

Quotes on Christian Reproof

by

Richard Baxter

We have a base man-pleasing disposition, which will make us let men perish lest we lose their love, and let them go quietly to hell, lest we should make them angry with us for seeking their salvation: and we are ready to venture on the displeasure of God, and risk the everlasting misery of our people, rather than draw on ourselves their ill-will. This distemper must be diligently resisted.

Take heed, therefore, that you do not connive at the sins of your people, under pretence of love, for that were to cross the nature and end of love. Friendship must be cemented by piety. A wicked man cannot be a true friend; and, if you befriend their wickedness, you show that you are wicked yourselves. Pretend not to love them, if you favour their sins, and seek not their salvation. By favouring their sins, you will show your enmity to God; and then how can you love your brother? If you be their best friends, help them against their worst enemies. And think not all sharpness inconsistent with love.

I find it will be impossible to avoid offending those who are at once guilty and impenitent; for there is no way of avoiding this, but by our silence, or their patience: and silent we cannot be, because of God's commands; and patient they will not be, because of their guilt and impenitence.

Yea if they will seek the ruin of the Church and Cause of Christ, they must look that we should take Liberty to contradict them, and to speak for Christ and the souls of men, till they have deprived us of tongues, or pens, or lives; And they must expect that we obey God rather than men, and that, as Paul did Peter, Gal. 2. 11. we withstand them to the face; and that Satan shall not be un-resisted, because he is transformed into an Angel of Light; nor his Ministers be un-resisted, because they are transformed into the Ministers of Righteousness. Too many who have undertaken the work of the ministry do so obstinately proceed in self-seeking, negligence, pride, and other sins, that it is become our necessary duty to admonish them. If we saw that such would reform without reproof, we would gladly forbear the

publishing of their faults. But when reproofs themselves prove so ineffectual, that they are more offended at the reproof than at the sin, and had rather that we should cease reproving than that themselves should cease sinning, I think it is time to sharpen the remedy.

To bear with the vices of the ministry is to promote the ruin of the Church; for what speedier way is there for the depraving and undoing of the people, than the depravity of their guides?

If your own body were sick, and you will despise the remedy, or if your own house were on fire, and you will be singing or quarrelling in the streets, I could possibly bear it, and let you alone, (which yet, in charity, I should not easily do,) but, if you will undertake to be the physician of an hospital, or to a whole town that is infected with the plague, or will undertake to quench all the fires that shall be kindled in the town, there is no bearing with your remissness, how much so ever it may displease you. Take it how you will, you must be told of it; and if that will not serve, you must be told of it yet more plainly.

You cannot lament your worldliness and sensuality, you cannot lament your disaffectedness to God, and intolerable neglects of him, till you find them out. You cannot betake you to Christ for the pardon of this sin, till you have discovered it. A sin unseen, will never humble you and break your hearts, nor fit them for Christ to bind them up. If you see not that the world is yet *alive* in you, you will not apply the Cross, for the crucifying of it, nor have recourse to a Crucified Christ for that End.

O how easy is it to hear your sin and danger from such a worm as I? or to hear your state discovered, and your selves condemned by a Minister of Christ in a Pulpit? But how dreadful will it be to hear all this from the Lord of Glory? And that when the case is past remedy, which now might have been remedied if you would, and if your obstinate hearts had not resisted.

While wicked men think they are not wicked, but are already converted, we lose all our labour in persuading them to turn.

If thousands of you were in a leaking ship, and those that should pump out the water, and stop the leaks, should be sporting or asleep, or even but favouring themselves in their labours, to the hazarding of you all, would you not awaken them to their work and call on them to labour as for your lives? And if you used some sharpness and importunity with the slothful, would you think that man was in his wits who would take it ill of you, and accuse you of pride, self-conceitedness, or unmannerliness, to presume to talk so saucily to your fellow-workmen, or that should tell you that you wrong them by diminishing their reputation? Would you not say, 'The work must be done, or we are all dead men. Is the ship ready to sink, and do you talk of reputation? or had you rather hazard yourself and us, than hear of your slothfulness?' This is our case, brethren, the work of God must needs be done! Souls must not perish, while you mind your worldly business or worldly pleasure, and take your ease, or quarrel with your brethren! Nor must we be silent while men are hastened by you to perdition, and the Church brought into greater danger and confusion, for fear of seeming too uncivil and unmannerly with you, or displeasing your impatient souls! Would you be but as impatient with your sins as with our reproofs, you should hear no more from us, but we should be all agreed! But, neither God nor good men will let you alone in such sins.

To be much in provoking others to repentance and heavenly-mindedness may do much to excite them in ourselves. To cry down the sin of others, and engage them against it, and direct them to overcome it, will do much to shame us out of our own; and conscience will scarcely suffer us to live in that which we make so much ado to draw others from. Even our constant employment for God, and busying our minds and tongues against sin, and for Christ and holiness, will do much to overcome our fleshly inclinations, both by direct mortification, and by diversion, leaving our fancies no room nor time for their old employment.

The word of God is quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and it is the plain word of that God, that feareth not the faces of the proudest sinners on earth, and will not flatter, nor daub with any of them all, but will tell them to their faces what they are, and what will become of them if they do not turn, and what they must trust to: This is the word that God hath put into our mouths, and commanded us to preach to

them: not the flattering words of an inferior, nor the tender language of a man-pleaser, but the commanding words of the God of heaven, and the peremptory threatening of everlasting fire, against all unconverted, unsanctified men, denounced from him that feareth none of them all, but will make them all stoop at last to him, and fear, and tremble before his Majesty. And is it any wonder if Proud and selfish sinners are displeased with such a word as this?