

## **Taking Rebuke or Not Answering Again**

Most of us have seen presidents and other public officials take all kind of abuse. Rarely do the leaders respond, and sometimes I have sat in amazement at how much a political leader takes without responding in like manner. In recent days, we have seen a more casual retort from Mr. Trump, but for the most part, politicians tolerate a great deal of criticism. I thought of all the ugly things that have been said about the Bushes and Clintons, deserved or not, but their responses were ordered and controlled.

One day, a ministry leader in our church came to me a little distraught; I asked if he needed anything. He began to talk, so we sat down; and for over an hour that man brought up mistakes I had made and situations I had mishandled in the course of the last ten to fifteen years. I was in shock, not just at how frail and sensitive the man was or how many things I did that bothered him, but that he remembered so many of those instances. I could not have remembered those situations if my life had depended on it, but obviously those moments, like a festering wound, had been building up poison inside him; this moment was the time he chose to pour it all out on me -- I had hurt him! I am the pastor, and obviously, I am in charge of the ministry (No matter what anyone else thought, and a wounded friend mattered.) and had some serious decisions to make. Could I trust this man to continue in the ministry? Could I continue to be his pastor? Was I man enough to take what he just dished out and not respond? Probably, six times during the hour of scolding, I said I was sorry and that I had no idea those things had hurt him so badly. At the end of the discussion, I shook his hand, apologized again, and walked away with my ego harmed, but that was all. In the years to follow, that man continued to lead his ministry. We stayed friends, and he effectively lead his ministry. On several occasions, I wondered if it would have been appropriate for him to simply say he was sorry for lashing out, or if I should have mentioned the passage, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father..." without wondering if he had ever read that verse. I decided that if God wanted me to be cursed, then we would trust God as David did with Shimei.

Another time, I was faced with a situation when a ministry policy crossed the opinion of a ministry leader. The situation was not specifically directed toward any individual; the policy had been in place for some time. The basic policy was an age break of who could serve in a certain ministry, whether it

was our nursery, our buses, or other ministries, we had already made choices as to what age to allow certain people to be able to do certain things. That set age was now affecting a parent who was a ministry leader. As in the first situation, I found myself getting a lengthy scolding, correcting, and he was chewing me out for having a policy with which this man did not agree. It all came in a lengthy text. In that situation, I felt it necessary to talk in person. I simply responded that it would be better if we spoke in person about this. His questions were hypothetical questions; he did not want an answer, he did not want a solution, he just wanted to vent or have me surrender and let him have his way. Obviously, I was not going to surrender. We had policies, and those policies were going to stand; but, I would happily try to express my friendship, my admiration, and my respect. This was a family who worked much in the ministry and deserves much gratitude and respect. At the same time, I took a very, serious tongue lashing via texting and was not able to talk personally with him about the issue. Again, I could have responded in critical texts but chose to let the situation die. The ministry has continued.

In both of the above situations, these men were not habitually disloyal, they were extremely hard working and doing their job well. I just made them angry! Had they been disloyal or critical to all those in our church, I would have had to do something differently, but they would never say anything to another, at least I did not think they would.

At one point or another in our ministry, we crossed a line that really bothered a man or lady, and their anger was poured out on me. Some situations arise in which we need to stand our ground and not give. In some situations, we need to graciously part company like Paul and Barnabas did when they differed over John Mark. One thing that God has always given me the grace to do is to control my tongue and to refrain my words. Perhaps there were times I should have lashed out in return as David did on his deathbed. David reminded Solomon of several people who had been a continual thorn in his flesh and gave instruction about getting rid of those guys before they caused Solomon trouble. I may one day feel those emotions, but for now, the ministry continues.

In mercy, God's blessings are upon us. To return evil for evil and railing for railing (I Peter 3:9) and to respond in like manner is certainly not Christlike. A self-controlled response is one of the most important qualities a preacher can possess. One might ask how often situations like this have occurred, and certainly because of my lack of memory, I cannot remember all of them, but I

would say at least every few years something like this takes place. Each time, I have to make the decision of how to respond. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (James 1:19) Solomon wrote, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." (Proverbs 15:1)

We have a "no denim" policy in our junior high and senior high school. A girl had been told that she could not wear the dress she was wearing that day. She did not receive any demerits, nor was she sent home from school; it was not a modesty issue, just a policy. I knew nothing of the situation. Then an irate mom came marching into my office and threw a dress on a hanger across my desk and in angry words wanted to know what was wrong with the dress. I had to admit it was beautiful. The dress had a soft, thin "denim like" vest sewn into the top. The dress probably cost a great deal and no doubt was beautiful on the teen. It was far from a denim skirt or cowboy jacket, but it was denim. Wow! Did I get a tongue lashing about that one.

Rules in our church ministry are set for the most part and were written many years ago by unknown men I can blame. But school rules change with time and styles and are set by our deacons most of the time. In both cases, they will cross someone someday. We have to be kind, gracious, and still be the leader.

When a musician did not like some decision I made, again I was assaulted by an angry woman, a long speech followed during which she said something like this, "If you were any kind of a man you would...." So now it was my lack of manhood that was the trouble. After she was done, I graciously said I was sorry for mishandling the situation. (Often we do mishandle situations, though the act be right, the method may be failed.) Then I said if it would make her feel better, I would get on my knees and apologize and kiss her feet. But I continued, "When I get up off my knees I will still be the pastor and I will still make the decisions about how our ministry will be led."

That did not go over well, for "he speaketh as one that hath authority and not as the scribes." (She was not used to that.) I did not need to get ugly or loud, and in that case, we lost the family from the church. None of the other situations cost us a family. Some times you need to answer; other times you do not, but ALWAYS, you need to guard your words, control your response, and yield to the Holy Spirit -- that Christ would be honored in all things.

James 3:13 “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.”

vs. 14 “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.”

vs. 15 “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.”

vs. 16 “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.”

vs. 17 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

vs. 18 “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”

I am probably still pastoring because a youth pastor got me to memorize this passage and dozens of others on the tongue. “For the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity....”

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