

Teaching #1570 - Sunday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

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### LISTENING TO THE WORD IN FOUR STEPS (continued)

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

Not everyone who has a Bible experiences its transforming power. For that matter, not everyone who **reads** the Bible experiences its transforming power. Paul outlines the **path for power** in the four words he uses describing the proper reception of God's Word. We've looked at the first two steps in two key words in **verse 16** - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...."

**Teaching** and **reproof**. Those are the first two steps to listening to God's Word. First, we must be Scripturally taught. We must know what the Bible says. The first hunger we must have as Christians is a hunger for the truth. Peter says we hunger for the Word like **newborn babes**. The hunger for the Word is the **priority hunger** for the child of God.

How much do I need to learn and study the truths of God's Word? How much does a baby need milk? This is not optional. It relates to disciplined, systematic church attendance. And it relates to what **kind** of church you attend.

But we need to see the importance of **all** God's Word. We don't just come occasionally to the Word looking for **solutions** to our problems. If we do that, we'll only be interested in God's Word when we're in a jam. There are lots of Christians like that. But the Word will never yield its richest fruit to them. There must be an **ongoing, consistent, growing** study and learning of the whole counsel of God.

Then, secondly, with a deeper understanding of God's truth, we will grow more attuned to the Spirit's **reproof** in our own hearts. As we see more and more of God's glorious truth, we will become aware of **how far short we fall of God's standard**. This is not a **bad** thing. This is not God's way of **condemning** us. It's His way of **convicting** us to bring fresh cleansing and fresh restoration into our lives.

Reproof **feels** painful, but the pain is only temporary. The pain is the pain of surgery - the pain of healing. And the sin must be removed before anything of God's positive kingdom can be constructed in our hearts.

Paul wasn't the only one to describe the importance of heeding reproof. Jesus described the very same process in the hearts of His true disciples: **John 15:1-2** - "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

Remember, pruning is **removing**. It's taking away things that prevent the plant's life from reaching the fruit. The pruning Jesus is talking about is primarily the removal of our own independent will and agenda. Something must be **cut out** of the Father's children if the process of fruit bearing is to be continuous. I can't think of clearer words, right from the lips of our Lord, about the abounding value of reproof.

And notice, it's the **fruitful** plant that needs pruning. I can't think of a better passage to indicate the **ongoing** need for reproof. Fruitful plants **remain** fruitful by heeding the pruning work of reproof on a daily basis. Without reproof, even the fruitful life will dry up. There is no way of maintaining fruitfulness without ongoing reproof. Reproof isn't proof of being backslidden. **Ignoring** reproof is a sign of being backslidden. But **receiving and heeding** reproof is a sign of the Father's ongoing love and interest and investment in your walk with Him.

But what happens **after** the giving and receiving of reproof? What is the next step in the receiving of the transforming power of God's Word in our hearts? Paul looks at that in the third step in this sixteenth verse:

#### 1) THE HEEDING OF REPROOF MUST BE FOLLOWED BY THE ESTABLISHING OF CORRECTION

**2 Timothy 3:16** - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...."

**Correction** is the third step in fruitful listening. The word means to "**set something upright**", or to "**put back on one's feet.**" After the reproof has been given, and the sin rooted exposed and forsaken, the Christian is ready to receive God's positive correction.

Each of these steps is vital. And each of them must be taken in proper turn. It's just like getting a prescription from your doctor. He tells you what medicine to take. He tells you how much to take. He tells you when to take it. And he assumes you are serious enough about your health that you will follow his instructions.

However important this is in the medical realm, it is much **more** important in the spiritual. In fact, if **all** these four steps aren't taken in their proper sequence, or if **any** of them is left out, there will be no growth in the things of the Lord. There will be bruised, worn out, frustrated Christians all over the place, wondering why the Bible seems to help other Christians, but not them.

Let me tell you how I see this happening all the time:

- a) ***There are Christians who back away from their exposure to God's Word simply because they only felt the pain of reproof, without seeing the positive goal at the end of it.***

In other words, they were so focused on the **cost** of obeying the Lord, they didn't see the **reward**. They convinced themselves this was too difficult, too painful. They didn't see how much greater the **end result** of listening to the Spirit of the Lord would be than all the hollow glitter of any sin they presently cherished.

There is such a tight, inseparable link between reproof and implementing the correction that follows it. You can separate them in a sermon like this. But in reality, they come as one complete package. Here's a great example of this from God's Word:

**Deuteronomy 1:34-44** - "And the Lord heard your words and was angered, and he swore, [35] 'Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers, [36] except Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him and to his children I will give the land on which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the Lord!' [37] Even with me the Lord was angry on your account and said, 'You also shall not go in there. [38] Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. [39] And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. [40] But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea.' [41] Then you answered me, 'We have sinned against the Lord. We ourselves will go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.' And every one of you fastened on his weapons of war and thought it easy to go up into the hill country. [42] And the Lord said to me, 'Say to them, Do not go up or fight, for I am not in your midst, lest you be defeated before your enemies.' [43] So I spoke to you, and you would not listen; but you rebelled against the command of the Lord and presumptuously went up into the hill country. [44] Then the Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you as bees do and beat you down in Seir as far as Hormah."

Don't miss what's being described here. The people listened to what God said about their sin. They admitted they had rebelled against the Lord - **Deuteronomy 1:41** - "Then you answered me, 'We have sinned against the Lord. We ourselves will go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.' And every one of you fastened on his weapons of war and thought it easy to go up into the hill country."

Now, the first part of that verse is wonderful. The last part is terrible. It's terrible because God didn't **tell** them to go up into the land the fight their enemies. He told them to go in the opposite direction - **Deuteronomy 1:40** - "But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea."

But that journey was going to take a very long time. And it didn't make any sense to move **away** from the promised land. So the people **listened** to God's reproof of their sin. They **agreed** with God that they had been disobedient. But they weren't willing to heed God's chastening, correcting path for their lives. And the result was disastrous failure.

Follow through after reproof. God may have some discipline for you. There may be a tough **path** of correction. Don't rush on in your own wisdom.

- b) ***There are Christians who try to implement the correction of God's Word without ever forsaking and cutting out the sin He exposed in His reproof.***

This is very common in North American Christianity. We are oriented by our culture to center our lives around the fulfilling of our aspirations and expectations. We want what we want right now. And we don't want to be inconvenienced.

And here's the problem with all that. We are trying to follow a Savior and a faith that has at its entry point a **cross**. In other words, the first thing Jesus bids any of His followers to do is **come and die**.

Many people try to step around that point. And, of course, nothing else will work if that point is side-stepped. You can't just come and claim blessings. You can't just come and try to be a better person. Jesus doesn't *improve* people. He only *re-births* them, and *re-makes* them.

c) ***Sometimes people will avoid God's reproof in one area of their lives by overdoing spirituality in another area.***

This happens all the time. I feel guilty about my secret dishonesty in some area of my work so I decide to give more of my profit to missions or the church. I feel guilty about never being willing to give some time to my marriage and my wife, so I buy her a new car and send her to Europe. I know I don't know enough about God's Word to save my soul, so I make sure my children are in a Christian school. Maybe that will keep their spiritual lives on track.

Whatever form it takes, it's a very common tendency to try to **buy God off** in one area of my life simply because I'm not willing right now to heed His reproof in another. This will never work. It will **never** work.

This is like the man the Prophet Ezekiel described who tries to whitewash over a rotten wall. The whole thing will look a little brighter for a little while, but sooner or later it's all going to come crumbling down. Nothing permanent can be established with that kind of fundamental spiritual dishonesty.

So, just like the doctor's prescription, all these four steps have to be taken in their **entirety**. And they have to be taken in proper **sequence**. God doesn't do patch jobs. He has a plan. He wants to work the whole plan on all our lives.

Perhaps it will help to close with a very simple illustration of how the correction of the Word fits in with God's loving intention to bless our lives in this mistaken world. And notice I said that **correction from the Lord through His Word is always loving**. That has to be overstated because, in our pride, we tend to view any form of correction as **demeaning** and **confining**. When we're corrected it means we're not getting our own way.

But here's what is really happening. Imagine a student adding up a list of numbers to calculate a total sum. Imagine a loving teacher, noticing a mistake right at the beginning of the addition process. She can either **tell** the student of his error, or she can, if she's a very lazy, indifferent teacher, just let the student be.

But that long list of numbers is never going to total correctly. And when the Spirit of God corrects us through the Word, it is only because, if He doesn't, our lives will never **add up**. Correction is never really **confining**. It is always **loving and freeing**.

This is the understanding David had of the correcting power of the Word in His life. Make these direction-filled words the prayer of your life:

**Psalm 119:25, 44-47 - "My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!....44-47....I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, [45] and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts. [46] I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, [47] for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love."**