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Church of Christ
371 W. Main Street
Greenwood, IN 46142
(317)888-8288

www.churchofchristatgreenwood.org

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The Sin of Discouraging Others

By Dennis Carrow

We live in a day of incredible pessimism. We are inundated with bad news continuously. In fact our society seems to feed on bad news. This is evidenced by what we witness in the media, and many of the conversations we find ourselves engaged. The end result of all this pessimism can be discouragement. Often times, though we may not realize it, we can be a discouraging people.

The title of the article, "The Sin of Discouraging Others," is the same as a recent article by Gary Henry's WordPoints. Brother Henry reminded me of a great danger we all face if we allow pessimism to rule our minds. The message of the gospel is good news. A powerful characteristic of this message is one of hope. Though *hope does not disappoint*, but we are frequently disappointed in others. The result - we become discouraged. The effect - we discourage others. We need to carefully consider the effect we have on the lives of others.

Consider the Old Testament record of the children of Israel's demise in the wilderness. The promise of deliverance and entry into the wilderness was all because of the sin of discouragement. As Moses addressed the tribe of Reuben and Gad as they were considering staying behind as the others went forward into the Promised Land he said, "*Why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord has given them? ...For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of*

2

Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them." (Numbers 32:6-9) When we examine the context there is nothing that indicated the tribe of Reuben and God intended to discourage others, but this they did. The same can be true for us. Though we may not have the intention of discouraging others, this could be the effect on others if we fail to cautiously consider the things we say or do.

DO NOT PROVOKE, ...LEST THEY BECOME DISCOURAGED

The admonition of Colossians 3:21, "*fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged,*" reminds us that our manner of communication is critical to our influence. The last thing we want is to cause others to feel inferior, become frustrated, and to become discouraged and quit trying. We must see ourselves as encouragers, and focus on that objective. Our interaction should be devoted to building up. "*Speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love*" (Eph. 4:15-16).

Unfortunately we often lose sight of the objective of encouragement, and leave once we have debated our case, made our point, or had our way. To *speak in love* will always enable our motive to remain pure and our tone to be proper.

COMMUNICATING TRUTH WHILE ENCOURAGING TO DO RIGHT

Truth is unchanging and can never be compromised. Our objective is to communicate truth while encouraging one to do the right thing. This requires a patience disposition. A condescending tone while dwelling on the negative is never productive. Additionally, if we fail to listen or refuse to try to understand another's perspective we will be unable to approach them in a comprehensive manner. We need to be informed before we attempt

to communicate – especially when it involves a matter in which one needs to repent.

We are to *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness* (Ephesians 5:11), but we are to *warn the unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, and uphold the weak, and be patient with all* (1 Thessalonians 5:14). So, as we search for balance to avoid discouraging others we must honestly consider the effect we are having on their lives. While we acknowledge that each one must choose their own way, we also must acknowledge a degree of responsibility in our involvement in the lives of others. We can never allow the behavior of others to alter our consistent application of godly communication. *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.* (Ephesians 4:29)

INSULATING THE ENCOURAGER FROM BECOMING DISCOURAGED

Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. (Hebrews 12:3) We must look to Christ! Be reminded of his consistent merciful love that never allowed the behavior of others to hinder his objective. We must never allow the ungodly behavior of others to cause us to *hinder the gospel*. The cure for the hurting heart and the discouraged soul is those three intangible elements - faith, hope, and love. Faith guides and gives birth to vision, hope instills courage and maintains vision, and love gives purpose to life and allows us to transcend ourselves. Love is the proper attitude in action.

We can determine if we are guilty of the sin of discouraging others if we honestly look at the effect we have on those closest to us. What effect are you having in the lives of others? Will you begin today *encourage others* to live for Christ.

Proper Encouragement: A Lost Art

By Steve Niemeier

Proper encouragement has become a lost art in today's society. There are several types of encouragement such as the "mushy" encouragement that is nothing but "show" and given by those who are

"overly positive" and somewhat unrealistic in their "everything is hunky dory" atmosphere. There is the "cover up encouragement" which is basically given to cover up the reality of what a person really thinks.

Barnabas was a character in the New Testament that really new how to encourage and we could all learn a lesson or two from how he encouraged others even in stressful times. Honest and true encouragement includes praising and chastising as well. To give honest encouragement to another one must know the one they are striving to encourage well enough to know how to encourage them properly. This is what brotherly love is about – proper encouragement.