

# SHOWING AN ABUNDANT LOVE

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In 1 Corinthians 11:1, we are also instructed to be followers of the Apostle Paul even as he also is of Christ. One of the ways Paul followed Christ was by gently correcting his brothers and sisters in Christ when they fell into sin. In 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, Paul reminds his brethren in Corinth that he had written to them to show his abundant love towards them: “And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.”

## **Paul’s example of correcting the Corinthians**

Rebuking sin is a necessary task and is something that God commands us to do (Eph 5:11; Titus 2:15). Jesus gave us the example of doing this, as he testified of the world’s evil deeds (John 7:7). It must be done without preference or partiality towards anyone, including elders in the church (1 Tim 5:19-21). And the scriptures are the text we use to reprove sin (2 Tim 3:16-17; Titus 1:9-14). This is precisely what Paul did with the Corinthians. The church at Corinth was plagued with many problems, and the epistle of 1 Corinthians contains many rebukes and admonitions. By the inspiration of God, Paul wrote to them in that letter and told them to stop having division, envy and strife among them (1 Cor 1:10-15; 3:1-7,21-23; 4:6-7). He also rebuked them for tolerating sin within the church and commanded them to deliver to Satan the unrepentant fornicator that was among them (1 Cor 5). He also admonished them for going to law one with another, for taking their brethren to law before unbelievers (1 Cor 6:1-8). He also reproved them for being a stumbling block to their weaker brethren and causing them to defile their conscience by eating things sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8; 10:14-33). And he corrected them for having women with short hair and men with long hair (1 Cor 11:1-16), for corrupting the Lord’s supper (1 Cor 11:17-34), for giving improper esteem to the gift of tongues (1 Cor 12:28-31; 14:1-25), and for having confusion in their assemblies (1 Cor 14:26-40). Finally, Paul warned them against the false teaching that was among them pertaining to the doctrine of the resurrection (1 Cor 15). Concerning all these rebukes, Paul said in that first epistle, “*I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you*” (1 Cor 4:14). These rebukes were not hateful or destructive or in any way unchristian.

## **God’s definition of love**

Many brethren (especially the ones who are on the receiving end of deserved correction) label any kind of rebuke of sin (especially a public one) and any exercise of church discipline against unrepentant sinners as being hateful. But 2 Corinthians 2:4 reveals that rebuking erring brethren and practicing proper church discipline is not only not hateful, it demonstrates *abundant love* (see also 2 Cor 7:12). Paul had written to the Corinthians, confident that they would rectify (i.e. repent of) their problems (particularly the problem with the fornicator) and give Paul joy rather than sorrow when he came to them (2 Cor 2:3). He had truly shown the Corinthians an abundant love by writing them as he had (by being willing to be God’s inspired writer) and correcting them for their sins. The “second greatest commandment” is to “love thy

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neighbor as thyself” (Matt 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8). This commandment was first given in Leviticus 19:18. But in its original context, this love of one’s neighbor is demonstrated by rebuking him when he is in sin. Leviticus 19:17 says, “*Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.*” A person who dies in their sins cannot go to heaven where Jesus is (John 8:21). Instead, unrepentant sinners will receive death as their wages (Rom 6:23; Jas 1:15), and spend eternity in hell (Matt 25:41-46; 2 Thes 1:7-10; Rev 21:8). If we know someone is in sin, and we “suffer sin upon him” (Lev 19:17) by saying nothing to correct him, then we are helping him go to hell. That is why God equates *not* rebuking a sinner with hatred (Lev 19:17). James 5:20 says, “*Let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*” Reproof and rebukes are necessary ingredients in converting a sinner from the error of his way, which is why Proverbs 27:5 says, “*Open rebuke is better than secret love.*” As always, Jesus is our ultimate example. He said, “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent*” (Rev 3:19). The “new commandment” that Christ gave to us is “That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (Jn 13:34). Therefore, we must rebuke our erring brethren in order to obey the new commandment and exhibit the love of Christ.

## **Being wise and obedient**

We must also not forget that the *manner* in which we correct, reprove, or restore others must be loving. It is essential that the truth always be spoken *in love* (Eph 4:15). When we see a brother overtaken in sin, the Lord says, “Restore such an one *in the spirit of meekness*” (Gal 6:1). This is part of bearing one another’s burdens and fulfills the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). “And the servant of the Lord *must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness* instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure 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 at his will” (2 Tim 2:24-26). We are to: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort *with all longsuffering* and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:2-4). Because the rebukes and reproof from God’s word is vital to our being turned away from all unrighteousness so that our souls may be saved, God says that the “*reproofs of instruction are the way of life*” (Prov 6:23; 10:17) and “the way of understanding” (Prov 9:6-9; 15:31-32; 19:25). A wise man will hear reproof and be rewarded (Psa 141:5; Prov 28:23), while those who reject it will be destroyed (Prov 9:6-9; 13:18; 15:5,10-12; 13:1; 29:1; Amos 5:10; Gal 4:16; Jas 1:22-25). There are two necessary components in this equation: “*As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear*” (Prov 25:12). Paul was a wise reprover, gently correcting the Corinthians for their sins and thereby showing them abundant love. Paul was confident the Corinthians would have obedient ears. May we also be wise reprovers and have obedient ears.