

How to Avoid Provoking Members to Wrath

If I asked you how your manner is—warm and approachable (Prov. 18:24) or cold and stern—how would you respond? Would your wife agree? What about the sheep God has placed under your care? Our manner—our style or overall approach—can have significant effect on our ministry.

As shepherds, we are responsible for how we care for the Church of God (I Tim. 3:5). God has placed us in a position to nurture His sheep (John 21:16-17), in a *kind, meek and gentle* manner, “even as a nurse cherishes her children” (I Thes. 2:7). Similar to the warning issued by Paul to parents in Ephesus, we must be careful not to provoke *His* children (Eph. 6:4). Of course, there are situations where we must be ready to “exhort and/or convict” (Titus 1:9), but these should be relatively rare.

When we lack oil (smoothness) and honey (sweetness) in our words, we can unnecessarily provoke others. Effectively employing both ingredients will help our counsel be more pleasant and easier to ingest. As leaders, we should constantly strive to quell a potentially heated situation by first applying a caring and calm approach. Remember, “A *soft* answer turns away wrath...” (Prov. 15:1).

Equally important, cutting into another’s speech or failing to actively listen can inflame a person because it evokes the feeling of not being heard. Proverbs 18:13 states, “He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame unto him.” Simply put, such a manner—not listening and being quick to answer—is silly and disgraceful. So says God! Avoid this by *patiently* listening to what each individual has to say.

Another area that we must guard against in our approach to others is the propensity to micromanage members. We must avoid getting too far into “the weeds” of each and every detail of his or her life (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31). In the past, some in the ministry went to the extreme of checking brethren’s cupboards for any white flour and white sugar. While not the best “food” choice, it is not a *sin* in and of itself. Rather than being overly critical, we must *instruct* and *teach* in a *balanced* way, so members can learn to make the right choices, according to God’s Way. Being unbalanced in our approach toward volunteering, diet, dress, fundraising, etc., has the potential to invoke a negative response.

We should *carefully* and *lovingly* guide members toward qualifying for the kingdom of God as they “work out *their own* salvation,” understanding that we will give full account of how we did. (Read James 3:1 and Hebrews 13:17.)

As in all things, we must exercise wisdom. Different situations require different manners and approaches. Careful observation of circumstances is paramount. For instance, Proverbs 25:20 states, “As he that takes away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre [potash], so is he that sings songs to a heavy heart.” When someone has a

heavy heart, it is not appropriate to bring a happy, cheery approach to the situation. Recall how Paul learned to adapt to individuals to best serve them (I Cor. 9:19-22). We should strive to do the same.

Through our example—our approach—we can seize the wonderful privilege of working with God's sheep, without unnecessary, negative provocation. Let's all take time to examine and work on our manner so we can elicit a positive response.