

Giving Good Advice

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Those who are wise know that there are times when they need to advice of knowledgeable and mature Christians. “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels” (Prov. 1:5). God says we need advice, not only as individuals, but for the good of the whole society because “where no counsel is, the people fall” (Prov. 11:14). However, we should not make the mistake in thinking that any advice will do. “The counsels of the wicked are deceit” and “there are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (Prov. 12:5; 19:21). Sometimes I do not know what to say! I must conclude that if I am going to give good advice, it must be founded upon, and in harmony with, the word of God.

Give principled advice. Sometimes the answer is easy. Should I lie to try and serve some greater good? “A righteous man hateth lying; but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame” (Prov. 13:5). Other times we have to pull together principles and use illustrations to make the point like Jesus did. In Luke 10 when Jesus was asked “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” and “who is my neighbor?” the Lord answered with questions, used the principles of scripture, offered a parable and then said “go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:25-37). If we can correctly apply the principles of scripture to life’s everyday situations we can give good advice.

Give cautious advice. When faced with a question the answer might seem clear at first. But until we hear both sides of the story we cannot truly help. Faulty assumptions will make a mess of things in a hurry. Peter found out if Sapphira was on the same page as her lying husband before she was condemned and punished (Acts 5:8). The Bible emphasizes the need for witnesses (Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). If we are too hasty with our advice we could lead someone to the wrong answer, and that is unacceptable because souls are in the balance.

Give loving advice. When Paul talked about his ministry among the brethren in Thessalonica he described himself as a gentle mother, an affectionate servant, and a comforting father (1 Thess. 2:1-11). The loving thing for Paul to do was to be gentle, but hold nothing back. To comfort, but charge, and to work hard to help. Advice-givers should be willing to get their hands dirty when appropriate and serve. How do I know if my advice is as loving as it ought to be? Paul’s work was done so that the brethren would “walk worthy of God” and the result was that they “received the word of God” and allowed it to work in them (1 Thess. 2:12-13). Will my advice lead them to further faithfulness or to self-service?

Ultimately our goal in giving advice is to help someone fulfill their purpose as a servant of God. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc. 12:13). Godly advice might not be followed, but if it falls short of this aim, it is the wrong thing to say.