

The Discipline Of Verbal Correction

"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 2:11-15) See also 1 Corinthians 4:1-21.

Our text teaches us that there are things that are to be taught (As we have seen, this is formative or instructive discipline.), and to be rebuked. To rebuke is to show one his fault, or to condemn one for a fault. Paul told Titus that there are things that are, after having been taught, to be rebuked with authority.

What does the Scripture tell us about rebuke? *"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."* (Leviticus 19:17) In this passage we find that rebuke is a demonstration of love in which the one rebuked is shown his error, convicted of it by the truth, and called to correct the error. If we love our neighbor, we are to rebuke him so that he will repent of his sins. Jesus spoke of this saying, *"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."* (Luke 17:3-5) Rebuke is to occur when someone sins against us as individuals. We also know that we are to speak to our erring brothers when we see them walking away from the truth. *"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."* (James 5:19-20) We are to seek to reclaim him from the grips of sin. This would most certainly involve loving reproof and rebuke. (Cf *Nehemiah 5:1-13 and Psalm 6:1;38:1;39:11 Proverbs 27:5; Luke 17:1-5; Ephesians 5:11-17*)

Rebuke is not always to be a matter of scathing, harsh words. In fact, while sin is to be rebuked, even publicly (1 Timothy 5:20), Timothy is given instructions regarding how rebuke is to be administered. *"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity."* (1 Timothy 5:1-2) In 1 Timothy 5:20, rebuke is about convicting a person of sin, or exposing sin. In 1 Timothy 5:1, rebuke is something quite different; it is striking one with words. We are not to speak scathing, harsh, and wrath filled words when we rebuke. Rebuke is to be based upon the Word of God so that we can show sin as what it is, and demonstrate its presence with the truth. Harsh words need not be spoken, because the Word of God itself pierces deep within a man (*Hebrews 4:12-13*). (cf *Proverbs 6:23 instruction 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 4:1-4*)

Reproof and rebuke are things that we need to value. Reproof and rebuke are not simply someone telling us that we are wrong, but they are designed for the purpose of setting us aright. *"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 Timothy 3:16–17) God's Word is given to instruct us, reprove us, correct us, and perfect us. Reproof is part of the instructing and perfecting process. Reproof and rebukes are gifts from God to either keep us from falling into grievous sin, or to help us overcome grievous sins that we have committed. Solomon told his son, "*reproofs of instruction are the way of life:*" (Proverbs 6:23) Reproof ministers life to us. It directs us in the way of life. It instructs us how to live to the glory of God. We also find that godly reproof is better than the pleasure of listening to an enjoyable secular song (Ecclesiastes 7:5). In our day we value our entertainment, but we are far better off when we listen to the words of reproof and rebuke that often hurt us than if we simply tune out the Word of God and tune in the amusement of the world.

The Bible even speaks to us about how we should respond to reproof and rebuke. David sets a godly example saying, "*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: For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.*" (Psalm 141:5) Solomon wisely said, "*He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: But he that refuseth reproof erreth.*" (Proverbs 10:17) The godly response to verbal correction is to keep it, or hold on to it. This simply means that we are to accept godly correction and act on it. There is honor to the one who pays attention to godly reproof (Proverbs 13:18), and we are instructed by God to repent when we are rebuked (Revelation 3:19). (See also Hebrews 12:4-11; 13:7-8, 17, 22.)

We also need to see that there is a response to reproof that is ungodly, and shows our hearts and characters to be ungodly. "*Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.*" (Proverbs 9:8) There are those who reject rebuke and hate those who minister reproof and rebuke. The Scripture calls that person a scorner and contrasts him with the wise person, obviously declaring him to be foolish. Reading Proverbs 15:10 shows us that the rejection of correction indicates one who is forsaking the truth and embraces death. In fact, we find that, "*He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, Shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*" (Proverbs 29:1) Finally, Jesus' words in John 3:19-21 demonstrate that those who hate reproof are sinners who love darkness. It is quite obvious that one cannot consistently resist and reject verbal correction if he is the child of God. It is the wicked person who rejects correction.

These things being so, we can understand that verbal correction is an essential part of the disciplinary process. It is a part of godly discipleship. It is the duty of pastors to exercise this (2 Timothy 4:1-5), and it is the duty of churches to do so also (Titus 3:10).

Proverbs 6:23 reproofs of instruction (discipline, chastisement) are the way of life
Proverbs 10:17; Ecclesiastes 7:5; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:5-14; 2:11-15

Psalm 141:5 The godly response to reproof *cf Proverbs 13:18* contrast *Proverbs 15:10, 31-32; 17:10-11; 19:25; 24:24-26; 25:21; Hebrews 12:4-11; Revelation 3:19*

Proverbs 9:8 The ungodly response to reproof *Proverbs 12:1; 17:10-11; 29:1; John 3:19-21*

John 16:8 The Holy Spirit is the ultimate in reproof.