

The Wonderful Practice Of Exhortation

The New Testament teaches how important it is for believers and church leaders to exhort each other. Christian groups who do not practice exhortation are excluding one of the keys to having God's glorious loving Presence being made manifest among them.

Keys about exhorting others

Note the following key points about exhortation:

- In 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul said he exhorted them *“by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”*. Many times, exhortation needs to be done gently. Especially when exhortation refers to comforting, encouraging or cheering up others by the Holy Spirit, it must include a manifestation of His gentleness.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 mentions exhorting like a good father does to his children.
- In 1 Timothy 5:1, Paul reveals that younger church leaders should not rebuke older men but instead should exhort them like they would their father: *“Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers.”* God wants younger people to show respect to older people, even when the older are wrong and the younger are leaders.
- Many times, exhortation can involve motivating urgings inspired by the Holy Spirit (see Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 4:16, 2 Corinthians 10:1 and 12:18).
- One common error is the idea that exhorters are people who only encourage, comfort or cheer up others. As shown later, the Greek words for exhorting – “parakaleo” and “paraklesis” – also have other important meanings in various contexts.
- As seen in Luke 3:17-18, exhorting can occasionally involve strong warnings inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- Luke 3:18 reveals that John the Baptist exhorted the people. Note this verse uses the expression *“with many other exhortations”*. This phrase means what John previously said was an exhortation also. This reveals John's words in Luke 3:7-17 about repentance, future judgement on unrepentant unbelievers, practical living, Christ baptising others with the Holy Spirit and the eternal fire are regarded as exhortation also.
- Romans 16:17 links exhorting or urging God's people to the New Testament practice of church discipline in certain situations: *“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”*

The importance of encouraging others in a Biblically balanced way

Exhortation can often involve comforting and encouraging believers about how much God loves them, cares about them and has done for them by His grace through Jesus Christ. But sadly some humanistic churchgoers reject the idea exhortation can involve urging or imploring them to obey various specific aspects of God's New Testament commands. This idea is contrary

to how the words relating to exhortation are used in Ephesians 4:1-3, 1 Corinthians 4:16, 16:15-16, Philippians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, 4:10-12, Hebrews 10:24-25 and 1 Peter 2:11.

We also must find a Biblical balance between exhortation and correcting others. In my early years after returning from backsliding at the age of 20, I used to believe that Jesus Christ desired all believers to only encourage and comfort others. I became so extreme about this that even when friends would tell me about their backsliding and sins, I would not even dare say one word of warning or correction. I realised years later that I acted here more like a *humanist* than a follower of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4 says: ***“For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.”*** Paul’s words here show we can exhort from sinful motives if we are not careful. If we exhort, we must make sure our motive is to please God and not please men. Some exhorters seem to be more interested in having crowds like and approve of them than in pleasing Him.

Being gentle, patient, tenderhearted and kind in ministry

The letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus are especially relevant to leaders in the church. This is because Timothy and Titus were apostles and senior pastors. In these three letters, Paul taught that church leaders must:

- exhort others (see 1 Timothy 6:2, 2 Timothy 4:2, Titus 2:6 and 2:15).
- be gentle (see 1 Timothy 3:3)
- be longsuffering towards others (2 Timothy 3:10 and 4:2)
- be patient and gentle with others (1 Timothy 6:11). 2 Timothy 2:24 says: ***“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient.”*** Titus 3:2 states: ***“to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”***
- only correct with a humble attitude. 2 Timothy 2:25 refers to ***“in humility correcting those who are in opposition.”*** (N.K.J.V).

The New Testament teaches not just church leaders but all believers to be tenderhearted to others (see Ephesians 4:32 and 1 Peter 3:8), kind (see Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:12 and 2 Peter 1:7) longsuffering (see Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:12), gentle (see Ephesians 4:2) and patient (see 1 Thessalonians 5:14). Ephesians 4:2 says: ***“with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.”*** Ephesians 4:32 declares: ***“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:14 states: ***“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”***

In 2 Corinthians 6:4-10, Paul speaks of various aspects of ministry. In verse 6, he refers to kindness being one aspect of his and Timothy’s ministry. Are we good, kind and generous in our ministry to unbelievers and other believers?

If the main focus of our ministry is what other believers are doing for this – giving us money offerings, fulfilling our dreams and goals to have a large successful ministry and so on – we are not operating under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22 says a fruit of the Holy Spirit is kindness. Paul and Timothy had ministries inspired by and reliant on the Holy

Spirit. The goodness, kindness and generosity in their lives was a *fruit* of this. Is this the type of fruit we are trusting God about and determined to see in our lives?

Relevant Greek words for exhortation

In Greek, the word “*exhort*” is “*parakaleo*” which means “appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage” in verses such as Acts 20:1, 20:2, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 4:16, 2 Corinthians 10:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Hebrews 3:13, 13:22 and 1 Peter 5:1 or “request, implore, appeal to,” in verses such as Matthew 14:36, 18:32, Mark 5:10, 5:18, 5:23 and 2 Corinthians 12:18.¹ “*Parakaleo*” means “comfort, encourage, cheer up” in Matthew 2:18, 5:4, Luke 16:25, Acts 20:2, 2 Corinthians 1:4 (numerous times), 1:6, 7:6 (twice), 7:13, Ephesians 6:22, Colossians 2:2, 4:8, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:17 and Titus 1:9 and “try to console or conciliate, speak in a friendly manner, apologise to” in 1 Corinthians 4:13.²

The Greek word “*paraklesis*” is used often in the New Testament. In verses such as 1 Thessalonians 2:3, 1 Timothy 4:13 and Hebrews 12:5, “*paraklesis*” means “encouragement, exhortation”.³ In 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 8:17, “*paraklesis*” means “appeal, request”.⁴ In Luke 2:25, 6:24, Acts 9:31, 2 Corinthians 1:4-7, 7:4, 7:7, 7:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:16 and Philemon 7, “*paraklesis*” means “comfort, consolation”.⁵ Consolation refers to comforting someone in distress.

There are other Greek words which relate to consolation and encouragement. These are “*paramutheomai*” and “*paramuthia*”. Bauer said in the context of 1 Thessalonians 2:11 and 5:14, “*paramutheomai*” means “encourage, cheer up someone”⁶ or in John 11:19 “console someone concerning someone”.⁷ In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul instructs all believers to “*comfort the fainthearted*” (N.K.J.V) or “*console the faint-hearted*” (N.A.S.B). It is so important that we comfort or console others who need it.

“*Paramuthia*” means “encouragement, especially comfort, consolation”.⁸ Vine argues that “*paramuthia*” relates to consoling and comforting “with a greater degree of tenderness than” the Greek word “*paraklesis*” which I previously defined.⁹ A form of the word “*paramuthia*” is used in 1 Corinthians 14:3 when it says one of the results a true operation of the simple gift of prophecy is “*comfort*” (N.K.J.V) or “*consolation*” (N.A.S.B).

Bible Study Questions

1. What does 2 Corinthians 10:1 reveal about how exhortation needs to be done many times?
2. Can exhortation sometimes involve giving Spirit-inspired motivating urgings to others? Give verses which reveal proof of your answer.

¹ Bauer, page 617.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, page 618.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, page 620.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Vine, page 111.

3. What does Luke 3:17-18 reveal exhortation can occasionally involve?
4. When in Luke 3:18, Luke used the expression “*with many other exhortations*”, what was he saying about John the Baptist’s words in Luke 3:7-17?
5. In Romans 16:17, what did Paul exhort or urge God’s people to do?
6. What is a humanistic attitude to what exhortation involves?
7. What verses show that exhortation can be based on sinful motives?
8. In Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, what did he command church leaders to do?