

How Does an Honest Christian Receive a Rebuke?

By Paul R. Blake

In civil law it is ethically acceptable to respond to charges with a motion to dismiss the case before the weight of the evidence is considered in trial. However, children of God live by a different standard of morality that does not allow such worldly tactics. The apostle Paul opened his life, words, and works for examination by his brethren when accused of wrongdoing and trusted the outcome of the trial to the honest judgment of faithful Christians. This trust was manifested by his frequent references to what he wrote and what he did by saying: "You know..." (2Cor. 6:1-13, 7:14-16, 10:7, 12:17-19; 1Thes. 1:5, 2:2,5,11, 4:2). He knew that if a charge was false, his record would bear witness for him. He also taught that if the charge was true that repentance, not defensiveness, was required; he must honorably accept the consequences of his sin (Acts 25:11; Gal. 2:18). Paul did not refuse to talk with his accusers, but instead devoted a portion of the Corinthian epistles to answering charges in a careful, complete, and civil manner.

In this era of instant communication it is unfortunate that a few dissemblers misuse it by leveling unjust, malicious innuendo against good Christians. It is tedious and unpleasant to deal with professed Christians whose words and works manifest envy, hatred, and party spirit. Such behavior increases tension and creates an atmosphere of suspicion. In such an environment, nearly every brother who raises a question about another is viewed as a mean-spirited watchdog. The accused and his friends often refuse to consider the merits of the rebuke, and they quickly engage in any one of three unproductive reactions seen with increasing frequency among erring Christians today.

Assumption one – the rebuke is unjustified (I'm right). When a humble Christian is rebuked, his first question is not, "what is my accuser's evil agenda?" Rather, he asks, "have I overlooked something?" In this manner, he takes heed to himself and to the doctrine for the purpose of saving himself and his hearers (1Tim. 4:16). He does not allow pride to move him to consider his years of service as a shield to his own human fallibility.

Assumption two – the rebuke is ill-intentioned (I'm being persecuted). Paranoia is unbecoming in Christians, and it may even be a function of pride. In order for one to think that everyone is out to get him, he believes himself important enough to be a preeminent influence to others. Regardless, disciples of the Lord do not assume evil in others without the objective evidence of their words and works; personal suspicions are not evidence. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil" (1Cor. 13:4-5).

Assumption three – the rebuke is based on a misunderstanding (My accuser is ignorant). Perhaps the most dangerous response to a rebuke is to casually dismiss it as a misunderstanding. This response portrays the brother offering reproof as unwitting and obtuse. Claiming to be misinterpreted, misapplied, or misquoted without offering a clear, complete answer rewards the ignorance and laziness of some of the disciples who are prone to gossip without investigation. The scriptural response to a request for clarification is to repeat the truth in such a way that the inquirer can completely understand it regardless of the consequences (Dan. 3:16-18). Intentional vagaries are a form of lying.

Hasty rejection of reproof undermines unity and promotes division, especially when the only interests of the brother offering the rebuke are saving souls and upholding truth. Second, it has the potential to increase sin as the accused cuts himself off from the divinely arranged protection of concerned saints (Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:19-20). If it turns out that the rebuke is warranted, then cavalierly refusing it increases the risk of hell for the sinning disciples and his friends who blindly support him. And third, it damages one's influence among faithful brethren when he irately rejects reproof without due consideration. Good men know they are beset with

weakness and subject to error, and they are happy when someone points them back in the right direction when they stray. In their relief over having escaped danger, they are grateful that a brother rescued them, and are less concerned with the manner or mode of the rescuer.

It is essential to respond to a rebuke in a godly manner whether one believes it justified or unfair. Give serious, prayerful consideration before dismissing it as unmerited. Small comfort it will be for one to know that his unmannerly accuser shares the lake of fire with him. If one wishes to view himself as mature, let him respond to rebukes (justified or not) in a way that exhibits maturity by forbearing his brother in love and giving him an honorable hearing. If one wills to be an advocate of unity in the faith and of love for the saints, then let him answer charges in a divinely approved manner that promotes unity and love. Otherwise, one's credibility and influence suffer, unity and peace are reduced, and truth and right go wanting.

I could be mistaken. And you?

The Furnace of Affliction

"It is in the furnace of affliction that our Savior watches for Christlikeness to be brought out in us. He is the purifier and refiner of silver, and we understand that He counts the process complete only when He can see His likeness in the molten metal" (Norman Harrison).

A Moments Wisdom

- People often criticize the person they secretly envy.
- The best way to break a habit is to drop it.
- Don't get upset over the person who belittles you; he is only trying to cut you down to his size.
- Forgiveness warms the heart and cools the sting.
- When government accepts responsibility for people, the people no longer take responsibility for themselves.
- Enthusiasm makes a good engine, but a poor driver.
- Run after two rabbits and you will catch neither one.
- Perhaps you cannot be a star, but you need not be a cloud.
- A cold church is like cold butter: it does not spread well.
- The cross is easier bear for the Christian who takes it up than for one who drags it along.
- A bit of fragrance always clings to the hand that gives away roses.
- If it is painful for you to correct a person, you are safe in doing it; if you take pleasure in it, hold your tongue.
- An irritable man is like a hedgehog rolled up the wrong way, tormenting himself with his own prickles.
- Troubles are like babies; they only grow by nursing.
- Beware of the fury of a patient man.
- No question is ever settled until it is settled correctly.
- The only sure way to teach a child how to say "I'm sorry" is for him to hear it from our lips first.
- Three things are good in small measure and evil in large: yeast, salt, and hesitation.
- With time and patience, the mulberry leaf becomes a silk gown.
- The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra.
- Moderation of temper is a virtue; moderation of principles is a vice.
- A man who really wants to do something will find a way; a man who doesn't will find an excuse.
- A word to the wise is sufficient; a word to the unwise is resented.
- It is easier to do a good job than to explain why you didn't.