

Understanding Proper Rebuke

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: ... A time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl 3:1-7).

- **There is a time for *private* prayer over a brother’s sin.**

“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death” (1 John 5:16). Prayer is *always* the first step.

- **There is a time for *private* rebuke of a brother’s sin.**

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Matt 18:15).

- **There is a time for *public* rebuke of a brother’s sin.**

“Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Tim 5:20).

1. Recognition of a brother’s sin is a special call to prayer

If we have not prayed privately, we are not ready to talk either personally or publicly.

A. Begin with a time of self-examination.

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the need take heed to ourselves (Luke 17:3; 1 Cor 11:28; Gal 6:1; Act 20:28). **Self-examination is like washing our hands before surgery. Without it we may leave an infected sore.**

- Am I reacting to a sin I am guilty of committing (Rom 2:1)?
Am I committing a worse sin in my life that must be confessed?

Is this a warning that God is giving me because he sees me *in danger* of committing a similar or worse sin (Gal 6:1)?

- We take heed to ourselves by analyzing our motivations and praying a prayer such as David prayed, “Renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:10).

Am I giving every benefit of the doubt?

Am I jealous and feeling slighted, imagining an injury that is not real?

Have I failed to forgive the brother for some other other perceived injury and am I holding a grudge against him?

Am I magnifying something that is quite small and unimportant. “If one sees faults in another, he is not to magnify them before others, and make them grievous sins” (HS 120)?

Was this an unintended and accidental action that should be ignored and forgotten?

Am I putting the best possible construction on the motives?

Am I dealing with principles, not personalities?

Am I critical in general? “Dwell upon the good qualities of those with whom you associate, and see as little as possible of their errors and failings” (MH 492),

Am I feeling self-righteous and secretly happy at another’s mistake?

Do I have sufficient self-control that I will not speak of this to

others?

Have I already “shared” this information with another before praying for this brother?

- Am I in any way responsible for the sin the brother is committing?

Does my brother have something against me (Mt 5:21-26).

Have I encouraged it by my own actions?

Have I failed to set a proper example in another area of life that would the brother would use to excuse this sin?

Have I failed to recognize prior calls to prayer for this brother?

- Am I meddling in something that is none of my business and does not involve me (Pro 26:17)?

- Is this something to continue praying about and a matter to leave with God?

- Do I love this brother sufficiently to die in his place for this sin?

Am I someone that has a good relationship with this individual and can share with him?

Am I in a delegated position of responsibility that requires action from me (parent, elder, pastor, etc).

Is the limit of my responsibility to set a good example in this situation?

- Does the Bible or SOP give me advice on this matter?
Do I need wise counsel with a leader on this?

B. Continues with earnest and persevering prayer for the brother.

The Bible emphasizes the need to pray for our brothers (1 Sam 12:19,23; 1 Kings 13:6; Job 42:8; Jer 42:2; Matt 5:44; Joh 17:9; Rom 8:26; Col 1:9; 1 Thes 5:25; Jam 5:16; 1 John 5:16).

“Nothing but the power of God, *granted in answer to the earnest prayer of faith*, can deliver these ensnared souls” (GC 558).

“It is a part of God’s plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask” (GC 525).

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications [deēsis], prayers [proseuchē], intercessions [enteuxis], and giving of thanks [eucharistia] be made for all men” (1 Tim 2:1). The Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon helps us understand:

- *Urgent request based on need* [deēsis] a. What is the need? b. Why is it urgent? c. What is the specific request (Mk 10:36)? d. What is the explicit promise (2 Pet 1:4)? “Learn to pray short and right to the point, asking for just what you need” (RH 4/22/1884). May be united group prayer, “you also helping together in prayer for us” (2 Cor 1:11).

Scriptural examples:

Appeal to the supreme Judge to reverse unjust earthly decisions. “Get justice for me from my adversary” (Lu 18:2-8). Appeal for promised chastening. “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (Jam 5:17,18).

Appeal for wisdom. “God said, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’ And Solomon said: ‘... give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil.’” (1 Kings 3:5-8).

- *Speak aloud as in conversation* [proseuchē]—This is kneeling, closet prayer (Mt 6:6). “Learn to pray aloud where only God can hear you” (RH 4/22/1884).

- *Intercession* [enteuxis]—To speak to someone on behalf of someone else.

Scriptural examples:

“The man of God besought the Lord, and the king’s hand was restored him again, and became as it was before” (1 Kgs 13:6). “Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt 5:44). “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lu 23:34). ““Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60).

“My servant Job shall pray for you ... lest I deal with you after your folly” (Job 42:8).

“Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king” (1 Sam 12:19).

- *Expressions of gratitude for benefits or blessings* [eucharistia] Requires submission to God’s wisdom.

How is this situation blessing me at the present?

What specific ways has this brother helped me in times past?

In what specific ways has this brother been a blessing to the church in times past?

Note: This is *not* a call for self-righteous “thankfulness,” “God, I thank You that I am not like ... this tax collector” (Lu 18:11).

2. The Importance of Personal Appeal

Prayer may not release us of further responsibility. There are times we must make personal appeals to a brother.

When the action threatens the spiritual life of the individual, “a word in season” may save his soul. The appeal may be a gentle reminder, though sometimes a sharp rebuke is necessary. “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh” (Jud 22–23). “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers ... whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,” (Titus 1:10–13, NKJV)

The most common reason we neglect personal appeals to others is that we really don’t love people enough to do this. “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him” (Lev 19:17).

- Is this a place for the rebuke of silence (Isa 53:7; Pro 9:8)?

“Silence is the greatest rebuke that you can possibly give to a *faultfinder* or *one whose temper is irritated*” (OHC 293). “To be silent is the strongest rebuke that you can give to one who is speaking harsh, discourteous words to you. Keep perfectly silent. Often silence is eloquence” (GCB 4/6/1903). Jesus’ silence to Herod “seemed to indicate utter indifference to his authority. To the *vain and pompous* king, open rebuke would have been less offensive than to be thus ignored.” “He had no words for those who would but *trample the truth under their unholy feet*.” “Christ’s silence was the severest rebuke that He could have given. Herod had *rejected the truth* spoken to him by the greatest of the prophets, and no other message was he to receive” (DA 730). An unresponsive silence may be the best response to impure jokes or suggestive remarks.

- Is the time and place appropriate for the reproof?
If a personal appeal is necessary and I am the proper one to do it, have I chosen an appropriate time and place that will not make my brother more defensive? Before rebuking His disciples, Jesus “awaited a quiet hour, when their hearts should be open to receive His words” (DA 432).
- Do I know what the Scriptures say about this sin?
Can I let the Scripture speak and the Holy Spirit convict, relying on His word, not mine for any rebuke?
- Can I give a personal appeal in a tactful, encouraging way?
Many dental procedures are painful, but dentists seek to minimize the pain. Has every effort been made to minimize the pain? “Let the erring one be encouraged to climb step by step, round by round. The effort may be painful to him, but it will be by far the best lesson he has ever learned; for by so doing he will become acquainted with his own weakness, and thus be enabled to avoid in the future the errors of the past. Through the aid of wise counselors, his defeat will be turned into victory” (FE 305). “We can do nothing without courage and perseverance. Speak words of hope and courage to the poor and the disheartened. If need be, give tangible proof of your interest by helping them when they come into strait places. Those who have had many advantages should remember that they themselves still err in many things, and that it is painful to them when their errors are pointed out and there is held up before them a comely pattern of what they should be. Remember that kindness will accomplish more than censure. As you try to teach others, let them see that you wish them to reach the highest standard, and that you are ready to give them help. If in some things they fail, be not quick to condemn them” (MH 196).
- Do I recognize witnessing opportunities?
“If you truly belong to Christ, you will have opportunities for witnessing for Him. You will be invited to attend places of amusement, and then it will be that you will have an opportunity to testify to your Lord. If you are true to Christ then, you will not try to form excuses for your non-attendance, but will plainly and modestly declare that you are a child of God, and your principles would not allow you to be in a place, even for one occasion, where you could not invite the presence of your Lord” (MYP 370).
“As disciples of Christ we shall not mingle with the world from a mere love of pleasure, to unite with them in folly. Such associations can result only in harm. We should never give sanction to sin by our words or our deeds, our silence or our presence” (MYP 403).

3. Special Considerations When Public Rebuke Is Necessary

When grievous sin threatens the prosperity of the church, public reproof is both necessary and appropriate.

Moses gave Israel explicit instructions for public rebuke.

A. *Idolatry*. When individuals or institutions were inviting others to worship the gods of the nations, “then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you” (Deut 13:14) the individuals were to be stoned, the institutions destroyed. The reason given for this was “So **all Israel shall hear and fear**, and not again do such wickedness as this among you” (Deut 13:11).

B. *Institutional Rebellion*. “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, ... you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the Lord chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you. Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So

you shall put away the evil from Israel. And **all the people shall hear and fear**, and no longer act presumptuously.” (Deut 17:8–13).

C. *False Witness*. “And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And **those who remain shall hear and fear**, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.” (Deut 19:18–20).

D. *Home Rebellion*. “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and **all Israel shall hear and fear**” (Deut 21:18–21).

True Confession—Appropriate Response to Rebuke

Can You Distinguish Between True and False Confession?

True confession

- **Specific and timely**

“We have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king” (1 Sam 12:19). “Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart” (Heb 4:7).

“True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins.... All confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty” (SC 38).

- **Assumes entire responsibility**

- **Acknowledges complicity *with* sins of God’s people**

“We have sinned ... and have rebelled ...” (Dan 9:5).

- **Seeks freedom from sin—not punishment avoidance**

- **Life changing**

“If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die” (Eze 33:15).

“Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away” (SC 39).

False confession

- **General, not humiliating**

- **Too late, acknowledging what can’t be hidden**

“Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done” (Josh 7:20).

“There is a vast difference between admitting facts after they have been proved and confessing sins known only to ourselves and to God” (PP 497).

- **Excuses or blames to avoid punishment**

“The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen 3:13). “The people took of ... the things” (1 Sam 15:21).

“To every acknowledgment of his guilt he adds an apology in excuse of his course, declaring that if it had not been for certain circumstances he would not have done this or that for which he is reproved. (SC 40).

- **Momentary and temporary**

“Saul said, ‘I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly’” (1 Sam 26:21).

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Pro 28:13).

1. **Secret sin, known only to God, should be *privately* confessed alone to Him.**

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only” (SC 38). Acknowledging the our specific sins to God is *always* the first step.

2. **Wrongs should be *privately* confessed to individuals who have suffered harm from them.**

“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23-24). “They may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them” (SC 38). Restoring relationships with those we have wronged by humbling acknowledging our sorrow for the injury and pain we have caused them is our responsibility.

3. **Public faults should be *publicly* confessed.**

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (Jas 5:16). “They may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed” (SC 38).

Biblical Example of True Confession (Jdg 10:6-16)

The sin: The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.

The rebuke: So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of ... the people of Ammon.... They harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years ... so that Israel was severely distressed.

The confession: The children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, ‘We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!’

God’s response: Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? ... Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress.’

Deeper confession: The children of Israel said to the LORD, ‘We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray.’

Life changes: They put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD.

The result: The Lord “could no longer endure the misery of Israel” and raised up Jephthah to deliver them.