

The Ministry of Reproof

A Solemn Responsibility:

Those whom God has set apart as **ministers** of righteousness have **solemn responsibilities laid upon them to reprove the sins of the people**. Paul commanded Titus: “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” There are ever those who will despise the one who dares to reprove sin; but there are times when reproof must be given. Paul directs Titus to rebuke a certain class sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. Men and women who, with their different organizations, are brought together in church capacity have peculiarities and faults. As these are developed, they will require reproof. **If those who are placed in important positions never reprov'd, never rebuk'd, there would soon be a demoralized condition of things that would greatly dishonor God.** But how shall the reproof be given? Let the apostle answer: “With all long-suffering and doctrine.” Principle should be brought to bear upon the one who needs reproof, but never should the wrongs of God’s people be passed by indifferently. {3T 358.3}

When there are among God’s people those who have departed from the path of humble obedience, those who have exalted self, those who have united with Satan in accusing and condemning the men appointed of God to be ministers of salvation, **shall we keep silence for fear of hurting their feelings?** When there are men in the church who love riches more than righteousness, and who stand ready to take advantage of their fellow men by unjust dealings, **shall we make no protest?** And when men standing in the position of leaders and teachers work under the power of spiritualistic ideas and sophistries, **shall we keep silent, for fear of injuring their influence,** while souls are being beguiled? Satan will use every advantage that he can obtain to cause souls to become beclouded and perplexed in regard to the work of the church, in regard to the word of God, and in regard to the words of warning which He has given through the testimonies of His Spirit, to guard His little flock from the subtleties of the enemy. {SpTB02 9.2}

When men stand out in defiance against the counsel of God, they are warring against God. **Is it right for those connected with such ones to treat them as if they were in perfect harmony with them, making no difference between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not?** Though they be ministers or medical missionaries, they have dishonored Christ before the forces of the loyal and the disloyal. **Open rebuke is necessary, to prevent others from being ensnared.** {SpTB02 9.3}

“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.” If you think your brethren are in error, or in danger of making strong statements and of going to extremes, in the love of Christ and in the spirit of meekness, go to them and talk the matter over with them. If you wish to be laborers together with God, if you are spiritually minded yourself, **you will not seek to expose the errors and mistakes of your brethren, but will seek to correct them, and will restore the one you deem to be in danger.** When this work of restoring those who err is neglected, sin lies upon those who have seen their brethren’s defects, and have not followed out the gospel rule. God would have his laborers upbuild and strengthen and save those who are in danger of falling. Those who are in close connection with God, and who have a sense of the sacred character of his work, will **bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. This is the special work of those who believe the present truth.** {RH, November 30, 1897 par. 5}

Those who neglect their God-given responsibilities, and who will not take every means in their power to save those for whom Christ died from making a misstep, are **neglecting his work**, and are **failing to be colaborers with Christ.** RH, November 30, 1897 par. 6

“If wrongs are apparent among His people, and if the servants of God pass on indifferent to them, they virtually sustain and justify the sinner, and are alike guilty and will just as surely receive the displeasure of God; for they will be made responsible for the sins of the guilty. In vision I have been pointed to many instances where the displeasure of God has been incurred by a neglect on the part of His servants to deal with the wrongs and sins existing among them. Those who have excused these wrongs have been thought by the people to be **very amiable and lovely in disposition**, simply because they shunned to discharge a plain, Scriptural duty. The task was not agreeable to their feelings; therefore they avoided it.” [VOL. 3, P. 266 (1873).] {5T 676.1}

The spirit of forgiveness is to be cherished; yet the Lord says, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him.” The trespass may be against ourselves, or against some other soul whom Christ has purchased with his own blood. **These wrongs are not to be passed by.** The Lord has commanded us not to suffer wrong against our brother. It is only right that indignation be felt against wrong-doing; for by it Christ is dishonored. Sin is to be called by its right name, and is to be plainly laid out before the wrong-doer. “If thy brother shall trespass against thee,” Christ said, “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: and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” {RH, January 3, 1899 par. 12}

Men of courage and energy are needed to expose fashionable sins. Iniquity must not be palliated and excused. Those who lead the church to follow the customs and practises of the world, are not to be lauded and exalted. **No regard for family or position will hinder the faithful servants of Christ from guarding the interests of his people.** God is no respecter of persons. Great light and special privileges bring increased responsibility. When those who have been favored or honored of God commit sin, their influence goes very far to encourage others in transgression. And if, by their example, the faith of another is weakened, and moral and religious principle is broken down, the wrath of God will surely come upon those betrayers of their sacred trust. {The Southern Watchman, July 12, 1904 par. 4}

Severity to a few will often prove mercy to many. Yet we must be careful to manifest the spirit of Christ, and not our own hasty, impetuous disposition. We must rebuke sin, **because we love God, and love the souls for whom Christ died.** {The Southern Watchman, July 12, 1904 par. 5}

Christ here gives **no liberty for any man to pass judgment upon others.** In the Sermon on the Mount He forbade this. It is the prerogative of God. **But on the church in its organized capacity He places a responsibility for the individual members.** Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. “Reprove, rebuke, exhort,” the Lord says, “with all long-suffering and doctrine.” 2 Tim. 4:2. Deal faithfully with wrongdoing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, **Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil.** “**They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**” Gal. 5:21. {DA 805.4}

WHAT ABOUT MATTHEW 18?

She wrote more in detail in a letter to Edson, noting that she spoke to several, relating testimony I had for them. Spoke one hour, comforting some, reproving others, but the testimony was more especially to impress upon those particularly in fault through the sin of hasty speaking, jesting, joking, and laughing. All this was wrong and detrimental to their growth in grace. {2BIO 228.3}

Some felt exceedingly tried, especially Sister Doude. She came to see me in the morning, accompanied by her husband. She was crying and said to me, “You have killed me, you have killed me clean off. You have killed me.” Said I, “**That is just what I hoped the message I bore would do.**” {2BIO 228.4}

I found their greatest difficulty was that the testimony was given before others and that if I had sent it to them alone, it would have been received all right. Pride was hurt, pride was wounded terribly. We talked a while, and they both cooled down wonderfully and said they felt differently. {2BIO 228.5}

Brother Doude accused me of violating Scripture by not telling the fault between them and me alone. We told him this scripture did not touch the case. There was no trespass here against me. That the case before us was one of them that had been mentioned by the apostles, those who sin, reprove before all that others may fear. --Letter 6, 1868. {2BIO 229.1}

“**We did not lighten the burden,**” she noted in her diary, “for all this development only showed how much she needed the reproof.”--MS 13, 1868. {2BIO 229.2} **NOTE:** *It could be argued that even Ellen White indicated that God was not calling all the other brethren to work in this manner, pointing out individual sins in public (See 5T, 677-678). It must be recognized that public reproof was not a wrong approach. Mrs. White commented, “When I am speaking to the people I say much that I have not premeditated. The Spirit of the Lord frequently comes upon me. I seem to be carried out of, and away from, myself; the life and character of different persons are clearly presented before my mind. I see their errors and dangers, and feel compelled to speak of what is thus brought before me. I dare not resist the Spirit of God.” 5T 677 Again,, notice this statement: “Let none entertain the thought that I regret or take back any plain testimony I have borne to individuals or to the people. If I have erred anywhere, it is in not rebuking sin more decidedly and firmly. Some of the brethren have taken the responsibility of criticizing my work and proposing an easier way to correct wrongs. To these persons I would say: I take God’s way and not yours. What I have said or written in testimony or reproof has not been too plainly expressed. . . .” {5T 677.2} Further comment on dealing with those who have committed wrongs personally against us may be found in Desire of Ages, p. 440.2-441.4.*

MUST WE BE SPECIFIC?

Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. **Call sin by its right name.** Declare what God has said in regard to lying, **Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil.** “They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Gal. 5:21. If they persist in sin, the judgment you have declared from God’s word is pronounced upon them in heaven. In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; **the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord.** She must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. He who despises the authority of the church despises the authority of Christ Himself. {DA 805.4}

Those who walk with God are prepared to call wrongdoing by its right name. Sin is sin, whether practiced by ministers, teachers, medical missionaries, or other workers in the Lord's service. **Those who discern unChristlike traits in professed Christians occupying positions of responsibility must use great plainness of speech in pointing out these evils, instead of apparently continuing in fellowship with erring men because they are standing in high places.** It is on account of the positions of trust that these unChristlike workers occupy that I am instructed to say to our physicians, **Great plainness of speech is required.** Those who, though occupying positions of grave responsibility, are Christians only in name are **not to be sustained and upheld and strengthened by their brethren,** for Satan works through the sinners in Zion to bring in strife and contention and difficulties, which make God's people a reproach and a shame to Christ Jesus. 16 MR 1.3

How should reproof be given?

Men who are harsh and censorious often excuse or try to justify their lack of Christian politeness because some of the Reformers worked with such a spirit, and they claim that the work for this time requires the same spirit; but this is not so. **A spirit which is calm and under perfect control is better in any place, even in the roughest company. A furious zeal does no good to anyone.** God did not select the Reformers because they were overbearing, passionate men. He accepted them as they were, notwithstanding these traits of character; but **He would have placed tenfold greater responsibilities upon them had they been of humble mind, having their spirits under control of reason.** While ministers of Christ must denounce sin and ungodliness, impurity and falsehood, while they are sometimes called to rebuke iniquity among the high as well as the low, showing them that the indignation of God will fall upon the transgressors of His law, **yet they should not be overbearing or tyrannical; they should manifest kindness and love, a spirit to save rather than to destroy.** {4T 486.2} *NOTE: Apparently not all the reformers were guilty of this. See section VI, third paragraph.*

Severity to a few will often prove mercy to many. **Yet we must be careful to manifest the spirit of Christ, and not our own hasty, impetuous disposition. We must rebuke sin, because we love God, and love the souls for whom Christ died.** {The Southern Watchman, July 12, 1904 par. 5}

But how shall the reproof be given? Let the apostle answer: **“With all long-suffering and doctrine.” Principle should be brought to bear** upon the one who needs reproof, but never should the wrongs of God's people be passed by indifferently. {3T 358.3}

“Jesus did not repress [suppress] one word of truth. But in his intercourse with the people he exercised the **greatest tact and thoughtful attention.** He was **never rude; never needlessly spoke a severe word; never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness.** He spoke the truth, but **always in love.** He denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but **tears were in his eyes as he uttered his scathing rebukes.**” [I tell you, nothing short of that same **spirit dwelling in our hearts** will enable us to follow that example in the plain message which we have to give.] “He wept over Jerusalem, the city he loved, who refused to receive him, the way, the truth, and the life. They had rejected him, the Saviour, but he **regarded them with pitying tenderness and sorrow so deep that it broke his heart.** His life was one of self-denial and constant care for others. He **never made truth cruel,** but manifested a **wonderful tenderness for humanity.** Every soul was **precious in his eyes.** He always bore himself with divine dignity, yet he stooped with the **tenderest compassion and regard** to every member of the family of God. In all he saw fallen souls whom it was his mission to save.” {GCDB, February 13, 1893 par. 1}

He denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity; but **tears were in His voice** as He uttered His scathing rebukes. {SC 12.1}

Christ is the model of perfection, both in outward manner and inward grace, for he was meek and gentle of heart. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He enjoyed seeing children and youth happy. He **never spoke an unkind, discourteous word.** Even in his denunciations of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, keen and searching though they were, there was **no manifestation of an irritated temper.** Divine grace alone can correct our objectionable tendencies. {ST, May 14, 1894 par. 6}

Could a loving rebuke be perceived as “Severe”?

Those whom God has chosen for an important work, have **ever been received with distrust and suspicion.** Anciently, when Elijah was sent with a message from God to the people, they did not heed the warning. **They thought Elijah unnecessarily severe.** He must, they thought, have **lost his senses,** that he would denounce them, the favored people of God, as sinners, and their crimes, so aggravating, that the judgments of God would awaken against them. {RH, September 16, 1873 par. 25}

Severity to a few will often prove **mercy** to many. {SW, July 12, 1904 par. 5}

Many reformers, in entering upon their work, determined to exercise great prudence in attacking the sins of the church and the nation. They hoped, by the example of a pure Christian life, to lead the people back to the doctrines of the Bible. But the **Spirit of God came**

upon them as it came upon Elijah, moving him to rebuke the sins of a wicked king and an apostate people; they **could not refrain** from preaching the plain utterances of the Bible-- doctrines which they had been reluctant to present. They were **impelled to zealously declare** the truth and the danger which threatened souls. The words which the Lord gave them they uttered, fearless of consequences, and the people were compelled to hear the warning. {GC 606.1}

HOW REPROOF GENERALLY RECEIVED?

In every generation God has sent his servants to rebuke sin, both in the world and in the church. **But the people desire smooth things spoken to them, and the pure, unvarnished truth is not acceptable.** GC88 606

The spirit of true reform **will be met in our day as in ancient times.** Those who are zealous for the honor of God, and who will not countenance sin either in ministers or people, **need not expect rest or pleasure in this life.** {The Southern Watchman, July 12, 1904 par. 7}

God has set me as a reprove of His people; and just so surely as He has laid upon me the heavy burden, He will make those to whom this message is given responsible for the manner in which they treat it. ...I have not chosen this unpleasant labor for myself. It is **not a work which will bring to me the favor or praise of men.** It is a work which **but few will appreciate.** [VOL. 4, PP. 231, 232 (1876).] {5T 679.2}

Those who have in the fear of God ventured out to faithfully meet error and sin, calling sin by its right name, have discharged a **disagreeable duty** with **much suffering of feelings to themselves;** but they get the **sympathy of but few** and **suffer the neglect of many.** The **sympathizers are on the wrong side,** and they carry out the purposes of Satan to defeat the design of God. {3T 328.2}

FALSE SYMPATHIZERS

There will be men and women who despise reproof and whose feelings will ever rise up against it. It is not pleasant to be told of our wrongs. **In almost every case** where reproof is necessary, there will be some who entirely overlook the fact that the Spirit of the Lord has been grieved and His cause reproached. These will pity those who deserved reproof, because personal feelings have been hurt. All this **unsanctified sympathy** places the sympathizers where **they are sharers in the guilt of the one reproofed.** **In nine cases out of ten if the one reproofed had been left under a sense of his wrongs, he might have been helped to see them and thereby have been reformed.** But meddling, unsanctified sympathizers place altogether a wrong construction upon the motives of the reprove and the nature of the reproof given, and by sympathizing with the one reproofed lead him to feel that he has been really abused; and his feelings rise up in rebellion against the one who has only done his duty. Those who faithfully discharge their unpleasant duties under a sense of their accountability to God will receive His blessing. 3T 359.1

Reproofs always hurt human nature. **Many are the souls that have been destroyed by the unwise sympathy of their brethren;** for, because the brethren sympathized with them, they thought they must indeed have been abused, and that the reprove was all wrong and had a bad spirit. The only hope for sinners in Zion is to fully see and confess their wrongs, and put them away. **Those who step in to destroy the edge of sharp reproof that God sends,** saying that the reprove was partly wrong and the reproofed was not just right, **please the enemy.** Any way that Satan can devise to make the reproofs of none effect will accomplish his design. Some will lay blame upon the one whom God has sent with a message of warning, saying, He is too severe; and in so doing they become **responsible for the soul of the sinner** whom God desired to save, and to whom, because He loved him, He sent correction, that he might humble his soul before God and put his sins from him. **These false sympathizers will have an account to settle with the Master by-and-by for their work of death.** {3T 329.1}

Reproof : elegchos { el'-eng-khos} Jn. 3:20

First def. - A proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested Second def. - Conviction

Rebuke: epitimao { ep-ee-tee-mah'-o}(Upon-Honor)

First def. - "To show honor to" or "To honor"

Second def. - "To raise the price of"

Third def. - "To adjudge, award, in the sense of merited penalty"

Fourth def. - to tax with fault, rate, chide, rebuke, reprove, censure severely - 4(a) - to admonish or charge sharply

JUDGING

“Whosoever sins ye remit,” said Christ, “they are remitted; . . . and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Christ here gives **no liberty for any man to pass judgment upon others**. In the Sermon on the Mount He forbade this. It is the prerogative of God. **But on the church** in its organized capacity He places a **responsibility for the individual members**. Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. 2 Tim. 4:2

Christ has plainly taught that **those who persist in open sin** must be **separated from the church**, but He has not committed to us the work of judging character and motive. He knows our nature too well to entrust this work to us. **Should we try to uproot from the church those whom we suppose to be spurious Christians, we should be sure to make mistakes.** COL 71

The tares **closely resembled the wheat while the blades were green**; but when the field was white for the harvest, the worthless weeds bore no likeness to the wheat that bowed under the weight of its full, ripe heads. COL 74

Christ’s example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord’s Supper. It is true that open sin excludes the guilty. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches. 1 Cor. 5:11 But beyond this none are to pass judgment. God has not left it with men to say who shall present themselves on these occasions. **For who can read the heart? Who can distinguish the tares from the wheat?** DA 656