too. In the case of the personal transgressor, we are told to “tell it unto the church” (Mat. 18:17). Concerning false teachers, we must “mark them” (Rom. 16:17). The immoral man is to be withdrawn from at the assembly or “when ye are gathered together” (1 Cor. 5:4). Even when it comes to elders, Paul said, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20).

I feel compelled to address one more detail before we close. How public should any disciplinary action be of the local congregation? As a rule, church matters should be kept before the church (1 Cor. 6:1). New Testament letters are addressed to the saints. At the same time, God does not tie the hands of gospel preachers to deal with people who want

to take the truth to task in the public arena. Paul dealt with the Epicurean and Stoick philosophers in the market place (Acts 17:16ff).

Conclusion

Even though there might be different ways to handle different cases (categories listed above), the church is admonished to note that person and not to keep company with said individual (Mat. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:9; Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10; 2 The. 3:14-15). Whether that person is a personal transgressor (Mat. 18:15-17); an immoral person (1 Cor. 5); a false teacher (Rom. 16:17-18); a disorderly walker (1 The. 5:14; 2 The. 3:6); or a heretic (Tit. 3:10-11) does not matter. To have no company with him means to refuse to eat with him or do any other thing that might suggest approval of their lifestyle (1 Cor. 5:11). Hospitality must be refused lest it be misunderstood as bidding them Godspeed (2 John 9-11). Kindness mixed with firmness must be shown him by every member of the church. He must always know that the church prays for his repentance, but the church cannot fellowship him in his sin.

If the church refuses to deal with sin God's way inside the camp, then it has no moral authority to deal with sin God's way outside the camp!

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Elders Must Have Backbone—

Titus 1:9

Tony Lawrence



Tony Lawrence has been the pulpit minister at the Bybee Branch Church of Christ since 1985. He earned a BA from Freed-Hardeman University in Bible and an MA in Apologetics from Tennessee Bible College; he is also an Honorary Alumnus of MSOP. He is married to Corretta (daughter of Gospel preacher, Benny Bristow) and has two sons, Mark and Micah. They have one grandchild.

EVERY MEMBER of the Lord's church ought to appreciate, admire, and uphold godly elders. Their task is challenging, and their responsibility weighty. The Scriptures urge the congregation to **know them** (King James Version, 1 The. 5:12), to **follow/imitate them** (KJV/NKJV; Heb. 13:7) and **obey them** (Heb. 13:17). They deserve to have our support and enjoy the confidence that the faithful will uphold them in carrying out their tasks.

Contrary to what many evidently think, a flock is vulnerable when there are no shepherds to oversee them. Paul told Titus that things are lacking when there are no elders (Tit. 1:5). This is true of weak and timid shepherds who fail to take their obligations seriously.

Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of
the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD,

surely because my flock became a prey,
and my flock became meat to every beast
of the field, because there was no shepherd,
neither did my shepherds search for my
flock, but the shepherds fed themselves,
and fed not my flock. (Eze. 34:7-8)

This writer has nothing but praise for the many good men who serve in the office of an overseer. They simply need encouragement to be less timid and lead God's people more courageously. Congregations must exhibit the courage and conviction of the Levites when Moses asked, "Who is on the Lord's side?" and the Levites rallied around him (Exo. 32:26). It is truly a timely topic to discuss the need for elders to have backbone because many churches are suffering from division and digression.

To cover adequately the necessary elements of this topic, one must first address God's plan by contemplating the **Characteristics of Godly Pastors**, followed by a **Consideration of the Assigned Text**, and concluding with a **Case Study of the Ephesian Elders**. This topic could be expanded in many ways and much profit could be derived from study of the role and responsibility of overseers. This lesson by necessity will have to limit its focus to that of the firm, guiding hand of a godly presbytery (eldership).

Characteristics Of God's Pastors

The church and its organization originated in the mind of God, including the role of overseers (Eph. 3:10; Eph. 4:11-16; Acts 20:28). God knows man's need for supervision and guidance, possessing the same characteristic of straying sheep (Isa. 53:6). The book of Judges captures this thought so succinctly, "In those days there was no king

in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Jud. 21:25). Man left to his own devices will go astray (Jer. 10:23; Pro. 29:15).

It was God’s design that there be **pastors** (Eph. 4:11). The term *pastor* has been so abused by the religious world that its usage is practically non-existent among God’s people today. Why does it seem as if the Lord’s church is being driven away from biblical terminology? Why does it seem as if one Scriptural designation is almost used exclusively to the neglect of the others? Perhaps many would not have a denominational view of the Lord’s church if they truly understood the meaning of the term *church of Christ*.

Each of the terms used to describe those who oversee God’s flock has meaning and the term *pastor* is particularly relevant in this study. In Acts 20:17 they are the **elders** (*presbuteros*), yet in verse 28, he said that the Holy Spirit had made them **overseers/bishops** (*episkopos*) and as such they were to **feed, shepherd, or pastor** (*poimaino*) the flock. Peter uses these same three terms in 1 Peter 5:1-2, when he said they were elders (*presbyteros*) and they were to feed/shepherd/pastor (*poimaino*) the flock while serving as overseers/bishops (*episkopos*). It appears the “operative” term in these passages is the verb *poimaino* from the noun *poimēn*, translated “shepherd” or “pastor.”

The concept of shepherding is frequently found in Scripture and worthy of intense study. It would be easy to digress and discuss the metaphor of a shepherd and his role in providing both *protection* and *provision* for the flock of God. When preparing to encounter the giant Goliath, David recalled his role as a shepherd (1 Sam. 17:34-37).

When God designed the church, He provided a pattern for the type of persons He wanted to shepherd His people. These qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Those who serve must meet all the Scriptural qualifications given to Timothy and Titus. Some may consider the bar has been set so high that few, if any, could qualify to serve, but in reality they are the minimal requirements to qualify for the position. Yet, the role of pastors is not as individual leaders, but as a body or group of men functioning as one. Their actual work calls for them to exhibit courage, conviction, and compassion. Pastors who faithfully discharge their duty will demonstrate each of these characteristics.

Leadership requires courage. God charged Joshua to remain courageous, “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left that you may prosper wherever you go” (Jos. 1:7). And when Joshua drew near the end of his life, he gave a similar charge to the elders of Israel (Jos. 23:1-8). It takes courage to confront false teachers and faithless brethren. It is difficult to correct error in preaching or practice. There is a natural reluctance to be confrontational. Those confronted will usually mount a rigorous defense of their teaching or action. Therefore, pastors must correct those who are endangering their souls. While working with the precious souls of men, pastors will often find sheep that have become weak from their association with the world and some who are stubborn in their desires to pursue the works of the flesh. They get a taste of worldly pleasures and like it. Standing strong on issues like dancing and modesty may bring strong resistance to the overseers. Courage is required to avoid shrinking to their worldly ways and withstand their insults.

Conviction is also a necessary characteristic of the pastor. Such must be men convinced that God knows best,

that whatever God has commanded must be practiced. The only source of instruction for godly pastors are the Scriptures. As Paul admonished Timothy, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them” (2 Tim. 3:14). They must also be convinced that if they do what God has instructed God will bless them in so doing. The words *I will be with you* are greatly reassuring to one convinced of the power of God (cf. Gen. 26:3; Gen. 31:3; Deu. 31:23; Jos. 1:5; Jos. 3:7; Jud. 6:16; 1 Kin. 11:38; Isa. 43:2; Mat. 28:20).

Pastors must possess a compassionate heart. Sometimes it takes backbone to be a compassionate person in the face of a harsh world. In the New Testament, Jesus frequently confronted the Pharisees who showed little compassion to others and derided those who did. One can easily see this illustrated in the life of the elder brother in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. He rebuked his father for the compassion shown to his penitent brother. The Lord was able to correct with compassion the woman at the well (John 4) and the woman taken in adultery (John 8) without condoning their sin, and godly overseers must do the same. Gentleness is a necessary element in those who wish to restore the fallen (Gal. 6:1-2). Showing kindness and gentleness is much more challenging than displaying harshness. Those who are weak and falling need to know someone really cares for their soul (Psa. 142:4). Elders must avoid a vindictive spirit as exhibited by James and John when the Samaritans refused to receive the Lord (cf. Luke 9:51-56). Firmness does not preclude kindness and compassion.

Consideration Of The Assigned Text

One might consult several passages to study elders with backbone, but none are more relevant than the assigned text

of Titus 1:9. Paul's letter to Titus provided the rationale for such fortitude in those who hold this lofty office. An immediate, pressing need called for strong leadership. Evidently several churches existed on the island of Crete and it was critical that each of them have elders. The challenges presented in Paul's day are still those in modern times. In this section, Paul's instructions to Titus involved explaining the need for godly overseers (Tit. 1:5), their qualifications (Tit. 1:6-9), and the immediate task they were to fulfill (Tit. 1:10-16). For the purposes of this lecture, the lesson will concentrate on the last verse of the qualifications and then the first part of the task.

The needs of the Christians in Crete were no different than they are in any church today. As Peter observed, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you" (2 Pet. 2:1). Greedy men still will say almost anything to develop followers. They continue to prey upon weak and uninformed brethren. Men must still be prepared to counter their devious work. Hence, God's solution was to have the elders of the church confront these troublemakers. To do so, elders must be adequately prepared. Several of the qualifications address the character and reputation of the potential overseer, including his family, finances, faith, and personal conduct. Finally, in this passage is the necessary training in the Word.

Paul describes an elder as one "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Tit. 1:9). It should be obvious that good elders are taught. As the Philippians were told, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phi. 4:9). Perhaps no greater admonition appears in Scripture than that given to Timothy:

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

Elders are to teach, and one cannot teach that which he does not know. They must also be discerning, able to recognize when one is teaching something contrary to the sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10). Paul informs Titus they are to keep on holding to what they have been taught. (Such is the thrust of the present participle.) Remaining true to what one is taught frequently appears in Paul's writings (cf. 1 The. 5:21; 2 The. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:13). However, it is not just knowledge they must possess; they must also be able to use that sound doctrine to exhort and convict. When writing Timothy, Paul stated it very simply as "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). These twin duties represent both the positive and negative aspects of capable overseers; some people will need encouragement while others must be rebuked. The Greek word *elencho* has the concepts of exposing and discipline within it (cf. its usage in Mat. 18:15; John 3:20; John 16:8; Eph. 5:11; Eph. 5:13; Eph. 5:20; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 12:5; Rev. 3:19).

Paul, in Titus 1:10-16, explained why elders must possess these qualities. The troublemakers and the kinds of

difficulties that they can bring can wreak havoc in a local congregation. Paul will explain **who** they are, **what** they are doing, **why** they doing it, and **how** to respond to the trouble they are creating.

Paul described these troublemakers as being “unruly” (KJV), “insubordinate” (NKJV), or “rebellious” (NAS95). He had just used this same word four verses earlier to describe the type of children that would disqualify one from service as an elder. Paul used the same term to describe the type of people for whom the Law was made (1 Tim. 1:9). To what or whom are these troublemakers rebellious? It would not be to the elders at this point since none had been appointed. It is most likely that they reject the whole concept of authority, and more specifically the Law of God. They are also described as “idle talkers” or as one lexicon aptly put it, a “windbag” (Baur, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, “Mataiologos”). Peter and Jude both reference these types of people (2 Pet. 2:18; Jude 16). Jesus even exposed the Pharisees as those who used vain repetitions because some would be impressed with their many words (Mat. 6:7). What is important when one speaks is that his message reflects what God has to say on the subject. Peter said, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11).

Paul goes on to say they are “deceivers.” There is something sinister about one who deceives another (Gen. 3:13; Rev. 12:9). Paul does not hesitate to call out the “circumcision” as being chief in this matter. The term *circumcision* was a designation commonly used to describe Jews. And Paul will identify some of their teachings as “Jewish fables” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4; 1 Tim. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4).

Next, Paul explains **what** they are doing that is so disruptive. They “subvert” or “upset” households (or families, NAS95). False teaching can undermine one’s faith;

for instance, those who taught the resurrection had already passed overthrew the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:18). Only those who have lived through church turmoil can fully appreciate the gravity of the description here. It creates strife and discord not only in the spiritual family but also frequently within physical families. The Devil is a master of divide and conquer. It is evident that the problem is false teaching because of the phrase “teaching things which they ought not.” Simply, some things ought not be said (1 Tim. 5:13). Lying was a well-known characteristic of Cretans as indicated by the quote from Epimenides (Guthrie 209). These troublemakers have no trouble lying, deceiving as their consciences have been so calloused that nothing bothers them.

Why do they do this? Dishonest gain is their motive. Many have succumbed to the desire for money. Samuel’s sons allowed such to guide their judging (1 Sam. 1-3). However, one of the best examples is that of Balaam (2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14). Balaam was not allowed to curse the children of Israel, but his advice resulted in the temptation of Israel and its fall at Peor (Num. 31:16). Peter even warned fellow elders to beware of the lure of dishonest gain (1 Pet. 5:2). The love of money is the source of all kinds of evils (1 Tim. 6:10).

Godly shepherds are instructed how to handle these troublemakers. First, their mouths must be stopped. The most basic question is, How are they to stop them? One way is not to provide a venue for them to spread their teaching, nor support them in so doing. John warned,

Whoever transgresses and does not abide
in the doctrine of Christ does not have
God. He who abides in the doctrine of
Christ has both the Father and the Son.
If anyone comes to you and does not

bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 John 9-11)

The second thing they are to do is to “rebuke them sharply.” The word for *sharply* (*apotomōs*) means “severely, rigorously” (Baur, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich). Sharp rebuke was needed “because he knows that only such a rebuke will get through to those who are described in v. 12” (Knight 299). The sharp rebuke was not for personal gratification of one in a position of power or authority, but was to possibly reach them so they will be “sound in the faith.” This clearly indicates that those discussed were brethren that had not gone beyond the point of no return. Experience has shown that one’s level of response must match the extent to which one has gone (Jude 22).

The third thing shepherds must do is to reject Jewish fables and commandments of men. It has been said regarding human creeds that if one has less than the Word of God, he has too little; if he has more than the Word of God, he has too much. While on earth Jesus rebuked the teaching of the Pharisees as it supplanted the Word of God with the commandments of men (cf. Mat. 15:7-9; Mark 7:6-8). Paul echoed the same teaching to the Colossians (Col. 2:8; Col. 2:22).

This passage places elders under a tremendous obligation to protect the church from false teaching. Elders must have a strong constitution to confront those would do harm to the body. When one’s physical family is being threatened, there is no place for the head of the family to be a coward even if it means sacrificing himself. The same must be true of those who lead the spiritual family.

Case Study Of Ephesian Elders

The Scriptures provide an excellent, if not immediately evident, insight into the leadership at Ephesus in three pertinent passages: Acts 20; 1 Timothy 3 and 5; and Revelation 2. One can see a development of the leadership style. A rough dating of these passages is approximately AD 58 for Acts 20, AD 63 for 1 Timothy, and AD 96 for Revelation 2.

In Acts 20, when Paul met with the elders of Ephesus at Miletus. He charged them, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28) and “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). The first challenge is for each elder to take careful consideration of his own life (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16) and the second was to do the same for the church. It was the Holy Spirit (through instructions) that had made them overseers; thus they had a Divine charge. They were caring for the church purchased by the blood of Christ, something He loved so dearly (Eph. 5:25).

However, Paul foresaw the coming challenges to the church from two directions. Predators would come to the church from the outside. Thus, he warned, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). Even more insidious would be the challenge from those arising from within the church (perhaps even from the eldership itself). “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30). At the time this meeting took place, these problems were in the future. So serious were they that Paul warned them constantly for the three years he served them (Acts 20:31).

By AD 63, Paul wrote Timothy concerning the problems which had arrived. In Paul's opening of the letter, he wrote,

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. (1 Tim. 1:3-4)

It follows that the behavior within the church was not as it should be. “But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

This would seem strange instruction for a congregation established and led by a solid godly eldership. Why would Paul have to enumerate the qualifications to Timothy in a congregation that already had elders? Perhaps the answer is found in the fifth chapter of the book. Paul praised the good elders and urged double honor upon them while cautioning receiving unsubstantiated accusations against them. Yet, the possibility existed that some of the elders were sinning. “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20). It is possible that Paul may have referred to some of these in his second letter to Timothy, calling attention to some of these by name (cf. 2 Tim. 1:15-18). It is certain that Paul dispatched Tychicus to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:12). Thus, one can see the prophecy of Paul regarding the challenges coming to the Ephesian elders had taken place. False teaching and desertion from the Truth were creating problems for this congregation for which Jesus died.

Some thirty years passed between Paul's letters to Timothy and Jesus' revelation to John on the island of Patmos. In that revelation, Jesus dictated letters to the seven churches of Asia, among which was the one at Ephesus. Within the Lord's appraisal of them was, "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary" (Rev. 2:2-3).

It appears that during the passing of time the congregation finally understood the message of doctrinal purity. They had no toleration for evil men, challenging those who made spurious claims. Finally, it appears that they were a sound church led by elders with a strong backbone. Yet, now another problem had arisen; they had left their first love and were in danger of being no longer recognized as a faithful congregation by the Lord.

The case study of the leadership at Ephesus reveals that essential nature of an eldership that it is not blind to potential problems on the horizon. Elders must take doctrinal purity seriously and must confront error whether it comes from false teachers on the outside or even from within the eldership itself. A failure to address the problems of the present will only create even greater ones in the future. One should never think that doctrinal soundness is the only measure of a sound (healthy) congregation. Elders have to be vigilant to keep the congregation motivated by love for God and one another while at the same time preserving doctrinal purity.

Conclusion

God knew what He was doing! "Known to God from eternity are all His works" (Acts 15:18). When He designed

the church, He knew man's need for oversight and guidance. As such, the Lord designated certain individuals to serve as overseers of His flock. Those shepherds, however, serve under a "Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet 5:4). He calls on them to protect and provide for the sheep. Many pastors need encouragement to be strong in the face of challenges and to have the backbone to confront those who would harm the body. These same men also must have a heart of love for the Lord and lead the church in love for the Lord.

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A Soft Answer Turns Away Wrath

Steve Higginbotham



Steve Higginbotham was born in Chester, WV. He and his wife, Kim, are the parents of four children: Kelli, Michael, Matthew, and Anne Marie. Steve graduated from Freed-Hardeman University with a BS in Bible and is presently working on a Master in Ministry Degree from Freed-Hardeman University. He has served congregations in WV and KY. Steve presently serves as the Pulpit Minister for the Karns congregation in Knoxville, TN and also serves as an adjunct faculty member of Southeast Institute of Bible Studies.

THROUGH THE years, I have played a lot of basketball. Being 6'6" made the game come a little easier to me than to some others. I played organized basketball for a quarter of a century. During this time, I had more than a few plays burned into my memory. However, one of the most memorable events on the basketball court took place thirty-one years ago when I was a senior at Freed-Hardeman University. I was involved in an intermural game. The teams were evenly matched, the game was close, and the lead changed many times. As the game wore on, things began to get a little "chippy," tempers began to flare, and then it happened. A player on the opposing team made a fist, drew back, and punched a player on my team. The punch to the face caught my teammate off-guard, and he crumpled to the court. Immediately, a circle of players and fans formed

around the two players involved in the scuffle. Cheers and encouragement began to be shouted to the players involved to “let the other guy have it.” Then, amidst all the chaos came an unexpected response. While still on the court trying to regain his senses, my teammate looked at his opponent, who was standing over him with clinched fists, and said, “I forgive you, brother. Let’s play ball.” The crowd immediately went silent. No longer was anyone clamoring for a fight. The young man who threw the punch, relaxed his fists, reached out his hand, and helped his brother to his feet. Then the young man who lost his temper and punched my teammate walked off the court and back to his dorm in tears.

What was it that had the power to silence that “mob mentality”? It was a simple but profound “soft answer.” Had anything other than a soft answer been given that day, a fight would have ensued, but instead peace reigned in its place.

Through the years, I have thought of this instance on many occasions and have used it as a way to illustrate what Solomon said, “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger” (New King James Version, Pro. 15:1).

In this lesson, we will examine the meaning of this verse, examine this verse in the light of Jesus, and offer several applications that will help us to live in compliance with it.

Understanding Proverbs

Just as the books of the Bible have a variety of authors, the books of the Bible also contain a variety of literary genres. For example, the Bible contains several genres which must be respected if we are to understand the original intent (e.g., law, poetry, narratives, parables, epistles, apocalyptic, and proverbs to name a few). Each genre is a valid form of

communication, but these genres cannot be read in the same fashion if one desires to understand the Bible properly. The genres must be respected.

When it comes to Proverbs, we must remember what a proverb is, or we will soon begin to doubt the trustworthiness of the Bible. A proverb is a maxim or a general truth. In other words, proverbs are not universally true, but generally true.

Therefore, proverbs have exceptions. Failing to understand that would leave us in confusion as we read proverbs such as “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6). Due to an improper understanding of the nature of proverbs, many parents who have been broken-hearted over the life choices of their children have added an even heavier burden of unnecessary guilt upon their shoulders. While it may be true that some children turn aside because of a failure on the part of the parents, others turn aside in spite of their parents. Proverbs 22:6 is a proverb, a general truth to which there are exceptions.

Of course, that also applies to our passage under consideration. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” is a general truth to which there are exceptions. Sometimes, we do all we can do and speak with the utmost kindness only to be received with unkindness and malice. This passage is not offering an absolute cure for unkindness, but rather a suggestion that will, for the most part, be effective.

Jesus And His Application Of Proverbs 15:1

One of the most disturbing and distasteful things imaginable to me is when someone attempts to use Jesus to defend his ungodly behavior. I remember reading of a time when Adam attempted to blame his wife for his sin, and then

Eve attempted to blame Satan for her sin (Gen. 3:12-13), and if that were not shameful enough, for some to try to blame Jesus for their sinful speech is almost unimaginable to me. But it is happening. I am confident we have all seen and heard some brethren who have a very vitriolic spirit. Their words are cutting, harsh, and mean-spirited. They wield their tongues as though they were sharp swords, skillfully wounding their opposition. Instead of repenting and bringing their speech into conformity with Proverbs 15:1, Ephesians 4:29, and Colossians 4:6, these brethren attempt to justify their harshness by appealing to Jesus. They remind us, “Don’t you know what Jesus said to the Scribes and Pharisees? Don’t you know how direct he was to them? You’re just too sensitive and too polite.”

It is true that Jesus was sometimes very pointed to people. Read what Jesus once said to the Scribes and Pharisees, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!...Blind guides...Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of Hell?” (Mat. 23:23-24; Mat. 23:33).

The question we need to ask is If this is the way Jesus addressed people, do we have the right to follow His example? In order to answer that question, we must first consider the fact that Jesus had the ability to look into and know a person’s heart (Mark 2:8; Luke 6:8). We do not have that ability (1 Cor. 2:11), and thus love demands that we think the best (1 Cor. 13:7). It is wholly inappropriate for us, who are unable to know the heart, to respond like Jesus did toward those whose hearts He knew to be corrupt.

I suggest that we follow the example Jesus left us when He spoke with people whose hearts were not corrupt. Note the kindness, softness, love, and patience He showed them. One such example occurred when a sinful woman washed Jesus’ feet. Here is how Luke recorded the incident:

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, 'This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' So he said, 'Teacher, say it.' There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.' Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with

the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.' Then He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' (Luke 7:36-48)

Do not miss the kindness with which Jesus dealt with this sinful woman. Jesus actually asked Simon if he “saw the woman.” Of course he “saw” the woman. She had crashed his party. She had fallen at the feet of Jesus. She was weeping and wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair. Yes, Simon saw this woman, but did he see her like Jesus did? All Simon saw was a sinful woman. However, Jesus saw so much more. Jesus saw a woman who had a broken and contrite heart, and that He would not despise (Psa. 51:17). To this sinful woman, Jesus did not offer stinging, sarcastic words that exposed her sinfulness. Instead, Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven.

We must stop trying to justify hateful speech under the banner of “just being like Jesus.” We must stop looking past the people to whom we are speaking. We must train ourselves to “see them,” really see them as Jesus did. And when we do, the harsh, unkind, sarcastic ways in which we may have formerly talked to people will seem unholy and unworthy of one who is a representative of Jesus.

Putting Proverbs 15:1 Into Practice

I think we all would agree that knowing something is much easier than doing something. In other words, knowing

that I should respond with softness and gentleness is much easier than actually doing it. But I must give care actually to put into practice what this verse tells us to do. James warned his readers to beware and not equate hearing the Word with doing the Word (Jam. 1:22). So I want to offer the following suggestions as concrete actions we can take which will help us fulfill the instruction given in Proverbs 15:1.

Pick and Choose Your Battles.

Conflict is a part of life. We can never totally avoid it. Living together within a close family structure or working side-by-side within the local church will eventually result in conflicts. A good suggestion that will keep these inevitable conflicts from escalating is to pick and choose your battles. Not everything is worth fighting about. Whoever said we have to attend every fight we have been invited to?

Some people have a disgruntled disposition. In fact, they seem to thrive on conflict. They find enjoyment and pleasure in matching wits, standing toe-to-toe, and verbally assaulting another. When dealing with people like this, the best thing to do is simply disengage. It will have the same effect as removing fuel from a fire. Eventually, the fire will go out. Likewise, when we stop adding fuel to the fire, our conflicts will often disappear.

On the other hand, when we refuse to back down to such individuals as described above, and we decide to exchange verbal blows with them, it results in what I once heard an older preacher say. He said, “Don’t ever get into a puking contest with a buzzard. The reason is two-fold: (1) You’re going to lose for you can’t out-puke a buzzard, and (2) The buzzard will enjoy it.”

Wait Before You Speak.

When tempted to speak your mind or write that scathing email or post, do not do it. Sit on it for a day. James said, “So

then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (Jam. 1:19-20).

Because of my personal experiences, I have made it a rule not to reply for at least 24 hours to an email or a conversation in which I feel attacked. When I have followed my advice, I have discovered that much of what I was going to say was unnecessary and unwise. I have also discovered that when I ignored my own rule, I found myself having to apologize for my words.

The inspired writer, James, was right. Let us learn to be “slow to speak.” This time will allow us to give answers that are much more soft and kind.

Speak The Truth In Love.

Paul said we are to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). When we find ourselves in a situation wherein we must speak and tension is running high, we must learn to govern ourselves and bridle our tongues (Jam. 1:26). We need to make sure that what we say is necessary, helpful, and intended to uphold truth and is not “thinly veiled religious talk” intended to take a dig at someone. When we speak the truth in love, we will not aim at just getting truth “said,” but our aim will be to get truth “accepted.”

Hurt People Hurt People.

Several years ago, my dog was hit by a car. My dog survived but had her hip and leg broken. As I scooped her up to take her home, she bit me! Under normal circumstances, my dog would never bite me. But she did, and I know why she did. She was in pain and lashed out at me.

This is precisely the reason many people act and speak in the hurtful ways they do. They hurt others because they themselves are hurting. When I am mindful of this truth, I am much more restrained in the way I respond. People who

hurt others because they are hurting do not need more hurt; they need compassion, patience, and understanding.

Agree With Your Adversary.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison” (Mat. 5:25).

Tension and conflict can be defused if we will search for ways in which we can find agreement. Several years ago, a man who was a constant “thorn in my side” met me at the door following worship services. In front of everyone present, he said in a very loud voice, “You know what? You preach on about a 5th grade level.” To which I responded, “Thank you. I think you’re right.” He did not know how to take this. It silenced him. He said this thinking it would offend me and get a rise out of me. Instead, I agreed with him and thanked him for his observation. The puzzled look on his face indicated that my response totally disarmed him.

Maintain Humility.

James said, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law” (Jam. 4:10).

While it takes a great deal of restraint and self-control, sometimes the wisest response is one in which you demonstrate your humility. Several years ago, a man stood up during a worship service while the closing comments were being made. This man stood from his seat and proceeded to berate my elders and me. It just so happened that I was sitting on the very first row, and an elder was standing at the pulpit. While this man was spewing forth his diatribe against us, I whispered to the elder at the microphone that

when this man finished his rant, to call on him for closing prayer. When the man finally finished, the elder said, “You’ve made some pretty serious charges against us. I’d like to ask you to lead us in a closing prayer and to please pray for us that we might have wisdom, courage, and vision to lead the church in a way that would be pleasing to God.” This humble response was met with an angry and defiant refusal to pray for us, showing to the entire congregation that his motives were impure. Had the elder tried to defend himself and get into a back-and-forth argument, I am certain the incident would have escalated. However, his humility won the day and kept the congregation from sympathizing with the man who disrupted the service.

James wrote, “No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jam. 3:8). While this is true, we must do our best to at least “bridle our tongue”; otherwise our religion will be vain (Jam. 1:26). One way in which we can bridle our tongue is to remember the truth taught in Proverbs 15:1 and to learn to give a “soft answer.” May God help us to have the wisdom, self-control, and humility to respond to people in a soft, gentle, and kind manner.

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A Case Study Of Paul: Knowing The Difference Between Matters Of Judgment And Doctrine (Acts 15 vs. Galatians 2)

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



Robert R. Taylor, Jr., was born in Bradford, Tennessee in 1931. He was baptized in 1944. Robert began preaching in 1949. He was educated at Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb, and George Peabody for Teachers. He has done local work in TN and MS for fifty-six years. He has been at Ripley, Tennessee for forty-one years. He has preached in about 500 gospel meetings and over 700 lectureships throughout the nation. Robert has presented over 6,500 sermons on radio and TV. For 28 years, he has helped with a prison ministry and baptized inmates. He has served as instructor in Online Academy of Biblical Studies for 15 years. He has been married to Irene for 63 years. They have two children and four grandchildren. He has authored thirty-five books and twenty-five tracts. For seventeen and one-half years, he wrote material for Gospel Advocate Quarterlies and the Annual companion. Between 1969 and 1977, he served as a staff writer under B. C. Goodpasture, editor of the Gospel Advocate. On January 1, 2011, he retired from local work but continues to be an active member at Ripley. He is conducting gospel meetings and lectureships and spends an immense amount of time writing.

WHAT A priceless privilege it has been to have been invited to speak on all the Power Lectureships and write a chapter for each published volume—books filled with power-packed profit. I have enjoyed reading all past volumes and will do so with the current one. Genuine gratitude is expressed to Don, Robert, the elders, the deacons, and all treasured members at Southaven for the invitation to participate with the one for 2015.

Before writing word one of my assignment, I read carefully the names of all speakers and topics in order to ascertain what this lectureship planned to achieve. It looks good, great, and grand. It is both positive and negative. Overall, it overflows with relevant matters, with practical counsel for all of us and will be richly rewarding to listeners now and later to those who peruse the printed volume.

My assignment covers an area that is mixed-up badly in modern mindsets. As a result many totally unnecessary problems beset and plague us which should not have materialized at all. Far too many elevate their opinions and personal judgments and make them into doctrinal matters determining both fellowship now and destinies later. The “I think” mindset is deeply rooted in the minds of many and it is going to be “my way” or no way. In preaching for 66 years and writing for the religious public for 55 or more years, I have witnessed all of this again and again with immeasurable sadness. When I began to preach in 1949 I stood in welcomed company with many who broke that fellowship in the 1950’s and 1960’s with the rise of anti-ism.

Assigned Texts From Acts 15 And Galatians 2

And some days after Paul said unto
Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our

brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. (King James Version, Acts 15:36-41)

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we

gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you...But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal. 2:1-5; Gal. 2:11-14)

It is intently important that we look closely and clearly at the material Luke wrote in Acts 15 and what Paul penned in Galatians 2. Needed truth can be learned from both Luke and Paul.

Barnabas, Paul, And John Mark In Background

Barnabas is first mentioned in Acts 4:36-37. We first read of Saul, later to become Paul the apostle, in Acts 7, then in Acts 8 and more fully in Acts 9. There he is a murderer, a persecutor, and then a consistent convert to Christ. The name John Mark occurs first in Acts 12:12 as the son of a prominent Jerusalem member, Mary of Jerusalem. His

second time to be mentioned is Acts 12:25 traveling with Paul and Barnabas.

In one of his masterful biographical sermons the late and lamented B. C. Goodpasture portrayed lovable Barnabas as one generous of heart, hand, and judgment. Fundamentally, he fit all three of these portrayals. In Acts 4:36-37, he shared property and money wealth with needy people in Jerusalem. In Acts 9:27, he verified the genuineness of Saul's conversion to the reluctant brethren in Jerusalem. Saul then was warmly accepted among Jewish saints in Jerusalem. In Acts 11 he was dispatched by the apostles to help the newly begun work in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:22-26). It was during this period when the overtaxed Barnabas sent and searched out Saul's presence in Asia Minor and brought him to Antioch as a needed helper. What a duet of disciples they made. They complemented each other in executing the Lord's work in this thriving metropolis of Syria. It was natural and normal that the Holy Spirit teamed them together in Acts 13 for that historic first missionary journey. In Acts 15 they both were prominent in the Jerusalem Conference. Then, in the latter part of Acts 15, these two giants in the faith parted ways.

Saul presided at Stephen's stoning in Acts 7, made havoc of the church imprisoning both men and women in Acts 8, and breathed out threatening in Acts 9. Acts 9 is his conversion and a total change for the powerful persecutor. He promptly preached in Damascus, Arabia, Damascus again, at Jerusalem, in his home area, and Antioch; executed his first missionary journey; defended truth in Jerusalem; and then disagreed strongly with Barnabas in Acts 15:36-41 relative to John Mark.

John Mark was son to Mary of Jerusalem, related by a fleshly tie with Barnabas, and evidently a close associate of Simon Peter. He traveled with Barnabas and Saul to Antioch

from Jerusalem and then part of the way on missionary journey one. He turned back which later figured so strongly in the rupture between Paul and Barnabas. He came back stronger than ever, was fully restored in Paul's good graces, became useful to Paul for the ministry as we see in Colossians 4 and especially in 2 Timothy 4:11. Mark penned the gospel record bearing his name.

An Analysis Of Acts 15:36-41

Subsequent to Paul's and Barnabas' return from the Jerusalem Council and a short working stay at Antioch, Paul proposed to his good friend Barnabas that they make another missionary journey revisiting the brethren and congregations made in Acts 13-14. Paul desperately desired to know how they were doing. Barnabas was in full agreement that they go. But a personnel problem emerged between these stalwart saints and soldiers of Calvary. Barnabas was deeply determined that his near kinsman (Col. 4:10) accompany them on this trip. Paul felt deeply that John Mark had shirked duty's demand on that trip and he refused Mark on this new trip. Paul wanted a worker that he could trust implicitly and such was not his reliance in Mark at this time. The contention was so sharp and neither one was willing to compromise his feelings. They parted ways. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus, his home area as per Acts 4:36-37. Paul took Silas, a prophet of Jerusalem, who had accompanied them from Jerusalem. They went to Asia Minor and points onward revisiting the brethren and planting the gospel in many new places of Asia and Europe.

Was this a doctrinal matter with salvation hanging in the balance or a matter of judgment? It clearly and convincingly is the latter—not the former. Had the

Lord commanded Paul saying, “Take John Mark on this trip,” John Mark would have been taken with Paul’s full endorsement. But on the other hand, if Barnabas had been told by the Lord, “Leave John Mark behind,” he would have been left behind for a surety.

We do not know that the following occurred, but it is most interesting to ponder its possibility. Amidst Paul’s strong opposition, Barnabas could well have said: “Paul, do you not recall a young man in Jerusalem whom the brethren were reluctant to give him a chance to prove himself once and for all? It was I who vouchsafed your genuine conversion. Brethren accepted my full endorsement of you. Now I want to give another young man the chance to make good, show himself a man, and undo an earlier mistake on his part.”

Who then was right in this judgmental matter? In a way, both may have helped young Mark to sense the seriousness of the matter of his turning back earlier. Barnabas, the giant in consolation and encouragement, may have played a major role in Mark’s full restoration toward great usefulness in the Kingdom. He may have thought, “Barnabas believes in me. He desires to give me a second chance. I want to prove him right in this matter.” On the other hand, it must have made a deep impression on Mark’s young heart upon hearing Paul’s opposition to his going.

He could have said, “Paul has lost confidence in me. This cuts to the quick. I want to prove to the Lord and Paul that I am serious in correcting a former mistake I made. I want to make good.”

Furthermore, he could have said to himself, “I want to be restored fully in Paul’s heart.” He was as per Colossians 4:10 and 2 Timothy 4:11 when Paul wrote, “Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”

These must have been welcomed words indeed when Mark heard them from Timothy.

It needs to be pointed out that Paul and Barnabas did not make this a matter of fellowship as many do today in judgmental matters. They did not divide the brotherhood into warring groups creating Paul's group and Barnabas' group. Furthermore, the proposed missionary work did not suffer. Now there were two missionary teams and trips—not just one trip to be made. Cyprus was visited again by Barnabas and Mark. Asia Minor was revisited by Paul and his new associate Silas. Think of all the damage done to the Lord's Cause because feuding, fussing, and egotistical brethren have been determined to make judgmental matters into fellowship matters, into the law and gospel as per them. Paul and Barnabas stand in strong disapproval of such today and rightly so!

An Analysis Of Galatians 2

Indicated in the title of my lesson is the concept of Acts 15 vs. Galatians 2. This does not mean at all that a contradiction existed between Luke and Paul. It draws out rather forcefully the basic difference between judgmental matters as with Paul and Barnabas over John Mark and salvational fellowship matters dealing with whether Titus had to be circumcised and keep Mosaic law to be saved. There could be and were differences between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark, but there could not be differences relative to what militant Judaism sought to bind on Christians who had freedom in the faith and liberty in the Lord. Titus became a crucial case in this controversy. Paul did not draw a line of fellowship with Barnabas in Acts 15 but did with the Judaizers in Galatians 2. He could not have fellowship with the error-filled Judaizers at the Jerusalem Council.

When Paul and Barnabas returned from missionary journey number one, they immediately were drawn into a serious confrontation with militant men and determined devotees who insisted that salvation depended on circumcision and keeping the mandates of Moses (Acts 15:lff). It was determined that Paul, Barnabas, and certain others should go to Jerusalem to solve this salvational issue. Paul knew the truth about this as well as Peter and the Jerusalem apostles and elders. We learn from Paul in Galatians 2 that he “went up by revelation” (Gal. 2:2). God told Paul to go and Paul went in full compliance with Heaven’s demands. Barnabas and Titus accompanied him. Luke does not mention Titus among the group that went. Furthermore, Luke made no mention of Titus anywhere in Acts causing some in our day to wonder if Titus and Luke may have been fleshly brothers. Luke does not mention himself by name either in his gospel or in Acts. For many years I have leaned toward this possibility about these two men. In view of the foregoing Luke may have been reluctant to call his brother, if Titus were such, by name.

Militant Judaizers were determined that Titus, a Greek or Gentile, must be circumcised and keep Mosaic Law to be saved. Earlier, Paul had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16 but that was a matter of judgment enabling Timothy to have better relations with Jews who knew of Timothy’s Greek father. It touched nothing of Timothy’s salvation. He had obeyed the gospel on Paul’s first missionary journey in his home area and was very much saved at the time.

With Titus it was doctrinally different. The Judaizers were seeking to force Titus to submit to an act that would forfeit his faith. Paul taught in Galatians 5 that if one depended on the circumcision rite for salvation, he forfeited his own faith and faced damnation (Gal. 5:2-4). This Paul was not about to allow

to happen. The Jerusalem brethren were as adamant about this matter as was Paul. The Judaizers were seeking to bring Paul, Titus, Barnabas and all the Jerusalem leaders “into bondage” (Gal. 2:4). The uncompromising Paul and his apostolic colleagues were not intimidated in the least. Fearlessly, they stood their ground. Paul wrote with force and finality in every syllable: “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal. 2:5). Far more people were involved than just Titus and those gathered at Jerusalem. All the Jewish world of saints were involved. They had been delivered from the bondage of Mosaic mandates to enjoy liberty in the Lord and freedom in the faith. Likewise, all the Gentile world of saints were involved for Judaizers sought to make them subjects of circumcision and keepers of Mosaic laws. In Hebrews Paul made it patently clear that leaving Christ and His gospel meant the very loss of their souls. This is the willful sin in Hebrews 10:26. If they forsook Christ and the gospel, there was no more sacrifice available for them. Such a sacrifice for sin could not be found in Judaism. Nor can it be found today in Protestantism, Romanism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or any other man-made religion regardless of how many adherents they may boast. In no sense of the term was Paul dealing with judgmental issues. He was dealing with salvational issues, with fellowship issues, with issues touching heaven or hell weighing in the balances.

Beginning in Galatians 2:6-9 Paul spoke of the Jerusalem pillars who added no necessary information to him about these strategic matters. He already knew the truth about this. He himself had given up loyalty to Moses and centered loving loyalty to Christ and Christianity. The Jerusalem leaders were committed in taking the gospel to the Jewish world. Peter was singled out in this matter. Paul was equally

committed and commissioned by Heaven to take the gospel to the Gentile world, one of whom was his own son in the gospel, Titus (Tit. 1:4).

James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars in Paul's estimation, recognized the validity of Paul's work among Gentiles. To Paul and Barnabas, the Jerusalem brethren extended the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:9). It was mutually decided Paul and Barnabas would take the gospel to Gentiles and they to Jews. The Jerusalem brethren urged Paul and Barnabas that the poor be remembered. This Paul said he was determined to practice. He and Barnabas had already done much along this line as we see in Acts 11:27-30 and Acts 12:25. In this third missionary journey, he would spearhead the gathering of a sizeable contribution to be taken to Palestine for the poor. Paul alludes to this in Romans 15, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, and 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Next, Paul turned to a matter of great doctrinal import. It had to do with Peter's defection from duty's demands. Paul withstood Cephas to the face because Peter was to be blamed (Gal. 2:11). Incidentally, if Romanism is right and Peter were really the first Pope, it is highly doubtful that Paul would have dared expose the first Pope! Peter, at Antioch, became highly inconsistent. Before brethren came from James, Peter mixed, mingled, and shared food with Gentile converts. However, when the Jerusalem group came, Peter withdrew himself thus separating from the Gentiles. Peter feared this group from Jerusalem. Peter influenced other Jewish believers to be likeminded. Even strong and steadfast Barnabas "was carried away with their dissimulation" (Gal. 2:13). Paul perceived promptly that this group "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14). In the remainder of Galatians 2, Paul went into correctional action with Peter and the other dissemblers.

In this section of study, Paul was not dealing with judgmental matters but with salvational issues, with doctrinal concerns. What Paul faced with Peter, Barnabas, and other dissemblers was far different than his disagreement with Barnabas over John Mark as accepted personnel for the second planned tour of duty.

Some Modern-Day Applications

The “anti” movements of recent years are cases in point. Whether to serve the Lord’s Supper in one container or with individual cups produced some division in years gone by. The one-cuppers, at least some of them, tried to make it into a fellowship issue claiming those who used individual cups were digressive. The matter of sanitation has won the day and seldom today will one find a one-cup congregation. The one-cuppers failed to realize that cup referred to contents and not the containers, whether ten or one thousand. It was not a salvational matter but one of judgment.

In the past, we have had brethren who thought we should not use any humanly-produced material in Bible classes. Use only the Bible they contended.

It was deemed to be wiser to use faithful material by loyal and sound brethren aiding us in Bible study. Again, this was not a salvational issue but one of judgment. Heaven or hell did not hang in the balances over this matter. It should have not been divisive in nature.

During the 1940s and especially in the 1950s there developed an element in the church determined to tell the whole brotherhood precisely how to take care of orphans, how to do mission work, how to support preachers in mission areas, congregational cooperation, eating on church premises, and the contention that individuals and not congregations could

help non-saints who were needy. Leaders in this movement began to make laws upholding some or all the foregoing. It had to be done precisely their way or fellowship was ruptured. They invaded congregational autonomy throughout the brotherhood. They turned judgmental matters into doctrinal positions that had to be accepted by all.

We all agree that the threefold work of the church is evangelism, edification, and benevolence. They left the what and majored in the how. One congregation could not send a regular gift to help a work the receiving church could not do on its own. On a larger basis, such had been done in our brotherhood for many years. During the period of the 1920s to the 1940s, many congregations cooperated in supporting the famed N. B. Hardeman Tabernacle meetings in Nashville. The same was done of the famous Music Hall meeting with the inimitable Foy E. Wallace, Jr., doing the preaching. It was a cooperative work.

Roy Cogdill saw no wrong in this but aided it. Later, he and Yater Tate led opposition to such cooperative endeavors. What if the two of them and their supporters had said, "It is our judgment to do such differently, but we surely grant the rest of you to do as you sense best." Back in the 1950's I talked to one who had fallen for Cogdill's and Tate's new position who had preached often on radio programs where there was congregational cooperation with all aiding congregations sending to one congregation who paid the weekly or monthly charges. I asked him how this differed from the Herald Of Truth, when it was still solid and sound? He said the latter was too big! Congregations who cooperate in evangelistic outreach programs on radio, TV, or by computers do not lose their autonomy by regular contributions of aid. Why did they not say, "We prefer to pursue a different course of evangelistic outreach but we fellowship those of you who have done

it the same basic way for decades?” There did not need to be division and withdrawals of fellowship over such matters. In supporting preachers in mission areas, why did they not say, “We prefer to send support to missionaries directly and not through one receiving congregation which pools gifts from many congregations sending one check weekly or monthly but will fellowship fully those of you who prefer to do it differently?”

Division over such matters should not have happened.

For those feeling it is wrong to have a meal in the church building, why did they not say, “We prefer not to participate but offer no objection to what the rest of you do?” This should not have been a divisive matter.

Relative to the care of children who have no one to take care of them, why did they not say something like this: “We prefer to take them and adopt them into our homes and not establish homes long characteristic of us in benevolence but we surely grant your doing it by establishing homes for these destitute children?”

Referring to us as institutional churches and withdrawing fellowship over these matters was minus Scriptural justification. There should have been no divisions over this, but they elevated their preferred judgments into laws of their own making.

Why make laws about helping saints only from the congregational treasury when Paul told the Galatian congregations to do good to all men and especially to the household of faith (Gal. 1:2; Gal. 6:10)? They sought to make laws relative to the contribution Paul raised on his third missionary journey for the Palestinian poor but added a fatal only in their system. Did they never read Acts 24:17 how Paul told Felix, the Roman Governor, that he came “to bring alms to my nation and offerings?” The word *nation* here is

what Felix governed as per Acts 24:10. In both passages, it is *ethnos*. Had that only been left out, there would have been no division in this benevolent matter.

Again and again, we have seen matters like this develop and with sad consequences. One brother falls out with another brother over a judgmental matter. Promptly, he lets all his cronies know that if you do not line up with me against this brother, then you are in my black book with no further fellowship subsisting between us. More often than not it is a personal judgment—not a doctrinal error at all. Hard feelings develop and then a parting of the ways for a lifetime.

Conclusion

Let us ever be sure we make proper differential between matters of personal judgment and salvational, fellowship issues. Paul and Barnabas did not split the brotherhood over John Mark. Paul did not hold a grudge against Barnabas till dying breath. Let us be men and women of nobility and not guilty of harboring and maintaining childish grudges against people with whom we have judgmental differences.

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Training Up My Children Without Provoking Them To Wrath

Becky Honeycutt



Becky Honeycutt is married to Jack Honeycutt. They reside in Gainesboro, TN. They have two grown children, Heather and Heath, and seven grandchildren. She and Jack work under the oversight of the elders at the Willette Church of Christ in Red Boiling Springs, TN. Jack is the coordinator of the Andhra Pradesh, India Mission Work. He and Becky travel to several states each year giving updates on the work and encouraging other congregations to get involved in the work. They are also responsible for all the funds given to the work, making sure all accounts are balanced and the funds sent to take care of the needs of our brethren there.

Becky travels each November to India to teach the ladies in the annual lectureship. She has also been honored to teach ladies in Jamaica. She has taught at extension schools of Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies and Middle Tennessee School of Preaching. She enjoys speaking at ladies' days, camps, and retreats.

THREE-YEAR-OLD Emmy was shopping with her mom and insisted on going to the toy section. Her mother had already told her that she could look, but she was not getting a toy. Emmy seemed pleased that she was getting to look. Her eyes sparkled as she walked down the doll aisle admiring all the colorful outfits and accessories. Emmy says, "Mom, can I have just one outfit for my baby doll?"

Mom replies, “No, I told you already; you can’t have anything today.”

“But, mommy, I really need an outfit for my dollie!” pleads Emmy.

“No,” says mom again.

Emmy starts crying and screaming loudly, “I want an outfit for my dolly!”

“Shhh!” mom says. Instead of being quiet, Emmy continues to insist on what she wants. Mom continues to tell Emmy to be quiet. People are beginning to stare as they watch this scene unfold.

Emmy starts wailing even more loudly, “But, mommy, I’ve been a good girl and I just want one outfit!” Mom wishes she could drop through a hole in the floor. She is so embarrassed by Emmy’s behavior but rather than suffer further embarrassment, she gives in to Emmy.

It is obvious that Emmy often gets her way. Otherwise, she would not have thrown the screaming fit. This is a prime example of Proverbs 29:15, “The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (King James Version). Have you ever wondered why this says mother rather than father? It is likely because mothers are usually the primary caregivers.

We may smile at this scenario, but in reality such a lack of discipline has led our nation into a generation of children who are unruly and disrespectful and getting farther away from God.

This Generation Of Children

Judges 2 verse 10 reminds us of a potential reality. This text speaks of the generation of Joshua who served the Lord. Then we read that “another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He (God) had done for Israel.”

The next few verses say that the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt. They were corrupt. Though God had raised up judges to lead the people in His ways, the people would not listen to these judges (Jud. 2:17).

Why did this generation not know the Lord or the things He had done? What about the fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins? Was no one in the family teaching this generation of precious souls about the God of Heaven?! Apparently not!

This was a time in history when everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Jud. 17:6; Jud. 21:25). Is our day and time quite similar to the time of the judges? Absolutely!

Thus, it is time for us as mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers, aunts, and cousins to use every possible opportunity to teach **this** generation about the church of our Lord Jesus Christ and the God of Heaven!

Fathers, Do Not Provoke Your Children

This study is designed to help us to know how to train our children without provoking them to wrath. Most familiar to us concerning this subject is likely the scripture found in Ephesians 6:4, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Also, Colossians 3:20-21 records, “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” Are fathers addressed here because they are usually the ones who more often provoke children to wrath? Could a mother not also be guilty of provoking a child to wrath? Yes, she could. But because fathers are recognized as the heads of their households and

are to be the spiritual leaders of the home, it makes sense that this is the reason fathers are addressed.

Provoke And Wrath

In order to understand these texts more fully, we must have a good understanding of the words *provoke* and *wrath*. The word *provoke* means “to rouse to anger, to incite, instigate deliberately” (Webster, “Provoke”). I believe we can say one of the key words is *deliberately*. Oh yes, our children will become angry with us on occasion, but that does not mean we intended to make them angry. And circumstances arise where parents are guilty of rousing their children to anger by being unfair.

The word *wrath* means “intense anger; rage; fury; any action carried out in great anger, especially for punishment or vengeance” (Macmillan, “Wrath”). Notice, this is not just anger; it is intense anger. Will our children sometimes become intensely angry? Likely so! In some cases, children have become so furious with their parents that they have done bodily harm to them. We certainly want to deflect this type of behavior!

How A Parent Might Provoke A Child To Wrath

(1) Telling a child he will be allowed to do a certain thing; the child is happy and excited; he is greatly anticipating taking part in something that means a lot to him. Then, at the last minute, the parent goes back on his/her word for no good reason.

(2) Making fun of a child who may be having a difficult time learning a particular thing, maybe even telling her she is stupid. This behavior on the part of a parent is devastating to a child, because a child looks to her parents first and foremost as her source of love and support.

(3) Discussing personal things such as low grades, behavior, or a boyfriend/girlfriend situation that embarrasses your child in front of others. We should never address others in front of our children about their less-than-favorable characteristics or behaviors.

(4) Punishing a child before fully knowing the circumstances of a situation. This is unfair. Being fair will require listening to our children before jumping to conclusions. Just as we want our children to listen to our instructions to them, children also long to be heard and understood.

(5) Being inconsistent. Inconsistency can be an instigator in provoking children to wrath. If a parent lets a child get by with unsuitable behavior one day, and the next time punishes that child for the same behavior, that child will likely not only be angry, but will also be confused.

I am sure we could think of other ways that fall into the category of parents provoking their children to wrath. May we not be guilty of these types of behaviors that can cause children to be resentful and rebellious.

Types Of Parenting

Permissive Parents

These parents tolerate immoral behavior and fail to instruct and discipline.

(1) They do not regulate TV or electronic game time or cell phone activity. That is, they do not regulate the amount of time their children spend participating in these, and they do not regulate the type of TV watched and games played. Notice, I did not say anything about regulating time spent outside playing or some type of playing that involves using a child's imagination. That is because—from what I am seeing in our present world—children spend much of their time

on cell phones or in front of a TV screen, whether watching some show, or playing a video game.

(2) They allow their children to go home with people they do not really know.

(3) They allow their children to be dropped off at the movie theater or some other recreational activity without proper supervision.

(4) They let children stay out very late at night. There is no regulation of curfew.

(5) They allow boyfriends or girlfriends to hang out at their residence without supervision.

(6) They tolerate backtalk and disrespect from their children.

(7) Some even introduce their children to alcohol, cigarettes, and/or drugs.

We have heard the saying *Be a parent, not a peer*. Permissive parents act more like their children's friends. They want to please their children in whatever they desire. The discipline and instruction their children so desperately need is not there.

Proverbs 1:8 says, "My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother." What does this tell us? That we, as parents, have a **responsibility to teach** these instructions and laws of behavior to our children! Sadly, so many are growing up in homes where there is no instruction. This is a huge contributing factor as to why our society is filled with juvenile delinquents! It is also why over half of our children are leaving the church!

Uninvolved Parents

These do not show enough concern for their children. They fail to be a significant part of their children's lives.

(1) They do not share quality time with their children. They do not sit down with them at meal time, or spend

one-on-one time with them. They do not take time for things as simple as asking them how their day was.

(2) They do not know who their children's friends are.

(3) Many times, they do not know where their children—particularly teenagers—are.

(4) They do not know what kind of activities their children are participating in.

My husband, Jack, was a juvenile probation officer for several years. His job required him to go into the child's home from time to time, to talk to the parents, even to look in the child's room. In one particular room, he noticed several lewd posters on the walls. He also discovered that this child was listening to music that portrayed evil, death, and Satanism. When he revealed all of this to the child's mother, she said she had not been in his room in years. Without question, this parent was uninvolved! And the sad part was these folks claimed to be members of the Lord's church! We usually do not hear a lesson concerning rearing children without alluding to Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." This training of our children is not going to happen if we just "go with the flow." It is going to take a purposeful and concentrated effort on our part! We must start while our children are young. Young people have tender hearts. These hearts, or spiritual minds, can be shaped from the time our children are born. In Proverbs 4:1-4, Solomon wrote about children hearing the instruction of their father. He tells them to give attention to know understanding. And he says, "When I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me...Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live." Notice the word *tender*. Solomon said he was his "father's son, tender." What does this denote? Solomon's father, David, was teaching him about God's commands while Solomon was young. One meaning of

the word *tender* is “sensitive to impressions, emotions, moral influences, etc., impressionable.”

Solomon, as we know, was a magnificent writer in giving advice through the Proverbs. He prayed for an understanding heart (1 Kin. 3:5-9). He exhibited sound judgment (1 Kin. 3:16-28). He purged his kingdom of corrupt leaders (1 Kin. 2:11-46). Solomon served God until he was old, but sadly, he allowed his pagan wives to turn his heart to idols. Does this fact make Proverbs 22:6 (which Solomon also wrote) an untrue text? No, because when parents teach their children properly in the ways of God, the likelihood of them departing is brought down to a minimum. Even if a child does depart, he will remember what he has been taught.

Should this discourage us from diligently teaching our children? No! We are responsible for their souls! And by trying to save their souls, we are saving our own as well. When children become adults, they are like all of us as Christians. They will be responsible for continuing to grow in the faith. They will be tempted. They may sometimes stumble. They may become unfaithful, but if we have done our job well in teaching them, we will have no regrets.

Authoritarian Parenting

This type of parenting is defined as “enforcing unquestionable obedience to authority, as that of a dictator, rather than individual freedom of judgment and action” (Webster, “Authoritarian”). This type of parenting may lead to obedience, but does it leave one’s child with a healthy sense of value and self-esteem? When disciplining our children, Jack and I had to take into consideration that our daughter was much more sensitive than our son. What worked for her did not always work for him.

Teaching children obedience and respect is a good thing, but love and encouragement must be sprinkled in between.

The “I am the parent, you are the child, and you are going to do what I say no matter what” kind of thinking often causes children to be rebellious. Whereas, if we take the time to sit down and talk through problems with our children, let them know we are on their side, genuinely compliment them when we can, and not jump to conclusions before we know the circumstances of a situation, our children will see that we love them and are trying to understand where they are coming from. Authoritative parents train their children in a proper manner. One of the meanings of authoritative is “based on competent authority; reliable because it is coming from one who is an expert, or properly qualified” (Macmillan, “Authoritative”).

I hope and trust that we would all want to be authoritative parents, parents that will train our children in a proper manner. But how many of us have ever felt like competent experts in parenting?

We certainly have a head start if we have been raised in a home where our parents have properly parented us. We usually take on our parent’s form of training our children as we were trained. But what about those who did not have the proper upbringing, and what about situations that even our parents did not face?

Second Peter 1:3 tells us that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. How has he given this to us? It is through the knowledge of Him.

Second Timothy 3:16-17 says that all Scripture is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” that we may be complete and thoroughly equipped. God’s Word instructs us on how to be proper parents! Let us look at the Bible’s instructions: The book of Proverbs teaches over and over again that the wise will fear God and increase in learning. It has much to say

about discipline. Proverbs 13:24 instructs that if we love our children, we will discipline them. Proverbs 19:18 says we must chasten our children while there is hope. What does this mean? It means chasten them while they are young. Proverbs 22:15 reveals that the rod of correction will drive foolishness from the heart of a child. Perhaps the most important reason to discipline is found in Proverbs 23:13-14: it is one of the parental responsibilities that will help save the souls of our children from hell. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul told Timothy to let no one despise his youth. Did you know that we, as parents, can determine whether or not society will despise our young people? Paul told Timothy that he, as a young preacher, should be an example “in word, in conduct, in love in spirit, in faith, and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). It is vital that we teach our children the same. We must teach them the ways of proper speech and activity. We must teach them to have a proper attitude. We must teach them to have a faith of their own and to live pure lives that show their faith.

Specifics To Teach Our Children At A Young Age

About God And The Bible

Babies who are just a few months old can go to Bible classes and learn the words God and Bible. They can learn about proper conduct, such as sharing, with their fellow classmates. We can teach them the same in the home. We can emphasize that we want to please God by obeying His instructions found in the Bible.

The Meaning Of The Word No

When my daughter, Heather, was eight or nine months old and flying through the house in her walker, she started coming to the kitchen, getting in the trash can. She loved throwing trash in the floor piece by piece. I started spanking her little hands and saying, “No, no.” She came back

the next day, doing the same thing, and I did the same thing. The third day was a repeat of the two previous days, but after the third day, she never did it again. Consistency is the key word to discipline.

Manners

“Thank you,” “Please,” “May I,” “Yes, ma’am” and “Yes, sir” are among the first of manners we should teach. Also, going along with good manners is body language/facial expressions. We do not want our children sticking their tongues out at folks or scowling at them.

Responsibility

Even a toddler can help mom fold wash cloths and do other simple chores. Of course, we add other appropriate chores as children get older. We are doing our children a great disservice if we do not teach them to work.

Love And Kindness

We must shower our children with these traits during the teaching process. When we use this approach beginning at an early age, we will be more likely to prevent dramatic behavior in the future.

Self-denial

In a world where many of our children have an overabundance of material things and partake in so many enjoyable activities, we must teach them about activities and conduct that they cannot be a part of if they want to be pleasing to God. What are some of these? The list includes going to inappropriate movies, dances, and parties, dressing immodestly, and hanging out with the wrong people in the wrong places.

Raising Our Children In The Church

Sometimes parents will make the statement, “I raised my child(ren) in the church. I can’t understand why they are no longer faithful.” And some parents truly have reared their

children, doing everything possible to ensure their children's stability in the church. But, in many situations when someone says, "I raised my child in the church," they only brought them to services, without additional training at home, or they may have attended the services sporadically and very seldom, if ever, been involved in the work of the church. So what is the proper way to "raise children in the church?"

Suggestions For Rearing Children Who Will Have A Genuine Faith

As Paul was speaking to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:5, he said that he called to remembrance the **genuine** faith that was in Timothy, which dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Children know whether or not we are **genuine**! Nothing shouts Christianity louder than our genuine example. Do our children see us praying and studying our Bibles? What kind of behavior are we displaying before our children, especially under stressful situations?

Jesus was our prime example in that He took time for children. He took them into His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16). Too many mothers are so busy working and striving for more material possessions that they fail to have time for their most important asset, their children. Do we take the time to study with our children at home? Just taking time for short devotionals on a daily basis can make all the difference. What should we teach our children during this time? Though Bible facts are beneficial, it is vital that we make application. When our children can see that the Word actually has a connection to bettering their lives, they will be more interested. Also, during these devotionals, be sure to pray. Our children need to know that prayer changes things. Call it to their attention when prayers have been answered in the positive.

Another motivation for teaching children at home is to help them to develop a faith of their own. We do not want them to serve God just because we serve God. The Bible teaches us how one can develop faith. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul told Timothy to give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. In verse 16 he wrote, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16). We must teach our children the doctrine of the Bible! Today children in the church are growing up not knowing why they believe what they believe. Do we teach our children about the one church that Jesus said He would build (Mat. 16:18)? Do we teach them that denominationalism is wrong and that the Bible plainly teaches against it (1 Cor. 1:10-13)? Do we teach them about vital issues such as marriage, divorce, and remarriage? When our son was still very young, probably about twelve years old, a situation came up with someone who had gone through a divorce and our son made the statement that that person would not have a right to remarry, would he? And we affirmed that he would not. Please do not think that children are too young at this age to know these things. In fact, pre-teens need to know about these things.

Conclusion

When children are born, most parents hold these precious babies realizing that their bodies are soft and delicate and need to be handled with tender loving care. But how many realize the monumental task we have in taking their soft and tender spiritual hearts, their minds, and molding them to conform to God’s Word?

May we “awake out of sleep” (Rom. 13:11) concerning the training of our children and get to the job at hand, even today!

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“Angry Words, O Let Them Never”

Sheri Blackwell



Sheri Blackwell is married to Don Blackwell. They have been married for 24 years. She is the mother of Macy, Lauren, and Brandon. Sheri has homeschooled her children for the last 16 years. She lives in Southaven, Mississippi.

HAVE YOU ever found yourself saying something when you are really mad and almost immediately regretted it? Have you ever given someone a piece of your mind? Have you ever intended to hurt someone with the things that you said? It is a common experience. James 3:2 says, “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body” (New King James Version).

Is it a sin to speak in anger? Is there ever a time when it is appropriate to speak in anger? Can I sin when I speak in anger? How do I keep my angry words from being sinful words? These are the questions we want to answer from God’s Word.

Let us begin with a definition of anger. *Merriam-Webster.com* defines *anger* this way: “A strong feeling of being upset or annoyed because of something wrong or bad: the feeling that makes someone want to hurt other people, to shout, etc.: the feeling of being angry.” Anger is an emotion or a feeling that we have. Sin enters the picture when we mishandle our anger. Ephesians 4:26-27 instructs, “Be angry, and do not sin: do

not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil." Being angry opens the door to temptation, especially anger that is allowed to simmer. When we are angry, we want to lash out. We want others to know how we have been hurt, cheated, or denied, do we not? What is the most likely way we will express our anger? We do so through our words! "How dare you treat me that way!" "Do you know what he said to me?" "I gave her a piece of my mind!" Are these familiar thoughts? Are these familiar words?

We tend to think of angry words as a negative thing. After all, no one wants to hear them. Our song says, "Angry words! O let them never." So, is it a sin to use angry words? No! Jesus was that perfect man who never stumbled in word and yet He used angry words. In John 2:14-16, Jesus came into the temple to find merchants buying and selling inside. They were commercializing the worship of the Lord by making enormous profits off the sale of animals for sacrifice. Jesus overturned tables and made a whip to drive the animals and men out of the temple. He said, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" (John 2:16). Do you think He was angry? Do you think He said these words in a mousy, timid manner? He was turning tables over! I imagine there was power in His voice. Jesus did not sin in speaking this way to them. They were in sin. Jesus rebuked them. How many times did God become angry with the children of Israel and rebuke them for their idolatry and adultery? Over and over again, He disciplined them. Hebrews 12:6 reads, "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." When sin is involved, anger is appropriate, and angry words can be appropriate. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2-4 to "convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." Notice that

he gives Timothy these instructions regarding his words to help the listener to avoid sin.

Often times though, sin is not why I am angry. I am mad when someone has hurt my feelings. I am annoyed when I have corrected my child for the umpteenth time today. I am furious that I did not get my way and I am irate that you think I am wrong! Are angry words sinful at these times? Here is a clue to figuring that out. Step back and remove the feelings of anger and frustration from the situation. Are your words still appropriate for the situation? Do they still need to be said? Do they need to be said in a kinder way? When your son breaks that beautiful piece of crystal passed down from your favorite grandmother because he is throwing a ball in the house and he knows better, are you going to be angry? Does he need to hear some stern, angry words from you? Yes! This is correction. Do you need to speak in a rage and call him names? No! When we are accused of doing something we did not do, do we bow up at the person and start screaming at him? Or maybe we start gossiping about him instead? We want to control our tongues. Remember the phrase “from the tongue unbridled slip” from the song *Angry Words*. Focus on the word *unbridled*. A bridle is a piece of equipment used to control a horse’s movement. It has a bit that goes in the horse’s mouth. The bit has reins attached to it; the rider can pull in the direction he wants the horse to go. James 3:3 even makes a contrast between controlling a horse with a bit and how difficult it is to control the tongue. A horse is a powerful beast, but it can be tamed. The tongue is always a battle. Controlling the tongue requires self control, especially when we are angry. “Be angry and sin not” (Eph. 4:26).

Why do you think that we struggle with our words more when we are angry? What do we intend to do when we lash out with angry words? We want to hurt others. We want

revenge for some injustice that we feel they have done to us. Remember though, that it is not our place to seek revenge. "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).

We have looked at an example of when angry words were used appropriately. Now, let us take a look at some examples of people who did not use their angry words the right way. Who is the first person that comes to mind from the Old Testament? The first one to come to my mind is Moses. Turn to Numbers 20:1-12. As we read up to Numbers 20:6, notice that the children of Israel are griping and complaining. Do they seem mad to you? I would say so. Are they sinning? I would say so. 1 Corinthians 10:10 holds them up as complainers who were destroyed. Let us continue reading. We realize that Moses had become angry. If you have someone griping at you and blaming you for their problems, do you not feel irritated? These people had complained and fussed from the very start. Now, Moses was generally such a humble man, but he had had enough. His anger caused him to sin with his words and his actions. He disobeyed the Lord and also took credit for God's actions.

Eliab is another example of angry words. In 1 Samuel 17:26-28, Eliab accused David of having wrong intentions and of being prideful. Why was Eliab so angry? Could it be he was jealous of David? David was exhibiting courage and faith in God when all others, including Eliab, had failed. Not to mention, David was his kid brother. Who does he think he is?

How about Naaman in 2 Kings 5:11-12?

But Naaman became **furious** and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself,

‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’ Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage. (emphasis added, SB)

Can you not almost see Naaman stamping his foot as he walked away? Naaman’s self-importance and pride had caused him to disobey willfully and he said so. Do we ever just outright disobey when we do not like God’s instructions to us?

Ahab and Jezebel just started telling lies about Naboth because he would not give them what they wanted. Do you remember how upset Ahab was that he could not have Naboth’s vineyard? Jezebel devised a plot for men to bear false witness deliberately against Naboth so that it would result in his death (1 Kin. 21:1-16).

James and John were known as the “sons of thunder.” We are not given a reason why Jesus called them this, but perhaps we have some insight in Luke 9:53-55. They were ready to condemn an entire village of Samaritans because the villagers would not accept Jesus. James and John were quick tempered. Have you ever heard someone lose it when having a religious discussion? We get caught up in being right sometimes.

Diotrephes in 3 John 9-10 was so caught up in being the preeminent one that he intentionally ran John and others down with malicious words. Are malicious words every used to run others down with the intent to hurt others?

Lastly, look at Peter. We see Peter speak angrily at the time of Jesus' trial. Peter allowed fear to cause him to lie and to curse. In Mark 14:63-72, Peter was witnessing the arrest, mistreatment, and beating of his friend and his Lord. I would think he felt anger at the injustice of all of this, but fear overtook him. He distanced himself from Jesus by speaking so differently. He identified himself with the world. Furthermore, he knew he was sinning. When we know we are doing wrong, are we more defensive?

As we went through these examples, did you notice the different sins of the tongue: complaining, pride, gossip, false accusations, lying, cursing, and threats? I think we have identified angry words in a sinful context. So, what we really need to know is, How do I keep from sinning with angry words? The song says, "Angry words! O let them never, from the tongue unbridled slip." We have to bridle the tongue. We have to use self-control. Self-control is part of the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:23). The Spirit works in us through the Word. If we want self-control, we had better be in the Word! It is full of Scripture about our words. After all, Jesus tells us in Luke 6:45, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Secondly, remember that God is in control. We do not have to even the score ourselves. Paul exhorted us, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Rom. 12:19)" and "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). This is easy to read but not so easy to do; Romans 12 tells us how.

Pray about your "word" troubles. David prayed in Psalm 141:3, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips." Also, in Psalm 19:14 we read, "Let

the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” You can pray these exact prayers!

Think before you speak. Taste your words before you spit them out! Consider our rule again. If I remove my anger, are my words still appropriate? James 1:19 says, “So then my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.”

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Mat. 7:12). We know this verse as the Golden Rule. Do you like to be yelled at, talked about, or cursed? Of course not! Extend the same courtesy to others. In this same vein, we need to be forgiving of others. In Colossians 3, Paul was speaking to the elect, to Christians, as to how they should behave. Notice Colossians 3:13, “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another...even as Christ forgave you, so you must also do.”

Be gracious with your words and encourage or exhort others. This includes saying things to build each other up but also words that encourage others to do right. I wonder if we really give much thought to this. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” Are we talking to our non-Christian friends about their salvation? When a sister comes to us struggling with sin, do we give her words that will encourage her to choose right? When others repent, do we take time to encourage them in their decision? Do we take time to talk to them at all? I can not help but think of Abigail when thinking of gracious speech. She is one of my favorite Bible people, and she was so good with her words. Abigail’s story is found in 1 Samuel 25. Let us make a few observations from this text. Abigail came to David, knowing full well of his intention to

slaughter her household. Abigail used her words to change David's thinking. She let him know that she understood his anger. Then she reminded him that he was chosen of the Lord and that God had many blessings prepared for him. What a wonderful technique she had! Do you think that Abigail exhorted and encouraged David so that it imparted grace to him? Her words and actions kept him from killing innocent people. She makes me think of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:26, "She opens her mouth with wisdom and on her tongue is the law of kindness."

Finally, love for one another is key to controlling our words when we are angry. First Corinthians 13:4-6 teaches us love in action. Can we apply these principles to our speech?

Love Suffers Long—We do not blurt out the first words that come to mind because we have just had enough of somebody.

Love Is Kind—Our words should be considerate. Remember to taste them before you spit them out.

Love Does Not Envy—Do not let someone's success cause you to resent them and talk about them behind their back or to their face.

Love Does Not Parade Itself, Is Not Puffed Up—Remember Moses' pride caused him to take credit for God's handiwork. Naaman's pride caused him to say "I will not." Both were disobedient.

Love Does Not Behave Rudely—The children of Israel griped and complained and made accusations. They did not appreciate the good things they had or had experienced.

Love Does Not Seek Its Own—Diotrophes wanted to be the most important and he said malicious, ugly things about others to advance himself.

Love Is Not Provoked—How quickly did David start threatening Nabal because he did not like the way Nabal

talked to him? How often does this happen in marriages? One person says something hurtful and so the other must say something more hurtful.

Love Thinks No Evil—Do not assume or say the worst about people. We often do not have all the facts. Is not this what Eliab did to his own brother? He thought the worst of David.

Love Does Not Rejoice In Iniquity But Rejoices In The Truth—Jesus did rebuke the money changers when He saw their abundant sin and He corrected it. Abigail gently reminded David of God’s plans for him and kept him from making a grievous error.

So, let us quickly recap. How do I use angry words without sin?

- (1) Learn self-control by using God’s Word.
- (2) Remember God is in control.
- (3) Pray specifically about your words.
- (4) Think before you speak.
- (5) Apply the golden rule.
- (6) Be forgiving.
- (7) Encourage others.
- (8) Love one another.

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“Setting My Husband Straight”— Dealing With A Husband With A Sin Problem

Kathy Pollard



Kathy Pollard is married to Neal. They met while at Faulkner University. They have three sons, Gary, Dale, and Carl. Her husband preaches for the Bear Valley Church of Christ in Denver, CO. Kathy has enjoyed going on short-term mission trips to Ukraine, Tanzania, and Cambodia. She is an instructor in the Women’s Program at the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver and a co-director of Higher Ground Encampment, a Bible camp for teen girls. She is the author of *Return to Me—What to Do When Loved Ones Fall Away*.

An ideal marriage will consist of two faithful Christians who, although imperfect, have the same goal of Heaven. This unity of purpose will ensure their drive to spiritual betterment, the giving of mutual encouragement, and ongoing, humble self-assessment. A marriage of this kind will overcome weaknesses together because husband and wife will desire to bring out the best in each other.

Unfortunately, some marriages are not ideal. Perhaps the wife married hoping to change her husband in time. Perhaps neither were Christians when they married so sinful habits did not sound any alarms. Sometimes a wife will be unpleasantly surprised to discover her husband’s hidden

sin problem after the marriage. And still some will find themselves married to a man whom they never would have guessed could change so much. Perhaps a tragedy resulted in broken faith, and the husband wants to hurt God with his sin. Whatever the case, some women find themselves married to a man with a sin problem. What are they to do? How can they keep their own faith strong? And do they have to respect and submit to a husband with a sin problem?

Dos And Don'ts When Dealing With A Husband's Sin Problem

While the husband is solely responsible for his sin problem, how his wife reacts to it can either make it easier for him to overcome or easier for him to continue to sin.

Don't Seek Revenge.

Some specific sins will be hard not to take personally. While all sins are against God, some will also be against the wife. Sexual sins like adultery or pornography make the wife feel inadequate and rejected. Lying and secrecy make the wife feel like she can no longer trust her husband. When the husband's sins hurt the wife's heart, she may be tempted to hurt him back. She may seek revenge by showing him how it feels to be deceived or betrayed. She may lash at him with her tongue. She may bring up supposedly forgiven sins of the past. In short, in her effort to make him pay, the wife becomes guilty of sin herself.

"Do not say, 'I will do to him just as he has done to me'" (Pro. 24:29). Vengeance may feel gratifying, but only for a moment. The wife set on giving her husband a taste of his own medicine will herself taste the bitterness of guilt. The wife who thinks she can shock her husband into straightening up his act is doing the exact opposite of what Scripture advises. Concerning vengeance when ill-treated, Paul wrote,

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). Spiteful words or behavior will not make a husband want to quit sinning. God says that the way to overcome the evil is with goodness.

Don't Give Ultimatums.

A desperate wife may feel that her husband's sin calls for desperate measures. She may say something like, “If you don't give up the sinful habit, I will never sleep with you again” or “Get your act together or I'm leaving you.” Perhaps the wife hopes that these threats will scare her husband into behaving. As is always the case, two wrongs do not make a right. Unless adultery is the sin (more on that later), the wife does not have a Scriptural right to walk out on her marriage or withhold intimacy. The threats end up coming across as promised punishment, and that is not the wife's role. She is not her husband's parent or Savior. She is his wife, his lover, his helper.

Don't Air His Dirty Laundry.

When hurting, a disillusioned wife may seek sympathy from her friends. Lamenting her husband's shortcomings over endless cups of coffee may offer short-term comfort, but if the wife's ultimate goal is her husband's repentance, she will protect his reputation by keeping the matter private. No one deserves to have their private struggles publicly aired. Instead, the wife should practice the golden rule (Mat. 7:12). This will help her use wisdom when choosing what to disclose and with whom.

Do Pray For Him.

The hope-giving truth for every wife to remember is that God loves her husband even more than she does. Even more important than harmony in the marriage is the condition of the husband's soul. The wife wants her husband to go to Heaven and so does God. She cannot force her husband to have a repentant heart, but she can pray for it. She cannot

make him change his ways, but she can pray for it. She can pray for wisdom (Jam. 1:2-5), for patience (1 Cor. 13:4), for compassion (Col. 3:12), and for strength (Phi. 4:13). And then she can leave it in God's capable hands. This is how a wife whose husband has a sinful habit can still find peace (Phi. 4:6-7).

Do Remember Your Own Shortcomings.

We all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Jesus strongly rebuked those who considered themselves religious examples but neglected their own hearts. He called them "hypocrites" and "blind guides" (Mat. 23:23-24). James writes that anyone who transgresses in one area has become guilty of all the law (Jam. 2:10), and that anyone who knows to do good and does not do it has become guilty of sin (Jam. 4:17). Every wife must make sure she is not holding her husband up to a higher standard than she holds for herself. The husband with a sinful "habit" is engaging in continual, willful sin which is different from an occasional slip-up. Regardless, a wife who remembers that she also has to overcome spiritual struggles and weaknesses, and that she also must rely on God's grace will be more compassionate and patient with her husband.

When Jesus was confronted with the woman caught in adultery, He knew she had been engaged in willful sin. She was completely and unjustifiably guilty. Her sin was exposed in a very public way, and she did not come to Jesus of her own free will. Nevertheless, notice how Jesus treated her. He reminded the accusers that none of them were sin-free and said to the adulteress, "Go and sin no more." Jesus was the only innocent one in the group, yet He chose to offer grace (John 8:1-11). This example of compassion will help a wife remember to offer the same to her husband. No wife is completely innocent and guilt-free.

Do Seek Outside Help If Needed.

While it is good to protect the husband's reputation, a wife must discern when it is time to get help. Some sins may require professional help to conquer. For instance, programs have been designed to help drug abusers and alcoholics overcome their addictions. If the sin is pornography, it may be wise to look into an accountability partner. Again, the wife must check her motives before involving others. If she is angry and wants to publicly shame her husband, she will only exacerbate the problem. If she is truly desirous of getting her husband the help he needs, she can prayerfully seek help or counsel from a reputable, godly source.

Do Study The Word

Of all the dos and don'ts, this is probably the most important. The world has plenty of advice to offer married couples, and most of it is unbiblical. The world promotes pride, selfishness, and revenge. The Word counsels humility, selflessness, and seeking the good of the other (Phi. 2). The world says multiple reasons exist to give up on your marriage. The Word teaches that marriage is for life, with the exception of adultery (Mat. 19:3-9).

Some have decided that pornography is grounds for scriptural divorce. This belief comes from a point Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mat. 5:23-24). The word used in Matthew 19:9 as the reason for divorce is *porneia*, meaning "sexual immorality." This adultery is unfaithfulness in marriage by having sexual intercourse with someone who is not one's spouse. While the adultery of the heart (Mat. 5:24) is a sin (and may possibly lead to the physical act of adultery), it does not carry the same

consequences as the physical act of adultery. Pornography is still a sin, and the person guilty of it will give an account on the Day of Judgment, but it is not a scriptural reason for divorce. Jesus was teaching that adultery begins in the heart, just as murder begins in the heart (Mat. 5:21-22), but that does not mean we can cart someone off to jail for being very angry with someone (even though it could lead to the physical act of murder if left unchecked).

Bible study is essential to the wife being able to know how to deal with and react to her husband's sin problem. Diligent Bible study is the only way to make sure she is making godly choices instead of listening to the world's advice.

Do Continue To Be A Good Wife .

It may be tempting for the wife of a husband with a sin problem to decide that she can do whatever she wants. She does not have to respect her husband anymore or submit to him. She does not have to cherish him or take care of him. She does not have to clean his home or provide his meals. And she certainly does not have to share his bed. When these thoughts come along, the wife must recognize them for what they are—the wisdom of the world (Jam. 3:13-17). These feelings of resentment and retaliation are natural, but they are not biblical. The Bible teaches that one's good behavior is not dependent on another's worthiness.

Each individual is responsible for his or her own attitudes and actions. If the husband is tangled up in a sinful habit, the wife must still be the kind of woman who shines. She cannot refuse to obey God's will because her husband has. She cannot use her husband's sinful choices to excuse or justify her own.

As difficult as it may be, the Bible teaches that faithful Christians will take the high road. Notice how Jesus wants Christians to treat their enemies. We are to love them, bless

them, do good to them, and pray for them (Mat. 5:44). If this is how we are to react and behave toward our enemies, how much more so should we love, bless, do good to, and pray for a soulmate? How are Christians any different from the world if we only love those who love us back (Mat. 5:46-48)?

If a wife will have any hope of her husband's repentance, she must continue to love and respect him. "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9). The husband will see his wife's sweet spirit and commitment to Christ. He will see that she is dedicated to living righteously. Regardless of whether or not the husband ever gives up his sinful habit, the wife will know she did the right thing. She will be able to look back without regret. On the other hand, if the wife chooses to retaliate or "punish" her husband by refusing to be a good wife to him, he could use her behavior as an excuse to continue in his sin. She will one day have to look back and see her own part in her husband's spiritual struggle. "Wives, likewise be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear" (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Some Ways To Help The Husband Overcome His Sin Problem

The "Dos and Don'ts" had more to do with attitude. Now let us consider some specific ways a wife can help her husband give up a sinful habit. While the work must ultimately be done by the husband himself, his wife can certainly do some things to make it easier for him.

Rebuke Gently.

Some wives will be careful when the need arises to admonish a friend but will not offer the same consideration

to their own husbands. Gentleness goes far in reaching any heart. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). In his book *Ten Commandments for Wives*, Benny Bristow writes,

When a wife endeavors to help her husband, and to correct his weaknesses, she will deal in kindness. You may help lead your husband through kindness to improvement, but you can never, through rudeness, drive him anywhere except away from you! (34)

Don't Compromise Your Convictions.

A wife whose husband quits attending worship may be tempted to stop going herself. If the husband has engaged in a certain sin for a length of time, the wife may become numb to it and even accept it. But giving in to or overlooking a sinful habit will make it easier for a husband to continue in the sin. Instead, the wife will want to maintain her convictions, even if she must go it alone for years. Her faithful attendance or refusal to engage in a sinful activity will demonstrate true faithfulness. Her love for God and for her husband means she will put God's will first, no matter what. In *She Hath Done What She Could*, Jane McWhorter writes, "Your husband may test your convictions, but he will respect you for them if you are really sincere and consistent" (135).

Know The Difference Between Shaming And Humiliating.

Shame is good because it can lead to repentance. When God's people no longer blushed at their sin, it was because

they were no longer ashamed of it (Jer. 6:15). Shame can turn a tender heart. Humiliation is different. It seeks to embarrass someone and attack his dignity. Parents want their children to be ashamed of certain behaviors so they will not repeat them. Parents never want to humiliate their children. Certainly, wives should never intentionally humiliate their husbands.

One wife shared the story of her battle with her husband's sin problem. She discovered her husband's tobacco addiction after they were married. She tried ultimatums. She tried emotional manipulation. She finally put some good advice into practice by saying to her husband, "I know you struggle with this addiction. I love you and will be praying for you to overcome it. All I ask is that you don't hide it from me because the secrecy and deception is harmful to our marriage." Her husband was touched by her compassion but too ashamed to enjoy the tobacco in front of her, so he gave it up.

Do Not Feed Your Anger.

Righteous indignation is to be expected. Sin is vile and offensive, and a certain amount of anger is natural. Brooding or rehashing the problem over and over in the mind, however, will lead a wife to the boiling point. In *Loving Your Husband*, Patsy Loden writes,

Anger is a very selfish response to any situation. It solves nothing; it robs you of reason. Without reasoning ability, you are not responsive to seeking a solution. Anger enslaves. You cannot act in a loving way when you are angry. Anger dictates how you will act, and it is always in a negative way. (104)

Focus On His Good Qualities.

When a husband picks up a sinful habit, it does not mean he is a bad man. He is battling the flesh and failing. Most likely he feels miserable. The apostle Paul described the struggle with his flesh as an ongoing battle. He said the evil that he does not want to do is what he keeps on doing because of the sin that dwells in him (Rom. 7:15-20).

If a wife wants to help her husband strengthen his godly traits, she will focus on them and point them out. She will look for good attributes to appreciate and then verbalize them. Obviously this does not mean she should completely ignore a sin problem, but if she points out her husband's strengths, he will enjoy the acknowledgement and want to continue to gain her admiration.

In *The Challenge of Being a Wife*, Ruth E. Hazelwood writes,

You will find that the more you focus on the good qualities of others the farther their weaknesses will recede. Anyone can do better when he believes he can do better, and this assurance may be based on the faith and confidence someone else has in us. (45)

Turn Him Over To God.

God is the One in the heart-changing business. A wife may have cause to question any advice she is given by friends or professionals, but she may know that she can safely leave her husband in God's hands. She can trust in God's love for her husband. She can pray every day for her husband and then release him to God's care (1 Pet. 5:7). She does not have

to carry the burden all alone. She can turn her husband over to the very One who died for him.

Sin habits mean a soul is in jeopardy. No wife wants to think of her husband being lost eternally. She cannot force him to repent, but if she is motivated by love and Heaven, she will make sure that her attitude and example will make it easier for him to.

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How God Encourages His Children— “Comfort Scriptures”

Bonnie Ruiz



Bonnie Ruiz was born in Miami, Florida. She obeyed the gospel in 1971. Bonnie is married to Joe Ruiz. In 1979, Joe and Bonnie began missionary work in Taiwan and lived and worked among the Chinese people for twenty-one years. In 2000, they returned to the United States and they began working with the West President congregation in Greenwood, MS in a Hispanic ministry until 2014. In 2004, they began taking mission trips to Peru each year to help existing congregations grow and assist in planting new congregations in the Amazon region.

Bonnie and Joe have five children: Kevin, Melissa, Chris, Michael, and Shane. They are also blessed with six grandchildren: Cassidy, Jessica, Lindsay, Jesse, Chase, and Eli. Bonnie and Joe live in Olive Branch, MS and are working under the oversight of the Southaven Church of Christ.

CHRISTIANITY IS the greatest life one can live while on this earth because of the hope it gives one. People cannot live without hope. From the beginning of creation, man has endured the loss of many things. People have lost their health, their finances, their reputation, and even their loved ones. The Bible is filled with those who have suffered pain, rejection, isolation, persecution and abuse, and yet found the strength to go on without cursing God and dying. People

can survive the loss of almost anything, but not without hope (Boa).

Hope is what gets us from one day to the next. A person goes to college hoping to graduate and have a successful career. A young person hopes to meet the right person and get married one day. Newlyweds hope to have children. In the loss of a loved one, one hopes to see him again one day (Boa).

One lives by hope, and when hope is gone, endurance, joy, energy, and courage just evaporate. Life begins to fade. When hope is gone, we start to die. Proverbs 13:12 tells us, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Boa).

God knows how important hope is and He is constantly encouraging us to give us hope to carry on through the trials of life in this fallen world. In our study, we will discuss several ways God encourages His children.

Through Fellow Christians

As a Christian one has the great blessing of being a part of God's family. God's family is a family where love abounds. It does not matter where one goes in this world, if the church is there, one has family that will take one in and show one love in many different ways. God tells Christians over and over again in His Word to love one another. When Christians love one another, they are watching out for one another. They are ready to assist in whatever way they can when they see a brother in need.

One such brother was Barnabas. Barnabas is well known to any serious Bible student for his ability to encourage his fellow brethren. The depth of his encouraging attitude caused the apostles to give him the name *Barnabas* which means "the son of consolation." One brother who was in

need of help was Paul. Luke told us in Acts 9:26-27 that when Paul came to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a Christian (King James Version). The disciples in Jerusalem were understandably afraid of Paul. Before his conversion, Paul had done everything he could to destroy the church. It is no wonder they questioned his conversion. As a devout Pharisee, Paul had hunted down and persecuted Christians; this could have been just another one of his tricks to find and persecute Christians. One can imagine how Paul felt, carrying the horrible memories of having Christians thrown in prison and killed. But after learning the truth and becoming a Christian, he loved his brothers and sisters and only wanted to do them good, but he was rejected by them. Paul must have been very discouraged by their rejection. But Barnabas stood in the gap beside Paul, leading him to the apostles and telling them how Paul had seen the Lord and spoken to Him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Christ. Barnabas provided the support that Paul needed at a very important time in his life (Boa).

This may be one reason why Paul spoke so often of total forgiveness and the encouraging hope it provides. He had experienced it firsthand by Barnabas' compassionate help. If Christians do not show forgiveness and encouragement to the penitent, they cannot enjoy the forgiveness God has so freely given them, because discouraging Christians make them doubt it. They may not have the strength or assurance to live in the joy of God's forgiveness. Christians need to be like Barnabas and stand with those who are remorseful and penitent, encourage them to forget the past and press on in the kingdom, serving the Lord (Boa).

Paul also became a very encouraging brother to his fellow brethren. Paul took the Lord's command to go into all

the world and preach the gospel very seriously. He planted many congregations of the Lord's church. These brethren became very dear to Paul; he was very concerned with their spiritual welfare. Paul made it a point to go back and visit them, to further teach them, and to encourage them to be faithful. Think about how difficult it was to travel to revisit the different congregations. He had to spend much time on a ship, and we know it was not a comfortable cruise ship like today's. He traveled by foot in danger of thieves, not to mention the sore feet and body aches. He slept by the wayside on the cold ground at night when there was no inn on his way. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul wrote of the many perils that befell him in his travels. If he could not be there in person, he wrote letters or sent other brethren to the congregations to help and encourage them. In Philippians 2:19-20, Paul wrote, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." The words of Paul in these Scriptures express how very concerned he was for the brethren at Philippi. He was not going to send just anyone to them, but out of his deep love for them he was sending his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, to encourage and care for them. Truly Paul was an encourager of his brethren.

Another such occasion was when Paul, while stopped in Miletus on his way to Jerusalem, sent for the Ephesian elders. Paul began talking to the elders, reminding them that he had served the Lord with all humility of mind, that he had suffered many tears and temptations because of the plots of the Jews, and that he had not kept back anything which was profitable to them spiritually. Paul told them that they would not see him again. In Acts 20:22 Paul wrote, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not

knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.” But Paul said that none of these things move him, neither does he count his life dear to him. He was determined to finish his life with joy and continue preaching the Word of God as long as the Lord gave him breath. Paul began to exhort the elders in Acts 20:28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.” They were to take heed because Paul knew that after his departing false teachers would enter in not sparing the flock. He encouraged them to watch and remember that for three years he ceased not to warn them day and night with tears. Paul continued to encourage them in Acts 20:32, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” Paul reminded them that he used his hands to support himself and those that were with him. He was an example to them how they should work and use their money to help the weak and to remember the words of the Lord that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Then Paul knelt to pray with them. They wept sore and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him. And Acts 20:38 records, “Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”

Paul lived each day for the Lord. He was mindful that his life would influence others. There was no way that Paul could have encouraged the Ephesian elders if he had lived any other way. One needs to take heed to Paul’s example of righteous living so that, when we seek to encourage others, they will take it to heart.

One sees from these Scriptures that encouragement does not always mean saying something to make one happy or to see life through rose-colored glasses. Paul trusted in his God. He knew that God had a plan and God was in control even if it meant difficulty for him. In 2 Timothy 1:12 Paul said, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Paul's great example of trusting in God and continuing to serve Him faithfully to the end was also a wonderful encouragement to the Ephesian elders to serve God at all costs.

One must take very seriously that one's reliance and complete trust in God through the trials of this life, whatever they may be, has a great influence on others. Our unwavering trust in God may be the very encouragement a fellow Christian needs to see him faithfully through his own fiery furnace. May all Christians be like Paul and truly be concerned about one's brethren so much so that one will do one's best to be a godly example.

The Encouragement Of A Friend

In our fallen world, one goes through many trying times. One receives blows that leave one feeling one just cannot go on; one wants to give up. During such times, one needs encouragement from God and others so that one can keep fighting "the good fight" of faith, looking to the Author and finisher of one's salvation, so one can finish the race.

Jonathan and David were very close friends. First Samuel 18:1 records, "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." They had a relationship of mutual support that served both of them well and gave them strength and comfort in troubled times.

These men walked together, encouraged one another and I am sure they must have prayed for one another. David said of his precious friend Jonathan, “Very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women” (2 Sam. 1:26). Jonathan not only demonstrated his loyalty to David in good times but later when his father, Saul, wanted to kill David, Jonathan’s encouragement was especially important to his friend. When David’s life was endangered, Jonathan was David’s encourager. When David could give nothing in return, Jonathan upheld him by offering his total support (Boa).

One such example is in 1 Samuel 20:1-4 when David told Jonathan that he did not understand why, but his father Saul wanted to kill him. Jonathan did not think his father wanted to kill David. First Samuel 20:3 records,

And David sware moreover, and said,
Thy father certainly knoweth that I have
found grace in thine eyes; and he saith,
Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be
grieved: but truly as the Lord liveth,
and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step
between me and death.

Jonathan replied that whatever David wanted him to do, he would do for him. First Samuel 20:32-34 says, “And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? What hath he done? And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.”

Imagine how encouraging it was to David to know that Jonathan was willing to risk his own life to protect him. Jonathan verbally encouraged David, and that was

important to David. But no words in the world can match the reassurance of knowing that someone believes in you and cares enough to stand with you no matter how tough times get or what the cost. It is good for Christians to show encouragement to others in good times. It shows a caring heart. Encouragement in hard times shows what one is made of. Like Jonathan, one needs to be willing to take risks to encourage and help others, especially our brethren. We may need to help a stranger or drive into a dangerous part of town. But one needs to remember it is far more than just helping one in time of need while on this earth; encouragement may save a soul from Hell.

I pray that we all have a very special friend like Jonathan was to David, one that will be there for us, to encourage us to keep fighting on in the mountains and the valleys of life. But even more so, I pray we will take the time, the effort, and yes, the courage truly to love one another and be that special friend to others to encourage them on the road to heaven.

Through God's Great And Precious Promises Of His Word

This is probably the number one answer given when asked How does God encourage His children, and rightly so. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and **comfort of the scriptures** might have hope." God has given numerous great and precious promises to encourage His children to keep pushing onward when it seems uphill all the way. When one feels one just cannot take another step, God reassures one of His love and abiding presence, His strength to carry one to victory through His precious Word. But how is one going to receive God's encouragement unless one is a daily student of His Word?

One's soul needs continual nutrition from God's Word to stay zealous and strong in one's daily living, and one will be that much stronger to overcome the storms of life when they come, and they will come to all that live godly in Christ (2 Tim. 3:12). Satan will make sure of it. First Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."

In the long ago David said, "O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97). David also says in Psalms 119:50, "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy Word hath quickened me." David knew where to go for strength in times of trouble because he was not a stranger to God's Word. He loved it because He knew it was words of comfort and wisdom from his Father who loved him. David knew it did not matter if he did not know the way; his Father did, and His Word was a light unto his path.

God has bountifully blessed Christians with His encouraging Word because He loves them so very deeply and wants them to be with Him eternally in heaven. Second Peter 3:9 tells one that God does not want one person to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance. God is one's Father and He holds one and soothes his broken spirit with His encouraging words so one can feel His undying love for one and His gentle push to get up and fight on unto the end.

Let us consider some of the beautiful encouraging Scriptures of God's Word.

And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Mat. 7:7-8)

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (Jam. 5:16)

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. (Mat. 21:22)

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. (1 John 3:22)

The world is so blessed to have such a caring God that has revealed His great love to mankind. These Scriptures and many more assure those who follow the commandments of God that He does hear their prayers, and not only hears them, but answers them according to His will. It is very encouraging to know that though sometimes we may pray for something not knowing it is not best for us, God will answer only according to what will help us on our road to heaven.

Hannah is one such person whose sincere prayer was answered. Hannah had been barren a number of years. This was very upsetting to her so Hannah took her broken heart to God in prayer. I doubt this was her first prayer to God

asking Him to bless her with a son, but this time we see in 1 Samuel 1:10-11 that she had grown to the point that she was not asking for a son just to please herself but to give him over to God.

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but will give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

First Samuel 1:19-20 tells of God's answer to Hannah,

And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.

God answered Hannah's prayer very quickly after she had grown to the point that she was willing to sacrifice to use her blessings from God according to His will and not her own. May one remember that all, even one's children

belong to God and may one seek to use all one's blessings to the glory of God.

One has God's precious promises to hold on to even when one is being chastised by Him. One must always remember God has one's best interest at heart. God's chastisement is to bring us to repentance not to leave us destroyed and hopeless. Read God's encouraging words to His children in Hebrews 12:5-13:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: **For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth**, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto "the Father of spirits," and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but **He for our profit**, that we might be **partakers of His holiness**. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yeildeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto

them which are exercised thereby.
Wherefore **lift up the hands which hang
down; and the feeble knees.**

It is so encouraging that God wants His children to know He understands that chastisement is hard to go through. He wants one to know that it is out of His concern and love for our souls that He does so and not to appease His anger. Being chastised by such a loving Father who does so to encourage one to live righteously makes it much easier to bear and desire to repent and live victoriously for Him.

God encouraged the Israelites that were carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar because of their sin of idol worship and unrighteous living by a letter of hope that Jeremiah the prophet sent to them. Jeremiah wrote,

For thus saith the Lord, That after, seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jer. 29:10-11)

Even though the Israelites went into captivity, rooted up from their homeland and all the suffering that they would go through, God gave them hope with His encouraging words of the good that He would bless them with again. One, too, can depend on God's encouraging love and words that as we repent of our sins, God forgives and forgets our sins and wants us in His fellowship again. With God, there is always encouragement and hope.

Through Service

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Helping others with a pure heart is most encouraging to the benefactor. God wants us to abound in good works.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. (2 Cor. 9:8)

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work. (Tit. 3:1)

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1:10)

Why has God stressed to His children to abound in good works? It is not only to spread the gospel to the saving of souls and help those in need, but God knows the more we serve others, the more encouraged we feel to do more and more in the kingdom. This in turn keeps us busy doing good that we will not have time to be entangled in the world fulfilling our own desires. The encouragement that comes from serving God keeps us on the straight and narrow road to heaven.

God does not judge one on how "great" a work one does, but on the humble loving heart in which one serves. Jesus said, "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these

little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Mat. 10:42).

Mary Magdalene is a beautiful encouraging example of a pure humble heart serving in very humble work. Luke 8:1-3 tells us that Mary Magdalene ministered to Jesus of her substance and Mark 15:41 says, “Who also, when He was in Galilee, followed Him, and ministered unto Him.” *To minister* means to relieve one’s necessities, supplying the necessities of life (Vine, “Minister”). As Mary Magdalene followed Jesus from place to place she did what was needed for our Lord and His apostles, washing their clothes, going to the market to buy food to prepare for them, and just whatever needed to be done. This humble work gave her a place in God’s Word and also the great honor of being the first person Jesus appeared to after His resurrection. This account and many others of humble, menial service for the Lord is very encouraging. One does not have to be out in the forefront of the battle for the Lord to please Him; He is pleased also with those that “tarry by the stuff” as they serve from a loving heart (1 Sam. 30:24).

As parents, let us be training our sons and daughters to work in the kingdom whether it is leading in a public way or cleaning the church building or a sick sister’s house, helping our male teachers decorate their Bible class rooms, washing dishes at potlucks or whatever is needed so they will know the encouragement that service gives to press on in the kingdom.

Conclusion

God is truly a Father of encouragement to His children. As one reads through the Bible with the mindset to notice in particular how often God encourages His children, whether it is through the different accounts in the Bible such as David

and Goliath, how He deals with His chosen people and the stranger, or the beautiful Psalms and Proverbs, one will be in awe of God's constant encouragement. God is our encourager, but we must seek His encouragement and spend time with Him in His Word and on our knees in prayer. One needs to be open to those He sends in one's path to encourage and uplift one. Be a thankful child of God always appreciating God's blessings, counting our blessings when we are going through trials. Even among trials, the child of God needs to do his best to have a positive outlook, looking for the many ways God sends His encouragement to help one press on the upward way. The faithful child of God need never wonder if God is watching over Him, for Jesus encouragingly said, "Lo I am with you **alway**, even unto the end of the world" (Mat. 28:20).

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