

Class 202 Leadership in the New Testament Church, Part 2: Session Three Notes

He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes heavy with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. (Psalm 78:70-72)

Some Thoughts on Dealing with Criticism and Opposition

And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, able to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose; if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

Why talk about our response to criticism and opposition? Is this practical?

1. We will inevitably encounter criticism in the ministry. How we respond to it will be one of the key determinants in how quickly and how well we grow.
2. It is also inevitable that Christians will encounter false brethren and false teachings. Some of this is ignorant, and some is deliberately propagated.
3. The ability to respond well to criticism and opposition is a grace from God, not a matter of personality. To the degree that our responses are driven by our human temperament, we have cut ourselves off from the Spirit's voice and leading.
 - a. Outward manifestations of the problem: Strong-souled, forceful people may lack the sensitivity to respond to people well; weak-souled, sensitive people may lack the strength required to confront others appropriately.
 - b. Inward effects of the problem: strong-souled leaders may become angry, controlling, and quick to give up on others; weak-souled leaders may become indecisive and passive-aggressive, nurturing bitterness against those with whom they find themselves in conflict. In either case, failure to follow the Lord's prescriptions for dealing with people can lead to cynicism and burnout.

4. It is a Kingdom essential that we walk in God's way with these matters, so that His life and grace can be released into them.

The leader's public response to criticism and opposition.

The word "strive" in 2 Timothy 2 literally means *to make war*; metaphorically speaking it means *to quarrel*. The leader must avoid arguments and quarrels against those who oppose Christ and who oppose him. Paul is very clear that the leader **must not** "make war" against others in the Body. It is no secret that "wars and fightings" can arise, but the leader more than anyone must not let himself be baited into entering a fight. He must not hastily take sides in disputes between brothers. Paul contrasts striving, contentious behavior with four positive skills and attitudes every shepherd and aspiring shepherd needs:

1. Gentleness
2. Ability to teach
3. Patience
4. A meek approach to instructing those in opposition

Gentleness.

Gentleness here is kindness. The leader must remain kind to those who oppose. The goal of Christlikeness is the restoration of the one in opposition. Of Christ it was said, "A bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench..." (Matthew 12:30) The bruised reeds are those who are broken; the smoking flax are those whose lamps are ready to go out.

Ability to teach.

Not everyone who serves as an undershepherd will be called upon to minister the Word to wider circles in the Body. However, in any setting the leader must have a firm grasp of the

issues involved and educate himself as best as possible so that he can speak intelligently about the matters in question. This includes questions of the Word.

Patience.

This word means to tolerate evils which are done to us. It is a sad reality that evil is done to the Christian ministry in a variety of ways. Anyone standing in leadership will quickly see exactly how “dead to self” he is. Leaders must focus on restoring people and achieving a godly resolution of problems no matter how they feel personally about being mistreated or slandered. *Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* (1 Peter 4:19) Part of being a Christian leader, as much as we may wish it were not so, is simply being able to “take it,” through God’s help.

Meekness.

The word meekness here means humility; in this context it means not promoting or thinking of one’s self in the matter but promoting what God cares about. The leader must act with humility when seeking to correct people and adjust situations. He does not think, act or behave as though he himself were incapable of error, but he acts as one who has been appointed by God to stand in a place of authority. All of us in Body of Christ need to deal with people in governmental authority on the grounds of that authority they have received from God, not on the grounds of their humanity.

How does the leader react in times of a challenge to his authority? It is significant that Paul uses the phrase “*the servant of the Lord.*” This term was used in the Bible to describe those who received governmental authority from God – men such as Moses and David. When we read their lives we are struck by their meekness in their refusal to defend themselves.

Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth. When Miriam reviled him (Numbers

12), he did not answer her back again but in fact, when God punished her, he even made intercession for her. Whenever possible, the issue must not become the slight done to the leader, but the need to see people restored and conflicts resolved. The leader does not need to defend himself; God will vindicate him. This is because by vindicating the leader, God is vindicating Himself. Self-defense should only be used to avoid discredit upon the Christian ministry itself, and even then it should only be done to protect the people of God.

The leader must be willing, graciously and meekly, to show the one in opposition where he has missed God. The shepherd bears the burden of pursuing the wandering sheep. No shepherd indignantly refuses to go after erring sheep, insisting the sheep come back penitently first. This is not the way of Christ (thank God He did not treat us this way!) and it must not be our way either. When Paul spoke of those in error, he did so weeping, not breathing out threats and slaughter – that was his old man!

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ... (Philippians 3:18)

The leader's private response to criticism and opposition.

In the conclusion of the Beatitudes, Jesus warns us to expect some rough treatment:

Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (Matt. 5:11) The New Testament writers had a clear and unsentimental attitude about the reality of "spots" in our love feasts. Jude warned us about those who would go in the way of Cain, Balaam, and Korah. We are to expect reviling, persecution, and slander of every kind.

But a few verses later, Jesus does tell us how to keep our hearts unspoiled: *Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you, and persecute you.* (Matt. 5:44)

The leader must love his enemies.

We must continue to wish and pray the best for those who attack us. This requires the love of Christ flowing out of us, not human love alone. You will need to ask God for it.

He must bless them.

I think Jesus had both senses in mind: we should *speak well* of our enemies as best we can; we should also *call down divine favor* on them. A man who loves and blesses his enemies has a heart of soil which will not receive the root of bitterness.

He must pray for them.

He must ask God's mercies on them, even as Moses interceded for his rebellious sister. Stephen, the first martyr, echoed Jesus' prayer of forgiveness. Can we do less on behalf of those who are not persecuting us to death but merely wounding us?

Jude the Lord's brother, after warning the Church about the mockers of the last days, told us to keep ourselves in God's love. *But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, **keep yourselves in the love of God...*** (Jude 20-21)

The Greek word translated *keeping* in this sense means to watch over, not to protect or hide. We are to watch over our hearts and make sure we remain in God's love, being careful that nothing contrary to love is entering them.

Keys for surviving the storms of criticism, rejection, and opposition.

1. Pray and call upon the Holy Spirit of counsel and might. (Oh, what peace we often forfeit...)
2. If you haven't already done so, hurry up and die already. Paul had become dead to either criticism or to praise. He had his judgment and his praise from God alone: *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by man's judgment: yes, I do not judge my own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet I am not justified by this, but he that judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise from God.* (1 Cor. 4:3-5) Are you immune to both criticism and flattery?
3. Profit from criticisms. In many criticisms there are grains of truth.
4. Know that it is God who has placed you where you are.
5. Therefore also know that God will vindicate you, in order to vindicate His own authority.
6. Know who you are in Him and know why you are there. *[Him] we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; towards this end I also labor, striving according to his working [energy], which works in me mightily [in dunamis].* (1 Cor. 1:28-29) Paul knew that God had given him a task, supernatural power for miraculous ministry, and supernatural energy to push on through every challenge of that ministry.
7. Have faith that Jesus is building His Church. The Church of Christ will not only survive the opposition and divisions of men, but also our mistakes in leadership. He is growing you – not just as a believer but as a leader!