

Reprove and Rebuke

So you are doing your best to live the life of a faithful Christian, but you know a brother or sister in Christ that has fallen away. What do you do? Do you go on living your life doing the best you can to be faithful, and pray that your fallen brother or sister might return to Christ? I believe everyone would agree the answer to that question is, yes. However, is that all God expects me to do, or does He expect more from me? In this lesson we will look at what the Bible has to say about reproving or rebuking someone that is living in error, according to God. We will examine if we are commanded by God to reprove and rebuke our brothers or sisters in Christ when necessary, or not. First, let me clarify what those two words mean. Reprove, means to scold or correct usually gently or with kindly intent. Let us not forget this is to be done with kindly intent. Rebuke, means to express sharp disapproval or criticism of (someone) because of their behavior or actions. I do not pretend to be a scholar, so I could be wrong, but rebuke sounds like it is a stronger action than reproving.

Reprove and rebuke command

Proverbs 28:23 “He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.” and **Ecclesiastes 7:5** “It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.” Trying to help someone realize their error, so they can stop it, does them more good than trying to flatter them. It also helps if the rebuke is given in a tone that is not angry or arrogant, and can be perceived as an act of kindness and not superiority.

Luke 17:3-4 “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Jesus himself, tells us if someone trespasses against us, to talk to them about it. This prevents us from sitting around getting angrier and angrier about something someone did. This means we need to talk to the person that has wronged us, not everybody on the planet but them. By talking to the person that wronged us we let them know there is a problem, perhaps they were not even aware of. This gives them a chance to say they are sorry, and for you to forgive them. If all goes well the rift is healed, or at least begins to heal. If your brother or sister does not want to be forgiven and will not repent, at least you are doing God’s will by being ready to forgive them and not sitting around letting anger fester. This also means, when someone seeks our forgiveness God wants us to forgive them, even though sometimes it might be hard or take time.

Ephesians 5:11-13 “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” Christians are commanded by God, through Paul, to do more than simply not take part in sinful activities, and thus stay in the light. God commands Christians to shine a light on sinful works by reproving them. So Christians are commanded to show disapproval of sinful works, not just not participating in them. If everyone in your office is drinking, without arrogance, let them see you are not participating. If people are sitting around telling dirty jokes

do not show approval of their sinful behavior. If a Christian does not act differently than the world around them does, then they are a part of the world, and not separate from it.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.”

Christians are commanded to be patient with, but to also warn those that are in error. Christians are also commanded to not return evil for evil. It can be very hard to do that, but remember as Christians we want to try to win over this errant person to Christ. Christians need to render good for evil. This can potentially deescalate a bad situation and keep it from getting worse. It also keeps the Christian from getting involved in poor behavior, that is not pleasing to God.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.” Christians are commanded to withdraw fellowship from a fallen brother or sister. This is done to get the fallen brother or sister to examine their behavior and correct it. Hopefully, this causes the fallen brother or sister to repent and return to Christ as well as being in fellowship with their brethren again. This is always a step taken out of love to try and save a lost soul.

2 Timothy 4:1-2 “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Christians are commanded to preach the Word, which means sometimes reproving and rebuking fallen brothers and sisters, to try and bring them back into the fold. Love is not ignoring sinful behavior which will lead to one being lost, but rather exposing sinful behavior to try and save a lost soul.

Titus 1:10-14 “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.” Sometimes a Christian might have to rebuke sinful behavior sharply, but even then, this is done to try and correct sinful behavior to save lost souls.

Biblical examples of reproving and rebuking

1 Samuel 19:1-6 “And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee. And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good: For he did put his life in his hand, and slew

the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.” Hopefully, most of us will never find ourselves in the position that Jonathan was.

Jonathan knew his father, King Saul, wanted to commit the sin of murder, and kill his friend David. Jonathan also knew David had done nothing wrong. Jonathan was willing to take a courageous stand and rebuke his father. Because of Jonathan’s willingness to try and rebuke his Father he was able to stop a sin from happening. Probably most of us will face situations far less dramatic than this one, but we could still rebuke someone to try and prevent, or stop them from sinning. Don’t forget any reproving or rebuking one does, needs to come from a place of caring about the other persons soul.

2 Samuel 12:1-9 “And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.” David had committed adultery, and ordered his lovers husband to be set up to die in an upcoming battle. Nathan was willing to stand before his king and rebuke this sinful behavior. Because of Nathan’s willingness to rebuke David, the King was willing to examine his behavior and repent of it. That is exactly what you should hope happens if you rebuke someone, that they repent of their sinful conduct and are in good standing with God again.

Luke 3:19-20 “But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.” John the baptist rebuked the sinful behavior of Herod, and because of that was imprisoned and later beheaded. John paid a high price for rebuking Herod, but by doing so he tried to help Herod change the sinful path he was on. In this case, as far as we know Herod did not turn from his sinful behavior. If Herod did not change, he lost his soul. However, John was willing to try and help Herod, and even though this attempt at rebuking sinful behavior failed, John was right before God. John did what he could to try and help someone see their sinful behavior.

Luke 11:37-40 “And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?” Jesus himself rebuked a Pharisee to try and help them. Jesus tried to help this Pharisee understand that being right with God by making sure we are obedient to his will, and our inward heart is right with God, is much more important than outward appearances and ceremonies. Jesus showed care for this Pharisee by trying to show them what they needed to change to be right with God. We can only hope this Pharisee heeded Jesus’s advice. Jesus’s actions showed love for this Pharisee, because he tried to teach this person to do better. Jesus cared about the Pharisee’s soul more than his feelings.

Acts 13:6-12 “And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” Paul rebuked Elymas, because Elymas was trying to prevent others from hearing the Gospel. Paul cared about the souls of those people that were present enough he rebuked Elymas, so that other people would not lose an opportunity to hear the Gospel. Had Paul not rebuked Elymas, who can say when these people might have heard the Word of God. (Now Paul did something we can not do today. He used the power given to him by the Holy Spirit to perform a miracle. Paul blinded Elymas for a season. This demonstrated to everyone present that Paul was teaching what God wanted taught.) While you and I do not have the power of the Holy Spirit like Paul, we can still follow his example and not let someone prevent the Gospel from being taught to others.

What is the desired result of reproving and rebuking?

Matthew 18:15-17 “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” and **Luke 17:3-4** “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Rebuking a brother or sister in Christ, if done correctly, is not done to be mean or prove you are better than them. The entire point of reproving or rebuking is to regain your brother or sister in Christ. This action is taken

from a place of caring about their soul enough to say something to try and help them see their errant behavior, and change it. The goal of reproving or rebuking someone is to help cause them to examine sinful behavior and repent of it, so they can be forgiven and get back on a path to Heaven.

Jude 20-23 “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” When done from a place of caring, as it should be done. Reproving or rebuking a brother or sister is truly done to try and turn them away from eternal destruction. These actions are taken to try and spark repentance, so forgiveness can be gained.

Conclusion

Hopefully, in this lesson we have seen that we are indeed commanded by God, to reprove or rebuke a fallen brother or sister when necessary. This is done not as an act of arrogance but rather as an act of kindness and concern, because one wants their brother or sister in Christ to not be lost. We must all keep ourselves on the straight and narrow, but from time to time we all might need a hand. One day you might reprove or rebuke a fellow Christian, to try and help get them back on the path to Heaven. Another day a brother or sister in Christ might reprove or rebuke you, because they want to help get you back on the path to Heaven. We have to remember these actions are always to be taken out of love for someone else’s soul, never anger or arrogance. We also need to remember if someone reprove or rebukes us, they might be doing it out of love for our soul, and try to not become angry about it.