

Leadership Principles & the Pastoral Epistles – 2015
WEEK 7: DEAL PROPERLY WITH OPPONENTS

Interpretive comments on 2 Tim. 2:23-26

This sixth and final element of effective spiritual leadership concerns how we are to respond to people who oppose God from *within* the church. This passage is one of several similar passages in the Pastoral Epistles which describe a *spectrum* of corrective responses to such people.

- 2 Tim. 4:2

- Titus 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:1,2

- 1 Tim. 5:20

- 1 Tim. 1:3

- 2 Tim. 2:23-26

- Titus 1:10,11

- Titus 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:20

The frequency of these passages suggests that this “ministry of correction” is both a *common* and *important* feature of church leadership. And Paul’s frequent and urgent reminders suggest that we are prone to *neglect* this ministry. We must be *willing* to do this, and we must be *able* to do it in a godly way!

Why is this so important?

Because we will misrepresent God if we don’t do this (Num. 20:2-12; 1 Sam. 2:27-34)

“We live in an age where people do not successfully integrate holiness and love. This is causing havoc in the theology and practice of Christians in almost every area of life. This affects leadership. Just as God’s nature is characterized by perfect mingling of holiness and love, leaders also must exemplify this dual nature.

We respond to God’s holiness with respect. We “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’” (Heb. 12:28-29). We respond to God’s love with intimacy. So “we have confidence [or boldness] to enter the Most Holy Place” (Heb. 10:19). In the same way, the relationship between a leader and those led is characterized by respect and intimacy.

But today we find it difficult to integrate holiness with love . . . How can leaders who are intimate with those they lead win their respect? By integrating holiness with love . . . Leaders, because of their holiness, must “*correct*” and “*rebuke*” (2 Tim. 4:2). Their intimacy does not prevent their responding to error and sin with indignation. The ability to encourage and to rebuke is essential for integrating love and holiness. These two ministries are placed together by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:2. The leader’s hatred of wrong will build respect if backed by exemplary living and loving concern for wrongdoers . . . If mingled with true

concern, holiness will win affection and result in a marked influence for good in the lives of all who follow such leaders.”¹

Because our church will become sick and ineffective if we don't do this (2 Tim. 4:1-4; 1 Cor. 5:1-8; Rev. 2:14,15,20)

Because Christians are more likely to repent if we do this (2:25,26)

Because others in the church will often be influenced by how we handle these situations (1 Tim. 5:20)

This is real servant work! No wonder Paul switches metaphors from household vessels to bond-servants (*doulos*). A Christian *doulos* is “one who gives himself up to another’s will . . . who is devoted to another to the disregard of one’s own interests.” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance) Others (including the people who are closest to the situation and should deal with it) will often be unwilling—leaving you to do the “dirty work.” *Yet to be omissive in this ministry is to be disloyal to Christ, and it is enough to ruin the ethos of your entire home group!*

This is one of the most common weak areas in adult home groups—for many reasons:

How can we become more effective in this ministry?

This is a complex issue. There are many variables (e.g., severity of the issue; position &/ influence of the opponent; how many are involved; etc.), so there is no formula. Consider these scriptural principles:

*Be sure that you have friends who are willing to help you with this ministry.*²

¹ Ajith Fernando, *Reclaiming Friendship* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), pp. 50-54.

² “One of my co-pastors . . . labored with me in my chief role, as an affirmer of the brothers and sisters and as a confronter of my sins and theirs. Our being willing to do this impossible work was in itself an expression of God’s glory. For me it is natural to avoid conflicts. But through mutual admonition God prospered our work with a peace and a unity that would have been impossible (otherwise).” C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, pp. 79,80.

If you are not living under God's grace, you will probably handle this ministry poorly.

- Why are you inordinately *fearful* of confronting?
- Why are you inordinately *angry* when people sin or don't respond properly to your correction?

Be sure to pray beforehand! This is spiritual work, and spiritual work is birthed and bathed in prayer (by you and other workers).

- Pray about your own attitude toward them and ask the Lord to give you His "Good Shepherd" love for them. Repent of any fears or sinful attitudes He exposes in you.
- Pray for their repentance, and reflect on situations in which you/others have repented after being confronted.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance when you speak to them.
- Pray for spiritual protection for the whole situation.

Consider getting advice from other seasoned leaders beforehand.

Paul's words here provide us with three key guidelines:

- *Move toward them* vs. withdraw from them, ignore the "elephant in the room," etc.—*counting on God's power to protect and uphold you.*
- *Conduct yourself redemptively* with kindness and patience and gentleness vs. "getting down in the mud" with them by quarreling, blowing up, being self-righteous, etc.—*reflecting on how patient and kind and gentle God has been with you when you have opposed Him.*
- *Focus "vertically" on what God says* and on their heart-attitude toward God vs. focus "horizontally" (e.g., meeting attendance; how they are affecting you, etc.)—*trusting the power of God's Word and Spirit to convict.* What would it look like to focus "vertically?"
 - You can ask: "What does God say about this issue?"
 - You can ask: "What does it look like to trust God in this area?"

- You can ask: "Will you ask God to reveal His will on this issue—with an advance commitment to do what He says (Jn. 7:17)?"

- You can ask: "Will you pray with me about this matter?"

Resist the temptation to "get it over with" in one conversation.

If they respond negatively and leave fellowship, communicate firmly but redemptively.

If they respond negatively but stay, decide carefully your next step.

- Formal church discipline is for serious commissive sin, *not* for chronic omissive sin.
- What might be appropriate steps to address chronic omissive sin?

Consider carefully what you should or should not say to others about this situation.