

Teaching #1571 - Sunday, July 1<sup>st</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."

Last week we began studying the third step in listening to the Word of God with fruitfulness. **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.

We're so used to consider **listening** as something we do while the sermon or the text is being read. In other words, we think of **listening** to the message and the **delivering** of the message as occurring at the same moment in time. But **correction** is usually a **post-listening** event. By that I mean correction usually gets imparted by the Holy Spirit **after** we've learned the truth and are engaged with moving on with what we consider to be normal living. Correction comes from the Holy Spirit while we're busy with **non-religious** events.

Today we continue with two more Biblical insights on the great blessing of the Word's power to correct our lives.

#### 1) **THE BRIDGE BETWEEN THE STING OF REPROOF AND THE BENEFIT OF CORRECTION IS CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE**

Let me give you one of the great verses in the Scriptures. It was written by one of the wisest men ever to live. And it deals with how one makes clean entry into the correcting work of the Word of God and the life of the Holy Spirit:

**Proverbs 28:13** - "**Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.**"

Notice the two important steps: **confession** and **forsaking**. These are the two Biblical ingredients to repentance. Repentance isn't **remorse**. It's **confession** and **forsaking**. Let's look quickly at each of these:

Confession isn't just admitting what you've done. It's not just **spilling the beans**. We are almost buried with confessions from celebrities and politicians and stars. There can almost come a kind of **pride** in that kind of confession. Or, confession can be viewed from a psychological standpoint. The value of confession can be seen as a kind of **emotional catharsis and release**.

None of these has anything to do with Scriptural confession. Scriptural confession is basically **getting God's viewpoint on my sin and agreeing with His assessment**. This means seeing my sin, not merely in terms of human weakness or pain, but as **willful transgression against God**:

**Psalm 51:4** - "**Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.**"

So here's the test of proper confession. If I'm preoccupied with anything else when I confess my sin to God (the **pain** I'm going through, the **damage** I've done to my reputation, the **consequences** of being caught), then I'm not properly aligned with God's Word.

I confess my sin not because I've hurt **me**, but because I've wronged **God**. Sin is ugly, not primarily because it has messed **me** up, but because it has **grieved the Spirit of God**. And the ultimate reason for hating sin isn't the **temporary pain** it inflicts now, but the **eternal separation it brings from God**. That is the biblical mind set for proper confession.

The second step in the bridge between reproof and correction is **forsaking** sin - **Proverbs 28:13** - "**Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.**"

It's a terrible mistake to think all God wants to do is **forgive** your sin. He wants not only to **forgive** the sin you confess. He wants to **remove** it. He wants to replace it with righteousness and the fruit of the Spirit.

It's also a huge mistake to think that God will **forsake your sin for you**. God will **help** you. The Holy Spirit will work **along with your own will** as you decide to turn from wickedness. But He will never **initiate** the process of putting self and sin to death.

Many Christians get confused about this. There is a sense in which some of the old sayings and ideas were very precious. And there's another sense in which a few of them were a little bit misleading. Let me give you an example of this right at this point:

It was a great emphasis of early Pentecostal practice that central to everything else was the experience of God in the heart in a living way. People came to church altars and prayer meetings. They knew they couldn't live the Christian life in their own will power. Most of these people were poor. They knew their only hope was to lift their eyes up to the Lord and call upon His Name.

One of the tragedies of the contemporary worship renewal (and there are great blessings as well as weaknesses) is the tendency to **replace** that kind of seeking of God in **extended times of corporate prayer** with **extended times of corporate singing and worship**.

But, having said that, one of the weaknesses of the old emphasis was the idea of receiving **“victory over sin”** at the altar. Of course, God did touch lives at the altar. He did fill people with His Holy Spirit. He did search and cleanse their hearts. But you really don’t get **victory over sin** at an altar. You experience victory over sin when you **forsake that sin** at specific times of temptation and confrontation with the world, the flesh and the Devil. You may **resolve** to forsake sin at the altar. And that is very important. But you **forsake** sin every day of your life.

In fact, **confessing** and **forsaking** sin form the bridge to ongoing correction and wholeness in your walk with Jesus as Lord.

## 2) **WHEN YOU’VE HEARD THE LORD’S REPROOF, CONFESSED YOUR SIN, AND FORSAKEN IT, YOU’RE NOT DONE**

Jesus was very concerned about the **reoccurrence** of sin in our lives after we have determined to follow Him in purity. In fact, He dealt with that very subject on several occasions: **Matthew 5:29-30** - **“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”** These words come from Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has just spent considerable time dealing with the kinds of sins people commit. He’s dealt with hatred, murder, lust, adultery, unforgiveness, and other sins.

And Jesus offered forgiveness. He offered wonderful, gracious, free pardon for the guilty. When they could do nothing to **earn** their status before a just and holy God, Jesus came and offered wonderful mercy.

But, according to Jesus, it would be a terrible mistake to think that Divine forgiveness somehow brought **immunity to future failure** in those very same sins. And there is nothing more inwardly defeating than falling again into sins that have already been confessed and forsaken before. Nothing will make you feel like your religion doesn’t work like repeated, besetting sins. They **suck all hope out of your soul**.

And that’s not what Jesus plans or desires for His followers. That’s why he deals so pointedly with not only the **forgiveness** of sin in these words, but the **prevention** of sin.

Look with me at Jesus’ words about **establishing permanent patterns of correction** in your walk with Him:

### a) **Jesus assumes these people know where and how they are falling into sin.**

Most Christians think **too late** about sin. We usually think about sin seriously **after** we’ve committed it. Jesus takes a totally different approach. He assumes the one serious about following Him takes the time to **know his or her weaknesses**. Jesus assumes serious followers don’t just let life happen around them. They analyze their failings. They pray about them. They deeply regret them.

If the problem is the eye they know it. If the problem is the hand they understand that. Jesus is dealing with more than just the literal human body in these words. These people know the root - the source of the terrible traps they fall into. They know how the downward spiral into sinful habits is initiated in their beings.

Of course we all know we’re sinners saved by grace. We all know we are weak. But this **general** knowledge isn’t enough. **Why** do you sin? What are your most **troubling, repeated sins**? **How** do you get into those situations? **Where** do you most frequently fail the Lord? Are some seasons worse than others for moral purity? If so, do you know why?

### b) **Jesus assumes these people will do absolutely anything to avoid these sins in the future.**

Don’t rush over those words too quickly. There are many Christians who use the grace of Jesus to take the edge off the battle with sin. There are Christians who will jump recklessly into dangerous moral territory, like a jumper out of an airplane, resting in the knowledge that they always have the parachute of Divine grace to bail them out at the last minute.

Jesus assumes these disciples would rather **willfully lose a limb than continue in sin**. And He paints that picture on purpose. In Jesus’ mind, only those so resolute will have a ghost of a chance at the kind of holiness His kingdom requires.

“But pastor Don, those words sound so hard. It’s almost like we **earn** God’s grace and help by our own works!” No. We never earn God’s grace. Jesus isn’t talking about **earning anything from God**. But he is talking about the kind of attitude - the kind of heart in which God will work. You can cut off every limb in your body and not come anywhere near heaven. Paul says so in 1 Corinthians 13.

But the Holy Spirit won't work in a person who doesn't **choose God's will and way with seriousness and determination**. And Jesus says that kind of choice will always include a kind of **maiming of self**. You can't have Jesus' grace **and** your sinful indulgences at the same time.

c) ***In maintaining moral purity a quick, decisive action is nine tenths of the victory.***

Jesus doesn't counsel a gradual, "I'll pray about it" approach to dealing with sinful tendencies. The quicker the better. The more decisive the break, the more likely the success. Find the source, the root of your problem. Is it a relationship with another person? Is it a place - a location where you can indulge your secret sin? Is it some form of entertainment? **Don't even ask Jesus for help until you are willing to tear that off and throw it away!**

Everybody **plans** to be a nicer person. Everybody loves spiritual growth in some **vague, general sense**. Jesus asks, "Do you want purity more than you want your right hand? More than your right eye?"

Notice, He doesn't assume this will be an **easy** victory. This kind of purity costs. It always costs. Nobody fails because there isn't provision for purity. They fail because they don't **want** purity as much as they think they do.

d) ***In cutting off the hand you are eliminating the prospect of future sin.***

I know we don't reach perfection in this life. But Jesus is talking about my heart's **determination** in dealing with sin. Much of the battle with sin is won between the **last** instance of sin being confessed and the **next** moment of temptation to that **same** sin in the future. That's the point of Jesus' strong words. Amputated limbs never grow back. Put repeated sins more out of reach. Plan each step of your day for the avoidance of sin. You can't keep all temptation out of your life, but **stay clear of known sources of temptation and failure**.

Jesus' words about cutting off the future of repeated sins only **seem** harsh. They're actually words filled with grace and freedom. He's calling on all of us to not just deal with holiness **after** we've sinned. There is something even **better** than forgiveness. He is able to keep us from **falling!**