

1 Timothy 5:1-2 Delicate Correction

With all the problems going on in Ephesus, something had to be done. Something had to be said. And doing that was probably going to rock the boat. So how is Timothy, the new guy in town, supposed to deal with it all?

He has several options. He can just ignore the bad things going on around him and try to do the right thing himself and hope people notice and catch on – that they, all by themselves, will realize the need to change and come asking Timothy how they can do things better. Kind of a spiritually subversive approach, winning over hearts and minds.

Or, he can go running in there with guns blazing and start clearing house. “Getting the job done” in the name of righteousness and truth. Kind of a Terminator of Truth approach. A self-appointed sheriff of righteousness.

Or, he could go in and start working on things, correcting people, instructing them, telling them what needs to change, and then losing his mind on them when they fall back into doing the same thing he has corrected them on “I don’t know how many times.” The exasperated parent approach.

We’ve probably all used one of these methods before in dealing with a situation where change or correction was necessary. But this morning we’re going to see why neither ripping into people, nor ignoring things is the right approach, and we’ll learn what is the best method to deal with a situation where someone needs to be spoken to, or something needs to change.

1 Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort *him* as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

Two verses. Not a lot, but Paul is laying a foundation here for how everything else is to be done – he’s going after Timothy’s heart and motives before giving any more instruction.

Paul puts Timothy in the context of the family and says; treat these people in the church like they are members of your own family. Sometimes we have to say hard things to the people we love, but hopefully we are able to do it in a way that maintains our relationships. If you have something hard that needs to be said to someone you love, or if you see someone making a mess of their life right now, maybe there is something to learn here this morning.

The first thing we notice, right off the bat, is that Timothy should not rebuke an older man, but should exhort him as a father and the same goes for everyone else, treat them like a close relative. Now that might seem odd to some of you, because you know that in other places the Bible very clearly says that people *should* be rebuked.

When God was speaking through the prophet Isaiah to the nation of Israel He said they should “cease to do evil, learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.” Isaiah 1:16-17

According to God Himself, sometimes confronting people is part of making sure justice is done. Protecting people is a good thing. And in order for that to happen, sometimes we have to stand up and make moral judgments and say, “What you are doing, or what has happened, is WRONG,” maybe even calling it “evil.” Many people are afraid of using such terminology today, especially in the public political arena. But according to God, there is right and there is wrong, and when wrong is done it needs to be called out.

I’ll give you another example of the Bible telling us to rebuke. It’s found in Paul’s letter to Titus, another young pastor, like Timothy, who Paul wrote to. In Titus 2:15 he says, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.”

So he tells Timothy not to rebuke, but he tells Titus to rebuke, and to do it “with all authority.” In other words, to stand firm and call ‘em out. What is going on here? How can the same man say rebuke and don’t rebuke?

You probably already realize this, but the answer is not related to WHAT is said as much as HOW it is said. Those of you who speak or read more than one language know how hard it is to make some words come through the translation process from one language to the next. Sometimes there’s no exact word that fits the meaning so you have to use one that is close. That is what has happened here. The Greek word that the Bible translates as “rebuke” here in 1 Timothy 5:1 is not the same Greek word as the one used in Titus, or anywhere else in the Bible. The word here appears only here and it means “to strike, or to beat upon.” Verbally assaulting someone, we would say today.

Paul is saying don’t do that. Don’t use your authority to try to cut people down. There is a right way to confront error and a wrong way. Yelling at people or trying to shame or belittle them isn’t the route to take. You don’t need to come across like a caustic old drill sergeant, especially when you are addressing older men.

Did your mom ever tell you, “You can win more flies with honey than you can with vinegar?” I’ve never tried it practically, but I know what she was getting at. The way you approach people affects the way they receive you. If you want to see people change, generally it’s best to take a soft approach.

Pro 15:1 NKJV - A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

So, if you can approach someone gently, you have a much greater chance of reaching them with your message. Several of the Proverbs reinforce this and show that generally, if it is delivered well, and for the right reasons, wise men will receive a rebuke or correction.

Pro 9:8 - Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

Pro 13:18 - Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, But he who regards a rebuke will be honored.

Pro 17:10 - Rebuke is more effective for a wise man Than a hundred blows on a fool.

So, we are to point out the error of people's ways. But we are to do it in the right spirit and in the right way. Paul categorizes that here as exhortation.

Exhortation is a big, fancy word that simply means to encourage someone in the right direction. Rebuke generally has more of a "stop it" feel to it, while exhortation has more of a "do it" feel. If you remember, last week we talked about having put offs and put ons. Rebuke would be more of the telling people they need to put off, exhorting is more of the telling them they need to put on. Proactive vs. Reactive.

I don't mean to be nerding out on the languages too much this morning, but you also need to know the Greek word for exhort, because some of you who know your Bible are going to love this. It's *parakleo*.

Now, why is that cool? Because Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as our Comforter or *paraclete*. Same root word. Remember, the role of the Spirit is to "convict the world of sin, and righteousness and judgment" in other words, to provide rebuke and correction but also to be our comfort and our strength – to exhort and encourage us.

When we exhort people, we get to participate in God's work in their lives, encouraging them toward righteousness. By now most of you have learned, we have the power to lead people astray or to lead them to God – your life can be spent traveling in either direction. But the best way to spend it is encouraging others toward God.

But again, this means we *do* need to say something. Those of us who describe ourselves as "non-confrontational" can't hide behind that excuse.

It is often *easier* not to say anything, but that doesn't mean its *better*; if someone is really in the wrong, how far are you going to let them go?

Now, it is easy to say, "it's not my problem" – and that is true sometimes, you're not the world's savior or conscience. But you do have a responsibility to some and what are you doing there? Are you willing to create a momentarily uncomfortable situation for the sake of reaping long-term rewards?

Parents – consider this: Pro 29:15 - The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

Yes, stepping in and correcting or disciplining is hard and exhausting at times, but you can't just let the child do whatever they want, they will naturally go astray and cause even bigger problems.

And then, for all of us:

Pro 27:5 - Open rebuke is better Than love carefully concealed.

Which touches on the all-important heart of it all – motive. Is your action, or inaction, toward the individual in need of correction characterized by love for them, or love for yourself?

Whether you are prone to be the Terminator of Truth confronting every issue head on or the Spiritual Subversive doing your own thing and hoping people notice your example and change on their own, both attitudes are more focused on self than the individual who needs to change. The Terminator of Truth just likes to “get things off their chest” and likes a little confrontation every now and then. The Spiritual Subversive doesn’t want to rock the boat or hurt anyone’s feelings, or maybe is just lazy or tired and doesn’t want to go through the effort of engaging.

But ultimately, this kind of correcting of people is about *them, not us*, it’s about helping them and pleasing God. Because we love them, we point them toward God and His commands and we help them see the consequences of disobedience. This is sacrificial love, it’s getting involved.

It’s not meddling, it’s mentoring. Pay attention to the difference there. Paul tells Timothy to get involved because people are being led astray. There are disastrous consequences to the road they are on. They need to be warned.

Now, to be honest, people don’t always respond the way we would like when you point out their errors and sin. But, if you do it with the right motive in the right way your actions are still pleasing to God regardless of the person’s response.

And all you are responsible for is yourself – if you do or say the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, the way they respond is up to them. And sometimes, you just need to give it time – they might not respond the way you want immediately, but the truth can be like a seed that gets planted and God can use the words you spoke to replay over and over in that person’s mind until finally they break down and accept it. So be willing to speak if God leads you to do so, and to do it His way, not yours.

There’s one other thing that we need to see here about our interactions with others – Paul says they should be categorized as conducted with purity – especially male-female relationships. Timothy should be having completely respectable interactions with all the ladies in the church.

It’s obvious why this is important, right? When a scandal comes along it rocks the church. Everyone recognizes that sort of thing should never have happened.

The way to avoid all of this is through having pure motives. And I would recommend having some practical safeguards.

So, for example, as a general rule, I don't counsel with women. Some of you have had the experience - if I can pass you off to Rose, or Marcella, or my wife, I do it. Every one of those women have been walking with Jesus longer than I have. They are filled with the same Holy Spirit and they use the same Bible as I do, so I trust that they are going to give counsel at least as good and most likely better than me.

Now, I will meet with ladies if you really want to talk to me personally, but in those cases I usually have Mady present as well. If I have to meet with a woman without Mady I do it in a public setting and never more than once. Those are just my rules. They help keep me pure.

Billy Graham had a rule that he would never ride alone in a car with a woman who wasn't his wife, never have lunch with his secretary alone or be alone in a room with a woman, and he expects the same behavior from everyone else on his staff.

Now, these are personal convictions we're talking about, it's not sin to ride in a car with a woman who isn't your wife. But the point of the convictions is to safeguard purity. Both hers and yours.

One other area where this plays out, especially for the singles is in regards to prayer and talking about spiritual issues in your life. If you're going to have a prayer partner, or accountability partner, or someone you can talk to, it needs to be someone of the same sex. Because when we talk about those issues of our lives, we are dealing with deep, intimate things and it is very easy for an attachment to begin to build there. And unless you are intentionally trying to build a relationship, you need to avoid such spiritual intimacy with a person of the opposite sex because sooner or later, someone is going to get hurt or you're going to go too far physically because of the intimacy you have created spiritually.

Weaving yourself together spiritually with a person of the opposite sex can be as dangerous as weaving yourself together physically. Spiritual intimacy and physical intimacy are AMAZING in marriage, but if that's not the direction you're headed, then keep a close eye on your relationships and consider what kind of convictions you might need to protect your purity and the purity of those around you.

Once again, the point is to do what is right for the other person, to make sure there is no hint of them being taken advantage of. Timothy was to make sure the young ladies were protected and never to indulge himself in their attentions.

So whether we're talking about building safeguards in your life, or addressing the sin in the life of others, the important thing is always to do what is best for the other person, putting them first and not your self.

Which, after all, is what Jesus did for us. Right?

He walks into our lives and confronts us on our sin - He calls it sin and exposes its consequences. But *how* does He do it? He is gentle with those who will hear, and only harsh with those who reject the truth.

Rom 2:4 (NLT) Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

Is He speaking to you now? Has He been trying to get your attention lately?

Rev 3:19 NKJV - "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

It's better to hear Him when He whispers your name than when He has to shout. God has ways of getting your attention that near He nor you want to see Him use. If He is putting His finger on some area of your life, or your whole life, and saying my son, my daughter, this needs to change...listen to Him. He's coming to you with your own best interest in mind.

Sin blinds us and misleads us. It makes us think everything is fine while we're plunging headlong toward destruction. So pay attention to His warnings. Don't mistake His patience for permission. Hear Him as He gently exhorts you to come to Him.

And if He is opening up the door for you to speak to someone else about an issue you see in their lives, pray, pray, pray about it. Remember the battle is won spiritually before it is fought physically. Ask God to prepare their hearts to receive the things He is leading you to say, and to prepare your heart and lips to do and say things in the right way for the right reasons. Step up and say what needs to be said, but say it in gentle love not stinging criticism.

[1](#) Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort *him* as a father, younger men as brothers, [2](#) older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

Let's pray.

Communion.