

SOUL FOOD - The Things You Need To Know About Your Bible - Pt 13
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PREPARING YOUR HEART FOR GOD'S HEALING CORRECTION

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."

There are two effective tools used by the Holy Spirit to pour and shape godliness in our lives. The first is the ***power of a good example*** - **2 Timothy 3:10** - "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness..."

Every serious Christian must abandon superficial influences and cling to examples that are, not necessarily the most ***popular***, but the most ***fruitful***.

The call to be shaped by ***good*** examples rather than ***empty*** must be personally applied to every follower of Christ. It means ***naming*** the influences that drain and pollute. Predominantly, in our culture, this will mean giving careful attention to the moral influence of all ***relationships***. And it means paying the high price of ***forsaking*** those who would draw our hearts from our Lord. It means being ***particular*** and ***honest*** in assessing television, movies, music and the internet. ***Entertainment*** is the ***worship*** of our world. Good examples must be ***sought***. Bad ones must be uprooted. Anything less than this is just empty talk.

The second great tool for transformation is the ***Word of God***. And it's powerful because it's ***breathed out by God Himself*** - **2 Timothy 3:16** - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable...." So of course it's profitable. How could it ***not*** be if it is breathed out by God Himself?

But 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***...."

Teaching and ***reproof***. Those are the first two steps. 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 **first** natural hunger for the child of God. 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** hunger for 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."

Don't miss the obvious point here. 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. Without reproof, even the fruitful life will dry up. There is no way of maintaining fruitfulness without ongoing reproof. Reproof isn't the sign of being backslidden. **Ignoring** reproof is the 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....”

Correction is the third step. The word means to “**set something upright**”, or to “**put back on one’s feet**.” After the reproof has been given, and the sin identified, 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.

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 TRYING TO OVERDO SPIRITUALITY IN ANOTHER.

This happens frequently. 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.

2) **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 it's 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.

Christians can 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.

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

This is the focal point of this morning’s message. 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.

Jesus 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

Band Aids come off in time. Don't take the Band-Aid approach. Amputated limbs never grow back. Put repeated sins 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.**

So don't just deal with God **after** you've sinned. There is something even **better** than forgiveness. He is able to keep you from **falling!**