

You Shall Surely Rebuke Your Neighbour

Leviticus 19:15-18 & 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Halifax: 23 April 2017

Introduction:

As we are between sermon series at this time, I told you that I had planned to do a couple of sermons on specific topics.

- Today, as well as next week, I want to speak to you about a duty that is grossly neglected in the church of Jesus Christ.
- It is a huge problem in the church of Jesus Christ that has caused much damage to the people of God over the centuries—and it is a problem that I have observed in our congregation and in our Presbytery.
 - It is the neglect of the duty related to loving your neighbour.
 - It is the neglect of the duty to rebuke your neighbour when he sins.

Earlier, I read 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul addresses, in particular, the elders of the church of Corinth for neglecting the duty of formal church discipline.

- Paul is very hard on them.
 - They had a man in their congregation who was living in incest, and he had not been put out of the church!
 - Paul tells them how wrong this neglect is...
 - a) It is a display of pride and arrogance to think they can ignore this matter and that it won't adversely affect the whole congregation...
 - It will bring God's displeasure,
 - It will destroy their reputation in the community,
 - It will cause the members to think lightly of sin and to fall into it themselves.
 - b) And it is wrong to the offender in that he is not properly shown how unacceptable his behaviour is to Christ so that he might be restored...
 - c) And perhaps worst of all, it is a wrong to our Lord Jesus Christ who died to make us a holy people who live for the Lord...a new lump as Paul calls us.
 - They were treating Christ's sacrifice with contempt and dishonour!
- The neglect of official church discipline is what Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 5.
 - But my focus today is not on the duty of formal church discipline so much as it is on the neglected duty that goes before that...
 - The neglect of the duty that belongs to each individual Christian to personally rebuke your neighbour when you see that he is in sin.

This duty is presented to us in a number of places in scripture.

- I have chosen a passage from Leviticus 19 where it is given in a very direct way.
- Please give me your attention as I read to you from this passage beginning in Lev 19:15:

Here is the Word of God: **Leviticus 19:15-18: “ ‘You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. ¹⁷ You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.’ ”**

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

You can see that this particular paragraph in Leviticus 19 speaks of how we are to treat our neighbour.

- We are told both that we are not to hate him and that we are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.
- And in verse 17, right after saying that we are not to hate our neighbour, it says **“You shall surely rebuke your neighbour.”**
 - That is a duty that is given to each one of us as God’s people.
 - Rebuke is not an expression of hatred, but an expression of love.
 - Today I want to impress this duty upon you...

We will begin by looking at three basics about this verse:

- at what it means to rebuke your neighbour
- at who is to do the rebuking
- and at how this verse insists that we do this.

Then we will look at why it is so important to rebuke our neighbour.

And lastly, we will consider the beautiful example of our Lord Jesus in this matter of rebuking His neighbour.

So let’s begin by looking at:

I. Three basic things about this verse...

A. First, what does it mean to rebuke your neighbour?

1. The word *rebuke* involves more than just telling someone that they did wrong—that they sinned and that it was wrong of them to do it...
 - It carries also the idea of *convicting* them of the wrong—of *convincing* them that they have sinned against God.
 - That can be hard to do because often people do not want to admit their sin at first!
 - You know how hard it is for you to admit yours!
 - You make excuses and you put up arguments.
 - So sometimes it can be challenging to convince a person of his wrong.
2. But your duty doesn’t end there—you are also to try to lead them to repentance.
 - a. You don’t just say, “Hey Jill, you got drunk last night. That was a sin against God. Didn’t you know that?”
 - And she says, “yeah, I know.”
 - And then you say, “okay, good...I just wanted to make sure you knew.”
 - So, do you want to watch a movie or something?”
 - b. You have to go on and say,
 - “Well did you repent? Did you ask God to forgive you for it?”
 - “Did you tell your parents about it?”
 - “What are you going to do to keep it from happening again?”
 - “Don’t you think you ought to talk to Sally about it too?”
 - She looks up to you and you need to tell her that it was *not* okay.”
3. So to put it plainly, your goal is restore your neighbour to the LORD!
 - a. This person sinned because she was not thinking about what would please God.
 - That is always the reason we sin—we are not living for our LORD and Master.
 - We are not concerned for His honour and glory.

- 1) One of the worst things about us Christians in Canada today is how little we really love God and fear God...how little we care about His honour.
 - How often do you really pray, as Jesus taught us to pray first, that God's name would be hallowed? That He would be loved and revered?
 - How often do you even think about His honour—or about pleasing Him?
 - I fear that too often, this is far from our minds.
- 2) Your neighbour has pulled away from the Lord.
 - Jill has forgotten that her chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him.
 - She has forgotten that she was purged from her sins by Jesus so that she could live a new life for him.
- b. Your goal is to restore her to Jesus.
 - You want her to come to Him for forgiveness and for the grace that she needs to put off her sin and start living for Him.
 - You might even help Jill to explore what she might need to put on in place of her drunkenness—
 - For example, to start seeking to minister to her friends and to stir them up to deeds of service instead of living in self-indulgence.

TRANS> You are not done in any case with rebuking her until she repents of her sin.

- So that is the duty itself...

B. The second basic thing I want to show you here is *who* it is that is supposed to do this rebuking.

1. Is this something that is supposed to be left up to the elders?
 - No, it is clearly addressed to everyone! That is what we find in our text.
 - It goes right along with the command to love your neighbour as yourself and that you are not to be talebearer or a false witness; and it follows the injunction that you are not to hate your neighbour.
 - These are not things that are just for elders and priests!
 - They are duties that belong to every one of us as God's people.
 - Formal church discipline and rebukes in the name of the church belong to the elders in their office,
 - but you are often in a much better position as an individual member to see the sins of your friends and relatives than the elders are.
 - You should have been addressing them long before the elders even find out about what they have done.
2. Of course rebuking your neighbours is not a duty that you are exercise all the time.
 - You are not to go looking for things to rebuke them about...
 - Nor are you to rebuke them for everything about them that irritates *you* or displeases *you*; but only for sin against God...
 - You are to make allowance for their growth like Jesus did—
 - He could have rebuked His disciples for many things, but He knew that they could not bear it yet...so He focused on more serious matters first...
 - things like deliberate sins...
 - or areas of major blindness such as quarrelling about who would be the greatest or trying to dissuade Him from going to the cross.

3. And of course you must be careful about the way you approach your neighbour...
 - a. Be careful that you do not *falsely* accuse them...
 - It is often good to go asking questions—
 - For example, if you were a friend of the guy in the Corinthian congregation who started an affair with his stepmother...
 - You might go to him when you first see signs of it and say, “Hey Bill, you seemed a little funny toward your stepmom last night... Is there something developing between you two?”
 - b. And go gently.
 - The best rule is to think about how you would want your friend to come to you if you had sinned.
 - Don’t go with anger, but as one sinner coming to another sinner.
 - And let me stress—that applies to you parents too!
 - It is much easier for your child to receive a rebuke from you if you go to them in love and meekness—as one who sometimes confesses your own sin to them and asks them to pray for areas of struggle.
 - Many times, you may even see your sin reflected in what your child has done. Go ahead and say so, and have them pray for you too.
 - For example, if you are dealing with your eight year old about losing his temper and you just lost yours the day before,
 - you can say something about that—“I had to repent of this yesterday, and now you need to repent of it today. Let’s ask God to help us.”
 - c. And you need to use wisdom when you go—
 - If you are a guy and it is your friend’s wife that you need to rebuke, it would be good to have your friend (her husband) there too...
 - or if it is an older person and you are a child, you might talk to your parents—and have them go with you.
 - Understand that it is not always wrong to get advice from your parents or your spouse or from an elder in the church if you are unsure how to proceed.
 - Just be sure that you don’t turn it into a gossip session.
 - Going to get help is not gossip, but just spreading information about someone else’s sin is—it is being a talebearer.

TRANS> But you see that this is a duty that is given to you and not to someone else.

- When you see that your neighbour has sinned, *you* are be the one who goes to rebuke him.
- C. And now the third basic thing I want you to see about this verse is the way it insists that rebuking your neighbour is something you are not to neglect!
1. In the English version I read, it says “**you shall surely rebuke your neighbour.**”
 - A more literal translation of the original would be “**rebuking you shall rebuke your neighbour.**”
 - It is something that is not to be left undone.
 2. I don’t suppose I need to tell you why it emphasises this as something you are supposed to do!

- It is because it is a very hard thing to do—there are a lot of other things you would rather do than go and confront your neighbour about his sin...
 - We are lazy by nature and we don't want to do hard things like this...
 - We come up with excuses.
 - We convince ourselves that it won't do any good anyway, and we rationalise that it will just create a rift.
 - Sometimes we even become self-righteous and say that we don't want to judge anyone.
- But do you know what?
 - God does not ask you if you *want* to rebuke your neighbour or if you think it will do any good or if it might destroy your friendship with him...
 - He does not ask you if you are comfortable with doing it or if the Spirit has led you...
 - He simply tells you—right here in His word—that **you shall surely rebuke your neighbour.**
 - He doesn't make it an option, so don't trouble yourself by looking at it as if it is an option.
 - Just get on with doing what the Lord has called you to do.

II. But why is it so important to rebuke your neighbour?

- That is the second thing I want to look at this morning...
 - I want to look at why it is important to rebuke him,
 - *first, for your sake,*
 - *secondly, for the church's sake,*
 - *thirdly, for his sake,*
 - *and fourthly, for the Lord's sake.*
 - We will go in that order.

A. First, it is important to rebuke your neighbour for your own sake.

1. It is important because it is your duty to God and to your brother and to the church.
 - When you don't do it, Leviticus 19 says that you bear sin because of your brother.
 - You knew what he was doing and you did not do what God tells you to do, so now you are complicit with him in his sin.
 - You are not responsible for what he did, but for his failure to repent of it and for all the further damage that that causes to him, to the church, and the honour of Jesus Christ. (We will look at each of these in a moment.)
2. Furthermore, you put yourself into a place of temptation to other sins when you do not rebuke your brother...
 - Some of these are mentioned right here in Leviticus 19:15-18.
 - a. In verse 16, it tells you not to go about as a *talebearer* among your people.
 - If you don't talk to your neighbour about his sin, it is very likely that you will end up talking to other people about it in a gossipy way.
 - That makes you a talebearer, and talebearing is a sin against God.

- It doesn't help for everyone else to know what your neighbour has done—God tells you to go to your neighbour!
 - I mentioned that it is appropriate to get help before you go...but be sure that you do go and don't just stop with getting help about going.
 - And the sad reality is that you will find a lot of people who are quite happy to hear about the sin of others, and oh how concerned they will act!
 - But if they don't send you to talk your neighbour, or take you to talk to him, then they become guilty of talebearing too.
- b. Another sin you will be tempted to commit if you do not rebuke your brother is *inappropriate anger*.
- Anger is proper when you go in love to rebuke your neighbour, but when you don't, the anger is sinful...
 - You are not to leave it there to fester—you are not to hold things against your neighbour in your heart so that you, as it says in verse 18, either take vengeance or bear a grudge against him.
 - *Taking vengeance* is when you try to pay him back for the wrong that he did—to punish him instead of rebuking and restoring him...
 - And *bearing a grudge* is when you hold something against him in your heart—you are no longer for him... You are against him.
 - Jesus says that you can't worship when you are like that.
 - Your prayers won't be heard until you go and rebuke your brother.
 - So it is a serious matter for you—it cuts you off from God.
- c. And there is another reason you must go rebuke your brother for your own sake—and this is a big one: *lest you begin to take sin lightly in your own life*.
- Suppose you see Ralph curse his mother in an angry rage and then walk away from her without repenting—and you do not bother to rebuke him about it.
 - What is likely to happen if you speak in a disrespectful tone to your mother the next day—not cursing her, but just in a disrespectful tone?
 - You will be tempted to excuse it—to brush it off—after all, it is nothing like what Ralph did!
 - Do you see the danger here?
 - But if you go to Ralph, then it will have the opposite effect...
 - It might even keep you from speaking disrespectfully to your mom when the temptation arises—you were just talking to Ralph about this!
 - But even if you do speak inappropriately to your mom, it will be much more likely that you will be smitten in your conscience: *I am no different than Ralph*, and instead of brushing it off, go quickly to ask your Lord and your mom to forgive you.

➤ So there you have the importance of rebuking your neighbour for your own sake...

B. Now let's look at the importance of it for the church's sake.

1. And the first thing I want to show you is actually what we were just talking about...
 - We saw that a failure to rebuke your neighbour tends to make you take your own sin lightly...it also tends to make the whole church take sin lightly...

- Here is someone like Ralph...speaking to his mother like that...
 - If you don't deal with it (and nobody else does) then soon all the young people in the church will start taking this sin lightly...
 - It will start to grow like cancer—it will spread like leaven.
 - Yes, there's Ralph...everybody knows that he has problems...
 - But now there is your poor example—not as bad as Ralph's, but not what it ought to be—and that weakens the church as a whole...
 - The whole spiritual temperature of the church goes down!
 - That is what happens when we don't address things!
 - Nobody is walking with the Lord anymore and nobody even notices!
 - As I pointed out before, nobody is concerned about living for God and pleasing Him.
2. Plus, your neglect keeps the church from being able to deal with things that need to be dealt with.
- a. If you had confronted Ralph, and he had been stubborn and it had gone before the elders—all the way to church discipline—
 - everyone in the church would have seen that it is not acceptable to show disrespect to your parents like that.
 - Even if Ralph had not repented and had been put out of the church for cursing his mother, it would have still been beneficial for the congregation.
 - and not just for the young people, but for the parents in dealing with their children about this—
 - And for the member who was being disrespectful to his boss at work and is awakened to the fact that he needs to repent.
 - b. But now the church is in a difficult situation—and the elders are in a difficult situation...
 - Because Ralph is there, and nobody knows what is wrong with him—
 - He is pulling away from church—he is sullen—people are noticing...but nobody knows any specifics—*nobody except for you!*
 - And soon there are lots of other sins in Ralph's life, and everybody can see that Ralph is not living for God anymore; he doesn't even come to church...
 - But the elders do not know the specifics and all they can do is try to talk to him...but *you* are the one who *does* know the specifics!
 - If you had gone to him at first and he had not repented, you could have brought him before the elders long ago—and they could have addressed concrete sin in his life...
 - but now all they know is that he has been slack about coming to church and does not return their calls.
 - So now that elders end up having to remove him from the church for withdrawing from worship and refusing to meet with them.
 - Nobody is really edified because you never bothered to go to Ralph and rebuke him for the things that you knew about.

TRANS> So now we have seen that you should have rebuked Ralph for your own sake, and for the church's sake...I suppose the third thing is quite obvious...

- C. You should have rebuked him for his own sake.
1. Now he has been put out of the church.
 - This might have been stopped if you had cared enough to rebuke him and follow through to the end when he first started to live in sin.
 - And what about his parents...they also should have rebuked him and seen it through to repentance or church discipline...
 - But nobody bothered to see it through in the early stages, so now his apostasy and hardness of heart has fully matured and he is impossible to reach...
 - Not that God can't reach him—but his parents and his friends might have been able to help him long before it got to this point.
 - They nagged him a bit, but they did not rebuke him unto repentance.
 2. And even if it never gets to the point where he is put out church...that may in fact be much worse!
 - a. Perhaps Ralph, or whoever, is still coming to church, still even keeping himself from drugs or fornication or some of the more blatant things...
 - but if the truth were known, he has no heart for God.
 - He is not really living for God.
 - Nobody ever challenged him, and he is just a Christian in form.
 - He does not know what it is to cry out to God in prayer, to be promoting Christ's kingdom, to love God's name...
 - to know the joy of walking with the Lord, of being filled with His Spirit, of worshipping Him and serving Him.
 - b. No, sin has come into his life that he has never repented of, and now he is just coasting along—nobody knows, nobody cares...
 - Because nobody went to him when opportunities presented themselves.
 3. So the truth is, the people who are closest to Ralph did not really love him.
 - If you love your brother, you cannot just stand by and watch him destroy his relationship with the Lord!
 - There is a reason that in Lev. 19:17 before it says: **You shall surely rebuke your neighbor...** it says: **You shall not hate your brother in your heart.**
 - Don't deceive yourself by saying you did not go to him because you loved him too much and did not want to hurt him, or because you were afraid you would drive him away...
 - He was sinning and not repenting—he was already away.
 - You just stood by and watched his sin multiply and his heart grow harder and harder.
 - Parents, it's even worse when you refuse to chasten your own children when they are small and teachable...
 - Proverbs 13:24 cannot be honestly misunderstood: **He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.**

TRANS> Withholding rebukes when they are needed is never an act of love—only of selfish sentimentalism. But here is the real heart of the matter...

- D. Action should be taken not only for your sake, for the church's sake, and for your sinning neighbour's sake...but for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ!
- The real question at the root of it all is whether you love the Lord your God!
1. I mentioned this earlier in the sermon, but I want to stress it here...
 - This is the real problem that reaches to all of us in the church today.
 - We are living in a very self-centred day in which we rarely even think about living for God's honour and glory!
 - We are so focused on what we want, on our comforts and possessions and our own happiness...on what we want God to do for us!
 - Oh yes, we may try not to break any of the commandments...
 2. But when you get down to it, our heart is not with the prayers that our Lord taught us to pray...
 - Hallowed be your name!
 - We really don't care that God's name is dishonoured in the church when people sin and don't repent of it.
 - We are indifferent about what people think of our Lord and whether they love Him or not.
 - And "Your kingdom come!"
 - We want the church to grow, but do we really care whether King Jesus is exalted and whether people are truly brought into His kingdom to serve Him?
 - And that those who know Him continue to serve Him?
 - Do we weep for His kingdom?
 - And "Your will be done!"
 - Again, do we even care if others are not obeying the Lord?
 - Are we ourselves really living with a deep desire to please Him?
 3. My brothers and sisters, we are not spiritually healthy—but our Lord Jesus is more than ready to help us!

TRANS> And that brings me to our last point...

III. I want you to consider the beautiful example of our Lord Jesus Christ in obeying Leviticus 19:17 and rebuking His people!

- A. He is the One who pours forth His Spirit and Word to convince us of our sin!
1. He uses the preaching of His Word to lay open our sins—to bring us to conviction over them...He appointed preaching and uses it to do this...
 - And He uses our neighbours—parents, friends, fellow church members, brothers and sisters—to rebuke us so that we will face our sins...
 - And He uses the whole process of church discipline—He tells us to leave the 99 sheep to go after the one that strays...that is what He does!
 - And He uses our simple reading of the Bible and our prayers and all sorts of other things—the good example of others—to rebuke us and expose our sin.

2. If it were not for the working of His Spirit with His Word in our hearts, we would never truly face up to our sin.
 - Remember the woman at well who said, “Come see a man that told me all that I ever did?” That was the mercy of Christ!
 - When Jesus was here on earth, He made people look bad because He was such a perfect example—and because of His powerful teaching...
 - He exposed them, and He still does it today.
 - If He didn’t, we would be without hope!

B. He does this because He loves us!

1. He knows better than any of us how destructive sin is—and He loves us.
 - He cannot bear to see us go on in our sin to destruction.
 - a. He exposes us in order to bring us to repentance.
 - It is not just to make us feel bad, but so that we will come to Him and look to Him who was crucified to atone for our sins.
 - So that we will not go on in our sin to complete spiritual destruction.
 - So that we will be able to live the abundant Spirit-filled life that we ought to be living!
 - Where would you be today if He had never rebuked you?
 - You would be completely lost in your sins—you wouldn’t care!
 - b. And He loves us so much that He went to the cross so that we might be saved!
 - He is the one who bore the curse for our sins so that we could be fully pardoned.
 - God has made a covenant, the blood of Jesus is the blood of the covenant that guarantees forgiveness to all who come to Him.
 - He rebuked us so that we would come to Him for the forgiveness of sins—to be justified by believing in Him...
 - c. And then after we have come to Him, Jesus keeps on rebuking us so that we will not depart from Him.
 - He keeps us in His grace by rebuking us when we sin—by coming after us so that sin does not destroy us.
2. You will say, but what about the perseverance of the saints?
 - Isn’t it true that once we have come to Jesus, He will keep us to the end?
 - Of course it is...
 - But you are missing the point!
 - How does He go about keeping us from falling away?
 - By rebuking us and warning us so that we will not utterly fall away!
 - The doctrine of His keeping us in His salvation is not that it doesn’t matter whether we fall away or not...
 - It is rather that Jesus will not let us utterly fall away.
 - The seed of life remains in us and He rebukes us by His Spirit and Word so that we never utterly depart and so that we come back.

TRANS> He always brings us to repentance—that is how He keeps us.

- He rebukes us so that we will come back when we have gone astray if we truly belong to Him.
 - That is why you have no grounds for the assurance of your salvation if you are not walking with Him today.
 - The evidence is in the fruit.

C. And the Lord Jesus makes all of us His partners in helping each other to continue in the faith!

1. Very often, He comes to us to rebuke us by sending our brothers and sisters in the church who love us to rebuke us in His name.
 - And when they come to us, if we are truly elect, the truth of His word eventually gets through to us and we repent and we are restored!
 - We may even be stubborn and be put out of the church for a time, but God will use that for our ultimate restoration.
 - And you see, we all have the privilege of having a part in each other's perseverance!
 - Perseverance does not happen in the ethereal realm, it happens before our eyes.
2. So if you see a person who has gone astray, who has sinned and has not repented,
 - you need to go to that person with all earnestness of someone who realises that their repentance is a matter of eternal consequence!
 - Pour out your heart in prayer for that person and for you as you go.
 - And our dear Lord Jesus will use you...
 - Even if the person does not respond now, if he is elect, he will respond years later.
 - You have no way to know how that person stands with Him if you leave them to wallow in their sin...
 - You are to love them enough to plead with them for their soul,
 - And you are to love them enough to plead for their soul before the throne of grace—in the name of Jesus.

Conclusion: My dear brothers and sisters, hear the word of God:

- **Leviticus 19:17: You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.**

Let us enter into this duty with the spirit of all the love of our Lord Jesus Christ who came down from heaven to bear our sins on the cross and to call us to Himself!

- We are members of His body.
- We represent Him.
- Love Him, love His people, plead for them in prayer and plead with them in love when they go astray...
 - Do this for your children, for your friends, for all who are in the church!
 - What a wonderful Saviour we have!
 - How great is His salvation!
 - How great is His love!

- **Leviticus 19:17: You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.**