



“Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (Numbers 14:19).

Helping Rebellious People

Central Truth: Intercessory prayer helps to initiate change.

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What would you do if your husband or wife, your friend or fellow church member betrayed you? How would you respond? Here is what you should do. (1) Focus on God, not the person or the problem he or she causes. (2) Endure the pain that the other person's rebellion brings, as Moses endured the rebellions of Israel for forty years. (3) Do not reject the person who has rebelled, even though you do not approve of the wrong that he does. (4) Extend to the rebellious person the same grace that God showed to you when you were in sinful rebellion against Him. (5) Pray for and minister to the wayward person until he or she is reclaimed from a rebellious state.

Rebellion is an indication that a person needs help. It means the person is hurting. As a nurse sits by the bedside of a critically ill patient, so the Christian must not forsake someone who rebels. *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves”* (Romans 15:1). Be a helper to the one who has a rebellious spirit.

Help the Rebellious in Spite of Their Wrong

The rebellious person forgets the promises of God. Israel had God's promise that He would bring her out of Egypt and into Canaan (Exodus 3:8). She had experienced being brought “*out*,” but she was not willing to trust Him to bring her “*in*.” That failure of faith was the seed from which rebellion grew and produced its frightful harvest.

Just so, a person in rebellion today forgets God's promise to reward good and to punish evil. He does so because of his concern for present comforts and personal satisfaction. He had better remember, for God's word is sure.

The rebellious person ignores the proof provided for faith. God had described the Promised Land as *“a land that floweth with milk and honey”* (Leviticus 20:24). Israel arrived at the southern edge of the land and sent twelve faithful men in to search it out. They described the land this way: *“We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it”* (Numbers 13:27). That was proof for their faith. But the rebel will not look for proof, neither will he receive the evidence when it is before his eyes. Because he is filled with himself, he receives nothing which does not agree with his personal attitudes. What a tragedy!

The rebellious person disregards the work of God. Men of Israel had seen God's glory and the miracles which He did in Egypt and in their wilderness journey (Numbers 14:22). But they did not change from rebellion to obedience in view of God's work.

Have you seen a rebel in one of the Lord's churches? God may be doing a great work when someone rebels, but that work is overlooked because the rebel is displeased at some person or some thing. Be sure you are not such a person.

The rebellious person rejects the man of God (Numbers 12:1-10). When Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, challenged the rebellious people to faithful obedience, the murmuring against them turned to threats of murder. The people spoke of stoning their leaders to death. They would have, had not the Lord revealed himself. The rebel rejects his human leader because he has rejected his divine leader.

Yet in spite of all those wrongs, the people of God must not reject the rebel. Instead, they must make every effort to rescue him. *“Though they are slighting Him, / Still He is waiting, / Waiting the penitent child to receive; / Plead with them earnestly, / Plead with them gently, / He will forgive if they only believe”* (Fanny J. Crosby). Will you be patient with the erring brother or sister whom you know is in rebellion?

Help the Rebellious Because of Their Punishment

God will not let rebellion against Him go unpunished. He gave Israel an opportunity to enter their promised land; they refused to go in. In that act they rejected God and His purpose in them. Two things followed.

First, the anger of the Lord was stirred against the people (Numbers 14:11, 12). Their refusal to follow Him was inexcusable. His blessing turned to judgment because “*God is angry with the wicked every day*” (Psalm 7:11). His wrath is constantly revealed from heaven against ungodly men who suppress divine truth by their ungodliness (Romans 1:18). Why do people think they can sin with impunity and still escape the judgment of God? It is impossible.

Knowing the terror of divine judgment, we do not reject the rebel. We work diligently to turn him to repent of his rebellion. Like Moses, we stand between God and the rebels, interceding for them and asking for His mercy to be upon them. What a motive for ministry!

Second, punishment was the sentence of God's just judgment. He warned, “*I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them*” (Numbers 14:12). Does that sound too harsh for a loving God to say? He said it because that is how serious rebellion against Him truly is. The greatness of His person increases the greatness of man's rebellion. God's judgment is certain and severe. A whole generation of people died in the wilderness because of their rebellion against God at Kadesh-barnea. God's judgment against sin has not changed.

If you are concerned that the judgment of God is coming upon rebellious people, help them to return to Him. Do all in your power to reclaim the wandering ones.

Help the Rebellious for the Honor of God

Read Numbers 14:13-19. There is one of the greatest intercessory prayers in the Bible. It pleads for God to spare Israel from the annihilation which He threatened. But take note of the motive behind the prayer. The petition was not simply to keep the people from suffering the due consequences of their sin. That was justly deserved. The prayer was concerned for the glory of God. That should be the purpose of every petition we offer.

“The enemy (Egyptians) will hear of what happened,” Moses reminded God, “and they will tell it abroad among the people.” It would not honor God for such a report to spread. So for the honor of God, Moses requested a reprieve from national judgment. The name of God would be blasphemed among the Gentiles (Romans 2:24). That thought broke the heart of Moses, a man of God.

What is your concern when a church member goes astray? Do you think of the person, the church, or the Lord God? Do you feel anger at the

rebel or dread that the honor of God would be stained? Cultivate a concern for God's honor. "The enemy will misunderstand what happened," Moses continued. "They know that You have gone before Your people in the pillar of cloud and fire. They know that You are personally present among them, being seen face to face. And they will think it is because You could not deliver the people, after bringing them out of Egypt, that You destroyed them in the wilderness. That will dishonor Your great name," he concluded.

The sins of God's people reach far beyond their personal lives. They bear a message to a watching world. The unregenerate world judges God on the basis of the lifestyles of those who claim to be the people of God. Consider the reaction to the fall of a well-known preacher, and think of what that does to the witness of the gospel today. Guard your own life. Help strengthen those Christians who are weak. Lift up those who fall. Be constantly concerned about the reputation of your heavenly Father. Help the rebellious to find peace with Him and in Him.

Help the Rebellious Today

Do you wonder, "How can I help someone who is in rebellion against God"? From the experience of Israel at Kadesh-barnea we can draw some guidelines for you to follow.

Do not be surprised when someone rebels against God. We are living in a world that is under the control of the wicked one (I John 5:19). The whole course of society (except for the saints of God) is in opposition to God and His purpose in the world. A weak or unsuspecting person may be tripped up in a moment and fall into Satan's snare. Do not criticize or condemn him. Rescue him instead.

Do not desert the one who is in rebellion. That is a particular danger in our "throw-away" society. Far too often a problem between a husband and wife ends in a quick divorce because they did not have the courage to work through the problem. They were too ready to drop the other. It must not be so among the people of God. Even if the other person is seriously in the wrong, do not desert him. Help to restore him. *"He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins"* (James 5:20). That could describe you as you rescue the rebel.

Bear patiently with the other person's faults and failures. The Israelites saw God's glorious miracles in Egypt and in their desert journey. Yet ten times they rebelled against Him, tested Him, and did not listen to His voice (Numbers 14:22). But God did not desert them, neither did Moses give up

on them.

Forgiveness is to be extended seventy times seven times, Jesus said. So patient endurance should be extended ten times ten times by one who would help the rebel. Do not keep score. Jesus said the shepherd seeking a lost sheep will “*go after that which is lost, until he find it*” (Luke 15:4). So we are to keep on seeking until the wanderer is safely in the fold.

Pray sincerely for the one who fails. Read again Moses' prayer for rebellious Israel (Numbers 14:13-19). There is not a note of selfishness in it. Neither is there any indication of anger or frustration at the oft-sinning nation. Concern is for the glory of God and the welfare of the people. That is the way you should pray for the sinners and backsliders you know.

Aim to glorify God and reclaim the wayward, not to please yourself. Be careful lest you are tempted by a judgmental spirit or a self-righteous spirit because you are not guilty of the same offense (Galatians 6:1, 2). Let every word and deed reflect the grace of Jesus Christ and bring glory to God.

Heed this appeal for patience in dealing with a rebellious person. Respond to him in the grace with which God responded to you in your sin. Show a spirit of helpfulness by restoring in loving patience the one who has fallen. “*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves*” (Romans 15:1). Amen!

Questions for Discussion

1. How does rebellion indicate that a person needs help?
2. Why should the Christian stay close to the rebellious person?
3. How might rebellion against God be seen in your church?
4. How does God discipline His rebellious child today?
5. How is the honor of God related to Christian conduct?
6. How does grace relate to reclaiming the rebel?
7. How can you develop patience with a wayward person?
8. How does prayer enter into reclaiming the rebel?
9. What guideline is given in Romans 15:1?
10. How can you put Galatians 6:1, 2 into practice?