

That's Not How I Would Have Done It

By John R. Gibson

Some instructions found in Scripture are more difficult than others. While there may times when we may face a real challenge in understanding what's being said (2 Pet. 3:14-16), this article is focusing on things where the challenge lies in the execution and not the understanding. Though we understand what is written it's not always easy to warn the unruly (1 Thes. 5:14), restore one overtaken in a trespass (Gal. 6:1-2), stop the mouths of the insubordinate (Titus 1:10-11), or withdraw from the disorderly (2 Thes. 3:6, 14). In a similar fashion, it is a real challenge to contend for the faith and preach the word in a way that convinces, rebukes, and exhorts, both in season and out of season (Jude 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:2). To proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27) requires both courage and a considerable amount of judgment. In fact, the difficulties involved in these probably make it impossible for anyone to perform them all perfectly on a consistent basis, but if they are commanded aren't we expected to do our best?

If we are committed to the two greatest commandments we will appreciate the necessity of warnings, discipline, sound teaching, etc., yet we sometimes fall short in these areas. Why? Why do those of us who preach sometimes not preach things that need to be preached? Why do so many churches often seem to delay having to deal with erring Christians? Why is church discipline of the kind mentioned in the first paragraph much rarer than disorderly behavior? Various answers could be given, but one key factor may be the things we come to expect when we attempt to deal with a difficult situation or address a challenging topic.

"Bro. White said you talked to him the other day about his attendance and he thought you were rude. I know our attendance is important, but you know he's had a lot of family problems to deal with lately and I'm not sure this was a good time to talk to him."

"Why are you elders in such a rush to withdraw from Sis. Black? After all, a few years ago Sis. Green was in a similar situation and you showed a lot more patience with her."

"Don't get us wrong, we don't object to lessons on modest dress—we just don't draw the modesty lines where Bro. Blue draws them."

There is no doubt that in the mind of some this kind of thinking originated with legitimate concerns about the genuine mistakes they observed in others. The reality is that through the years some preachers have become lawmakers instead of preaching God's law and few elderships have always been consistent in their dealings with the disorderly. Add to this the fact that among those dealing with the unruly, most would admit that there have been times when they failed to maintain the spirit of gentleness. Preachers, elders, and all saints need to realize that their failures in these areas can create problems. Yet, having acknowledged that all of this has been done improperly at times, we must all still have the necessary spiritual maturity to realize that abuse does not justify our rejection of things God has commanded His people to do.

And while all of these can be legitimate objections or concerns and everyone involved should welcome suggestions and constructive criticism, too often they do not reflect a desire to see rebuke, restoration, discipline, preaching, etc. done better; instead, they reflect a desire for generic preaching, no

real discipline, and doing very little, if anything, to deal with sin within the church.

If you have concerns about the preaching, shepherding of the elders, or the conduct of any spiritually concerned brethren involved in these activities and have suggestions for how these things can be done better, please share them with those involved in both seeking to prevent sin and restore the erring. But if you have been critical because you don't believe these things should be done, please go back and read again the passages listed in the first paragraph.

And finally, if you have been attempting to heed the previously mentioned instructions about how to deal with sin among God's people, then do not grow weary while doing good. There may be naysayers, but it is expected of us by our Lord and desperately needed by our brothers and sisters.