

Responding to Reproof in a Wise and Godly Manner

Commissioned

George Crawford | 02.19.23

Texts

Reading from the NASB Translation

- “Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.” - Proverbs 25:12
- “A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.” - Proverbs 17:10
- “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life” - Proverbs 6:23
- “³¹ He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the wise. ³² He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding. ³³ The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility.” - Proverbs 15: 31-33
- “A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.” - Proverbs 13:1
- “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.” - Proverbs 29:1

Introduction

- “...these three, apostolic epistles [I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus] ought to be constantly before the eyes of everyone who has obtained the position of a teacher in the Church.” - Augustine On Christian Doctrine, Book 4, Chapter 16
- “...but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” - 1 Timothy 3:15, NASB
- Scripture, our “method book”, as well as our “message book.”
- Read the chapter of Proverbs corresponding to the day of the month.

I. Properly Reactive

- Our Goal, to Properly Respond or React to the challenges of life, and particularly to rebukes or reproof
- Well-trained = Develop a “Reflexive” application of Proverbs
- Proper Underpinnings
 - Trust the Lord’s Sovereignty, His Omniscience, His Omnipotence and His Omnipresence
 - Maintain a Teachable humility
 - Don’t be a “fool” (Proverbs 17:10). Avoid having “Sin Make You Stupid!” “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid.” (Proverbs 12:1)

II. Our Responsibilities when Rebuked or Given Reproof

- “Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold
Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.” - Proverbs 25:12

A. Evaluate the Reproof/Rebuke - Three questions:

- Is the content truthful/accurate? (Ephesians 4:15)
- Is it wisely or properly given? (Proverbs 25:12; 15:1)
- What is the evident motivation? (Ephesians 4:15)
 - While final judgment belongs to God, the actions and words will reveal, at least in part, motives of the heart. (Luke 6:45; Proverbs 6:18; 26:23-25; 1 Corinthians 4:5)
 - *“What’s down in the well comes up in the bucket.” - Steve Lawson*

II. Our Responsibilities when Rebuked or Given Reproof

Continued

B. Take Appropriate Action:

- Make changes where needed.
- Repent, with a Godly sorrow (II Cor. 7:8-13) when appropriate.
- **Very Important: Seek wisdom, even counsel, in the nature of that change.**
 - **Possible to make change unwisely, and create a second problem.**

II. Our Responsibilities when Rebuked or Given Reproof

— *Three General Possibilities as to the type of Rebuke/Reproof*

- C. If truthful or accurate in content, wisely given and given with proper motivation, then listen, comply, and make the appropriate change.
- D. If unwisely given, but accurate and truthful in content, then important to listen and comply as needed.
- E. If it is inaccurate or untrue in content, improperly or unwisely given, and with an evident ungodly motive? Put another way, what if it is slanderous, malicious or unfair? A “bum rap?”

II. Our Responsibilities when Rebuked or Given Reproof

Continued

- IF it is slanderous, malicious and unfair (and this on a personal level)...then what?
 - Avoid public response
 - Two Steps to profit from it:
 - A. Examine Yourself
 - B. See to it that the charge is not true in the future.
- Supplemental Sources:
 - *The Right Way to Shake Off a Viper* - Cotton Mather
 - *A Christian's Cautions* - Jonathan Edwards
 - *Pastors and Their Critics* - Joel Beeke and Nick Thompson

III. How do we apply that within the Church to rebuke of the Church, often slanderous, usually from outside the Church?

- Generally avoid public response, other than when necessary.
 - *The power of silence (Luke 23:9; James 1:19-10)*
- “To all honest and just remarks we are bound to give due measure of heed, but to the bitter verdict of prejudice, the frivolous faultfinding of men of fashion, the stupid utterances of the ignorant, and the fierce denunciations of opponents, we may safely turn a deaf ear.” (Spurgeon , Lectures to My Students, 351; cited in Beeke, pp. 94)
- “Sometimes the best response to criticism is silence. Our wordlessness can speak volumes, often more than our words. Silence is not a failure to respond, but a particular way of responding to criticism. In certain situations, it is the most appropriate way to respond.” (Beeke, pp. 94)

III. How do we apply that within the Church to rebuke of the Church, often slanderous, usually from outside the Church?

- There may, eventually, be need for careful, precise and limited public response to maintain the good name of those entrusted with leadership in the Church and the truth and clarity of the Gospel. (Larger Westminster Catechism, Q. 144. Beeke pp. 95-99)
- Improve internally
- Examine the accuracy and truthfulness of the charge (If any)
- Examine the way in which the rebuke was given
- Examine the evident motivations

III. How do we apply that within the Church to rebuke, often slanderous, from outside the Church?

Continued

- **Internally, within the church:**
 - We are patient when wronged, gently correcting as needed - II Timothy 2:24-26
 - We teach truth and train in the discernment of error - Hebrews 5:14

III. How do we apply that within the Church to rebuke, often slanderous, from outside the Church?

Continued

- **Internally, within the church:**
 - We correct and warn as needed for the sake of the Gospel and the health of the Church:
 - Diotrephes - III John 9-10
 - Alexander the Coppersmith - II Timothy 4:14-15
 - We warn against the danger of speaking slanderous rebukes of others - James 3:9-10; 4:11
 - We “see to [our] duties and leave [our] reputation(s) to God.” (Richard Baxter)

IV. A Promise and a Warning

- A Promise of Blessing: Reproof/Rebuke and the right response to them are the “Way of Life” and lead to wisdom, understanding and honor. (Proverbs 25:12; 15:31-33)
- A Warning: If we do not listen to Reproof, tragedy may follow.
 - “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.” - Proverbs 29:1; “Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die.” (Proverbs 15:10)

Conclusion

Take Away(s)

- Seek the wisdom of God
- Don't be dismayed, rebel or resist when He provides it, in part, through rebuke or reproof.
- Listen carefully and evaluate wisely.
- Act (and speak) as needed
- Humbly trust God throughout the process.

Responding to Reproof in a Wise and Godly Manner

Commissioned

George Crawford | 02.19.23