

"... REBUKE, ENCOURAGE ..."

The Apostle Paul gave this instruction to his disciple, friend and chief associate Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:2 *proclaim the word; be urgent in season [and] out of season, convict, rebuke, encourage, with all longsuffering and doctrine. [DARBY]*

The juxtaposition of "rebuke" and "encourage" is striking, unexpected and worthy of consideration. It is difficult to join the two diligently in our life and it was a good lesson for Timothy — as it is for us.

Why "rebuke"? To counter the yielding to diverse temptations and the falling astray, so that we may return to the Lord:

1 Peter 2:25 *For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. [KJV]*

This is especially important at times of widespread falsehood and deception, as the Apostle explained in the continuing instruction to Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:3–4 *For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. [NRSV]*

We have to realize that — everywhere and everyday — doctrines and metaphysical constructs, some even feigning pious intents, are offered to suit desires and selfish predilections of others — or of our own — rather than to proclaim the word of God and the simplicity of the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 1:23–25 *As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles; but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For what seems to be God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what seems to be God's weakness is stronger than human strength. [GNT]*

The importance of not letting ourselves be swayed by human-crafted philosophies and traditions is vital, as again the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colossae:

Colossians 2:8–10 *Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ. For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ, and you have been filled by Him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. [HCSB]*

At times, it is the cares of this world, which may hinder our progress and which must be rebuked.

In the words of the Lord:

Mark 4:19 *"and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." [NKJV]*

Hence the rebuke, so that the word — through us — may be fruitful:

Colossians 1:5b–6 *..... the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; [NKJV]*

How then to "rebuke"?

First, I have to discern the Spirit of God and not rely on my own feelings, predilections, traditions or liturgies. The Lord Jesus pointed this out to His disciples, when, on their way toward Jerusalem, they sought to punish a Samaritan village for not receiving them:

Luke 9:54–56a *When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." [NASB]*

The disciples thought of doing well by punishing the bad deeds of the villagers, but they were following their pride and predilections, not knowing the spirit; and they were, in turn — not punished — but rebuked and corrected by Jesus.

Hence,

1 John 4:1 *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. [KJ21]*

Then one may note how the rebuke of the disciples by Jesus was precise, concise and forceful, as it befits One, Who is in the world, but is not of the world:

John 8:23 *He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." [ESV]*

As this is true of all believers:

John 17:14–17 *"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." [NKJV]*

No less clear and forceful was the rebuke Jesus gave to the citizens of Capernaum for not repenting:

Matthew 11:23–24 "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." [NKJV]

The importance that the rebuke be forceful and unwavering is highlighted in the exchange between the Apostle Peter and Simon, a sorcerer, who sought to purchase the Spirit of God in order to enrich himself:

Acts 8:18–23 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." [NASB]

The recorded answer by Simon indicates that he heard and understood:

Acts 8:24 But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." [NASB]

Of course, rebuking may better begin with my own conscience: as the Apostle Paul wrote.

2 Corinthians 5:11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. [KJV]

After the "rebuke," why "encourage"?

Lest a stern and forceful rebuke induce outright rejection and rebellion, it is essential that it be understood as the fruit and manifestation of God's love, aimed at correcting and leading to repentance, not to punishment:

Revelation 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. [KJV]

At times, when my sin is rebuked repeatedly, I may not reject the rebuke, but I may despair and feel discouraged — as a hopeless one — incapable of living as the new creature that I am in Christ.

Romans 7:15, 19 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. [NIV]

I do need both the rebuke for correction and repentance and I need the encouragement to trust the Lord more, as I look forward to the day when — not by my will nor by my skills — but, by my relying on the Lord fully, I shall be as perfect as the Lord intends me to be:

Matthew 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. [KJV]

I deem this not to be a fantastic exaggeration, as soon as I remember that the speaker is not another ordinary mountebank, but the very Son of God: hence, I take the goal seriously to heart. For,

Luke 18:27 He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." [NKJV]

Discouragement has no place; rather it must yield to simple, faithful patience:

James 1:2–4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. [NKJV]

That's a good step for bringing encouragement to one another: explaining the need to be patient, if one's progress towards perfection is slow; furthermore encouragement needs to be offered with unwavering persistence, not just once:

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [NASB]

It is always essential that spiritual rebuke not be criticism, denigration, contempt, nor spite; rather just the word of the truth of the Gospel in a spirit of gentleness, as the Apostle taught:

Galatians 6:1a Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. [ESV]

Discouragement is the inevitable result of relying on myself, rather than on the Lord: it is the result of something coming between the Lord and myself. Therefore:

Psalms 121:1–3, 7–8 I look up to the hills, but where does my help come from? ²My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. ³He will not let you be defeated. He who guards you never sleeps. ⁷The Lord will protect you from all dangers; he will guard your life. ⁸The Lord will guard you as you come and go, both now and forever. [EXB]

Finally, the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that encouragement is the effort of the fellowship of believers:

Hebrews 10:24–25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. [ESV]