



Rebuking Sin

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-2

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This morning we return to our study of 1 Timothy, a letter written by the apostle Paul to a young man preaching in the city of Ephesus. As we have learned up to this point, the church in Ephesus has some issues. The church is in danger of drifting, and by the time we get to the book of Revelation, they will have left their first love; they will have drifted completely. Paul warns about this, he sees it happening, and in the book of 1 Timothy, Paul gives some advice to this young preacher as he tries to strengthen the church. And part of his inspired advice is that Timothy needs to confront those who are living in sin. He needs to confront those who are teaching what is not right.

And this idea of confronting sin is nothing new. We have some guidelines all through the New Testament, explaining how it needs to be done. We think of Jesus and what he said in Matthew 18, how if someone sins against us personally, we need to pull them aside privately to talk about it. If they listen, great! But, if they refuse to listen, we take 1 or 2 others with us to witness the process, and if they still refuse to listen, we take it to the church. And if they refuse to listen to the church, we are to treat them as we might treat an outsider - they are no longer a part of us, but they are in need of being won back.

We also have passages like 1 Corinthians 5, where a man is caught up in sin, and Paul explains that the man needs to be removed from the church before the sin spreads to the rest of the congregation. We have passages like James 5:19-20 where we have an emphasis on the importance of confrontation. If we turn someone away from sin and back to the paths of righteousness, we cover a multitude of sins. So, it is critically important that we speak up and confront sin as we see it (especially in the church), but we also know that confronting sin is usually uncomfortable. I hope it is uncomfortable! If you are completely comfortable confronting sin, if you love telling everybody what they are doing wrong, we might need to confront you about that. So, we are not talking about going around busting everybody anytime we see them doing something we don't like, but we are talking about sin. In our Christian family, when we see somebody continuing in sin and heading down a dark path, we need to say something. And it is uncomfortable. It is much easier to just try to avoid this. It is much easier to just talk to other people about what we see in this person's life. It is much easier cut this person out of our lives without dealing with it. However, we really need to confront sin as we see it. So the question for us is: How do we do this? We have the guidelines as to the process, but what attitude do we need to have?

We know that Timothy was somewhat timid, and I find that interesting, because Paul gives this young man some inspired advice that makes this process just a bit easier. By the way, this picture up here has nothing to do with our lesson. This is Stephen's Falls out at Governor Dodge State Park, a beautiful place about an hour west of here. Nevertheless, today we come to 1 Timothy 5:1-2, and the passage is incredibly simple. By way of encouragement, as to the attitude Timothy needs to have as he confronts sin in the congregation, notice, please, 1 Timothy 5:1-2. Paul says,

Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

I hope we can keep our Bibles open as we look at these two verses, but even before we dig in, I want us to notice how UNIVERSAL this is. Yes, Paul wrote this to Timothy, but think about how EVERYBODY is included in this. When I am listening to somebody else speak, I hate it when somebody says, "Raise your hand" if this thing I'm talking about applies to you. When I listen, the introvert in me just wants to listen! So, I would just ask you to think about this for a second. Paul gives advice concerning how to confront those who are OLDER than we are and those who are YOUNGER than we are. Doesn't that apply to pretty much all of us? If I were to ask that all of us who know somebody OLDER than us in the church raise our hand, I think everybody here except for one person would have a hand up. And if I were to ask that we raise the other hand if we know somebody YOUNGER than we are in the church, all of us except for one person here today would have the other hand up! Pretty much all of us can figure out what Paul is saying here. When it comes to confronting sin, we just need to have some general idea of whether a person is older than we are or younger than we are.

I know there is always a lot of discussion about relationships between the generations - we have the Baby Boomers, and Generation X, and the Millennials, and all that, and then we have all of the characteristics of these various generations. And sometimes it is so complicated. And then I think of myself and the people I know, and half of those assumptions don't seem to apply. And then you need to know when somebody was born, and then math gets involved, and math is hard! But here, Paul keeps it very simple, doesn't he! This is how we confront sin in those who are older than we are, and this is how we confront sin in those who are younger than we are.

So, for the rest of our time together, I'd like for us to look at four principles from these two verses, four guidelines for confronting sin in the church.

I. As we go back to verse 1, we find Paul explaining to Timothy that he is NOT TO SHARPLY REBUKE an older man.

And although this applies especially to the older men in the congregation, it seems that the older men just happen to come first. And I say that because of the word Paul uses here. It's the only time this word is used in the New Testament, and it refers to "striking at" somebody - to strike at or rebuke with words. And that is why the NASB translates this as "***sharply rebuke.***" So, it's not as if we can go around "***sharply rebuking***" people, as long as we hold back from doing this with the older men of the congregation. "Feel free to verbally assault the older women and the younger men and women, but please just don't lash out at the older men" - this is not what Paul is saying!

At the same time, we should also realize that Paul is not condemning all "rebuking." All of us need to be rebuked from time to time. In fact, he will go on to use a different word for "***rebuke***" later in this chapter (in

verse 20). Hopefully we will get to it in a few weeks. In that context, he's referring to the actual shepherds of the congregation, ***"Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning."*** The word he uses there means, "to expose, convict, or reprove." He uses the same word in 2 Timothy 3:16, when he says that, ***"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."*** And he uses the same word a few verses later in 2 Timothy 4:2 (in our scripture reading from last week), where Timothy is told to, ***"...preach the word; [to] be ready in season and out of season; [to] reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."*** So yes, there are times when we might need to have our sins exposed, we might need to be reprovved, we might need to rebuke each other from time to time. But here, in 1 Timothy 5:1, he uses a different word as he says that we are not to ***"sharply rebuke"*** an older man. It seems, then, that even in our rebuking, we are not to be HARSH with our words, we are not to STRIKE OUT at somebody with the words that we use.

And certainly, this might have been a bit tempting for a young preacher. He is sent to this congregation, and as a young man, perhaps some of the older men at church might not appreciate this young guy coming in and telling them what to do. And so the temptation would be for Timothy to lash out, to go on the attack, to strike out with his words. But, Paul reminds him that he is not to ***"sharply rebuke"*** the older men.

And before we move on from this first big idea, I should also point out that it is connected to the older men in particular - again, not that we can be harsh with everybody else, but we do need to realize that older men do sometimes need to be corrected. Age and experience do not make us immune from doing or teaching something that is wrong. And sometimes those who are younger are those who happen to see and recognize sinful behavior. We think of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and we realize that the child was the only one who could see what was happening. So, when those who are young see sinful behavior in those who are older than they are, they must rebuke, but it must not be done ***"sharply."*** So, first of all, Timothy is told that he is not to ***"sharply rebuke an older man."***

- II. This leads us to a second big idea in this passage, the idea that instead of a sharp rebuke, we are to ENCOURAGE the older men - we are to APPEAL to them as we would APPEAL to our own fathers.

And again, in a sense, this seems to apply to everybody. Instead of a sharp rebuke, most of us appreciate some encouragement! If you must rebuke somebody, the instruction here is to be encouraging with it. And this word ***"appeal"*** is the idea of calling somebody to your side for encouragement. It is the same word Jesus used to refer to the Holy Spirit in John 14, 15, and 16 - the Spirit would come as a ***"Comforter,"*** Jesus said. The Spirit would come as an Encourager. In a sense, the Holy Spirit would stand beside the Apostles as they spoke and as they wrote their inspired letters. The word translated as ***"appeal"*** here in the NASB is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as to "beg, beseech, comfort, conciliate, encourage, entreat, exhort, implore, invite, plead, request, or urge." So, we are getting a pretty clear picture of what Paul is suggesting here. If somebody comes to me and stands beside me and helps me work through something (if they comfort, encourage, entreat, invite, plead, or urge), it is much better than somebody standing directly in front of me, perhaps shaking their finger in my face. It's the difference between a ***"sharp rebuke"*** and an ***"appeal."*** One is perhaps unnecessarily confrontational, but the other is encouraging. One approach will perhaps cause me to defend myself, while the other approach will perhaps convince me that I need to listen to this. Timothy, then, will need to rebuke from time to time, but the way that he rebukes seems to be just as important as the rebuke itself. And certainly this is very much parallel to Paul's instruction to the churches of Galatia in Galatians 6:1-2, ***"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of***

gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. That word “**restore**” was used in the ancient world to refer to fishermen “restoring” or “mending” their nets at the end of the day - patiently working through those nets and repairing the damage one stitch at a time. The word was used to refer to the work of a surgeon in setting a bone. The doctor would make it right, but it had to be done gently. And in the same way, when we rebuke, we are not to do it “**sharply**,” but we are to do it by making an “**appeal**.”

III. And this leads us to the next big idea, as Paul tells Timothy to basically treat each member of the congregation like FAMILY.

Now, I realize that not all of us have a good relationship with those in our own families. Many years ago, I remember covering some passage where God is described as being our “Father,” and somebody approached me later, almost in tears, explaining that she had a terrible relationship with her own father. And so, for her, it was extremely difficult to think of God as being her Father. For her, that was quite negative. So, if you have some serious issues in your family, this might a little difficult to apply, but in general, most of us at least try to interact with our parents and our brothers and sisters with some level of love and respect. Again, not always! Sometimes we can be more harsh with those in our own families than we would ever be with people out there in the world. And it shouldn’t be that way. But let’s look at this in an ideal way. Ideally, we treat those in our own families as we ourselves would like to be treated. And that seems to be what Paul is suggesting here. We think about Timothy. As far as we know, Timothy’s father never obeyed the gospel. His mother was Jewish, but his father was a Gentile. But most cultures, generally speaking, value treating those who are older than us, with respect. Most cultures value honoring our parents. And in the same way, most cultures seem to encourage respect and love between brothers and sisters. That doesn’t mean we will always get along, but it means that know that we should.

So, with this in mind, the church is often described as a family, as the household of God, as the household of faith. And this is especially important as we think about those early Christians. If you came from a Jewish family, the chances were high that your family would disown you for obeying the gospel. And it was pretty much the same on the Gentile side. If you left a life of worshiping Artemis and all of the other Greek gods, your family would take it personally, and you were out. So, these disowned Jews and Gentiles would come together in the church, and they were family. They were all they had. And so, as Christians, they were family. They spent time together. They shared meals with one another. And sometimes they had to confront each other. And just like in a real family, we cannot ignore sin, but we have to call it out. This is what Paul addresses here. When you need to call out sin in somebody older than you are, handle it as you would with your own father or mother. And when you need to call out sin in somebody younger than you are, handle it as you would with your own brother or sister. We hold each other accountable, but we do it with respect - again, not with sharp and biting words, but by calling them to our side. As best we can, we rebuke in an encouraging way. We appeal to them as we would appeal to someone in our own family.

I did notice something here: If I am older, I am to correct someone younger than me not as my child, but as my brother or sister. And I do think that is significant. Most of us appreciate feeling respected. Those who are older usually appreciate being asked for advice on things. Those who are younger don’t like getting dismissed as inexperienced. The young and the old, then, both appreciate being respected. A few months ago, my daughter came to me and said, “Dad, could you remind me how to refill the washer fluid in the car?” Why, yes I would! I just so happen to be an expert in all things washer fluid! It sure did feel good to be needed! All of us need to be respected - the young and the old. And that seems to be important here. If I am older and I need to

call you out on something, I should not be coming to you as if you were my child, but I need to be coming to you just as I would approach my own sister - not in a condescending way, but I need to be approaching you as my spiritual equal. Because we are equal. And this ties in to that passage in Matthew 18 that we thought about earlier. Jesus says that when our **"BROTHER"** sins against us, we are to take it to him privately. He is our **"brother,"** and we are to approach him with respect, we are to approach him looking for a solution that works for both of us, we are to approach him as we try to assume the best of him, just as we would appreciate someone approaching us if the situation were reversed. So basically, we treat others just as we would like to be treated.

IV. And this leads us to the last big idea here, and this one seems a bit more specific than the others - this is something of a bonus commandment - as Paul tells Timothy that HE IS TO APPEAL TO THE YOUNG WOMEN AS SISTERS, WITH ALL PURITY.

Not that he can be impure with the older men and women and the other young men, but Paul knows that Timothy, as a young man himself, might face a special challenge here, a special temptation. And as was true back then is still true today, that many men do not go around thinking pure thoughts all the time! And so, sometimes, we as men need a reminder from God. And this applies especially to Timothy as he might need to correct some sin in the lives of the young women there in Ephesus. The young women are not to be treated as objects or as possible conquests, but if he finds himself needing to correct something, Timothy is to extremely careful to appeal to the young women **"as sisters, with all purity."** Not just **"purity,"** but **"all purity."** He is to go above and beyond to make sure that he treats these women just as he would treat his own sister. That doesn't mean that he needs to tease them or argue with them all the time, but he needs to be sure that his behavior is pure in every way.

And again, I realize that this is not how women are treated - not then, and not now. Today especially, we have an emphasis on "consent," don't we? And really, pretty much anything goes these days, as long as it happens between two consenting adults. Paul's standard, though, is much higher: You are to appeal to the young women **"as sisters, with all purity."** Many of us know of preachers and other religious leaders who have fallen in this area. But this is nothing new, so Paul gives the warning. And really, this applies to all of us. Yes, this letter is written to the preacher, but all of us are called to rebuke sin, and when we do, we need to treat each other with **"all purity."**

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of today's study, let's remember that the church really is a family. And before we complain that it doesn't really feel that way, let's ask ourselves: What are we personally doing to make the church feel like a family? Do we think of the older men as fathers? Do we think of the older women as mothers? Do we think of the younger men as brothers? Do we think of the younger women as sisters? And if we do, what does that look like? Or maybe we could ask: What can I do this week to encourage a family-like spirit here at this congregation? Can I make a call? Can I send a message? Can I stop by for a visit? And if I'm worried that a brother or sister might be slipping away, what should I do? Paul's suggestion is that we confront sin - if they are older than we are, we treat them like we might treat our mother or father, and if they are younger than we are, we treat them with the same love and concern that we would show to our own brother or sister.

Lord willing, we can come back together next Lord's Day morning to look at a special obligation we have to the widows in the congregation. I would invite you to be looking at verses 3-16 as we prepare for that study. Until then, we want to invite anyone who needs to obey the good news to do so. We don't know what this week holds. We don't know whether you might be here for the first time or the last time, but we want the world to know that Jesus poured himself out into human form, he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, and he did this for us. He was completely innocent but offered himself as a sacrifice. We accept his sacrifice by believing that he is the Son of God, by making that confession publicly, by turning away from sin, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism. In Romans 6, Paul explains that we are baptized into his death. At that point, our sins are forgiven, and we are born into God's family. If we as a church can help with this, if we can help with some other spiritual need or concern, we invite you to get in touch. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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