

## The Art of Confronting

---

In a world of fallen humans, the need for confronting others regarding their faults is an unfortunate necessity. But there is a right and wrong way to do it.

---

*“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Lk. 17:3).*

*“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Matt. 18:15).*

*“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).*



The Bible gives not just the permission, but the duty to confront others about their sins. The language of Jesus and Paul in these verses (“rebuke him,” “tell him his fault,” “restore such a one”) leaves no room for evading this responsibility.

Some people take this injunction as a license to operate as professional critics, constantly haranguing others about their tiniest mistakes. On the other hand, there are those of a quieter nature who dread these tense discussions and will go out of their way to avoid addressing a problem, even to the point of allowing others to walk over them. Neither of these approaches is healthy.

Confronting others about their offenses is an art form, something that requires a great deal of thought, practice, and patience.

Providing a complete tutorial is beyond the scope of this brief article, but these verses suggest a few important guidelines that can point us in the right direction in mastering this skill.

First, notice Paul’s qualifier in the Galatians passage: “considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Some interpret this to mean, don’t allow yourself to be drawn into the sinner’s sin. That may be a risk in some rare episodes, but hardly seems applicable as a general rule. The more likely danger is that we use the confrontation as an opportunity to flaunt our superiority. Am I trying to help a brother, or am I showing off my own purity? The sinner can spot the difference and will respond accordingly. Before we challenge a friend about his wrong, we need to evaluate our own motive in the affair. Pride has no place in this task.

The first requirement sets up the second, namely, that we administer the rebuke “between you and him alone.” That is, we keep it as private as possible. Broadcasting another’s sin risks deepening the sinner’s sense of humiliation and can create a barrier to resolving the matter. Some sins are so flagrantly public, of course, that this may not be an option. But as much as possible, we should strive to protect the sinner’s privacy.

Third, the confrontation must be conducted “in a spirit of gentleness.” To be effective, our words of rebuke must be firm, direct, and pointed—but they must also be gentle. Those are hard attributes to balance; how can we say something that will pierce the sinner’s heart, yet in a tone that conveys the love behind the rebuke? We can learn much by studying the rebukes of Jesus and Paul, but real skill here can only come with a lot of practice.

Finally, thought must be given to the aftermath. What if the sinner accepts the rebuke and repents? Jesus says, “forgive him.” No exceptions, no qualifications, no probations, no grudges. The matter is done, buried, and behind us. “You have gained your brother,” Jesus adds—so treat him like one.

Throughout our lives, we will frequently face the need to confront others: spouses, children, co-workers, friends, brothers in the Lord. We must not shy away from these occasions, but neither should we thoughtlessly charge into them unprepared. Learn how to confront wisely, and you will be respected by all—especially by those who have received your corrective counsel.

— David King