



Tough Love Keeps Us in Grace

2 Thessalonians 3:14-18 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Have you ever been part of an intervention? An intervention takes place when the family and friends of a loved one coordinate their efforts to collectively confront them for their addictive, self-destructive, or damaging behavior. Think of the alcoholic who imagines everything is just fine and under control when in fact their addiction is controlling their life and poisoning their relationships. The hope is that a unified front will drive home the seriousness of the situation and reassure the addict that everyone involved loves him or her so much and wants to support them every step of the way on their journey to recovery, but things cannot continue as they are.

On occasion interventions also take place in the family of the church. Paul considered his words to have divine authority and therefore anyone who rejected his instructions was also rejecting God's will for them and putting their faith in deadly peril by choosing their sin over God. When a Christian refuses to repent after being repeatedly admonished, it is necessary that out of love for that wayward brother or sister the whole church family act in unison to impress on them the danger they are in. Paul says to disassociate from that person, that is to cut off our normal social relationships, in the hopes that they will repent. But again this is to be done in love, not in malice or bitterness but in the readiness to receive them back when they come to their senses and return to the Lord.

Such confrontations require great love and courage. Admittedly, the discussion is usually awkward and socially uncomfortable for everyone involved, and if the sinner refuses to repent, there can also be anger and resentment on their part, but to ignore the issue would be giving the green light for a person to go to hell. Being faithful to God can cause friction, but in that tension we have the gift of God's peace—the peace that surpasses understanding. God's peace with us in Jesus is unchanging, having been nailed down at the cross of Christ, and Jesus himself stands with us, especially when we have to act in tough love. Jesus rejoices, and we rejoice, when such interventions have their desired effect: another wayward sheep returns to the fold.

Prayer: Lord God, your word is truth and life itself. When I wander from your way and need correction, send Christians into my life who are full of love and boldness, to gently confront me. Humble my heart to accept their rebuke and trusting in your Son for forgiveness, keep me in the narrow way to life everlasting. Amen.