

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part eleven

Teaching #1960 - Sunday, April 9th, 2017 - 6 p.m.

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REPROOF - THE HURT THAT HEALS

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."

In our last teaching in this series we launched into the four specific steps leading into the fruitful reception of the Word of God in our lives. The **goal** of the whole process is clearly marked out by Paul in **verse 17** - "...that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

That's the goal - the **target**. We want to be men and women of God. And, more than that, we want to have **good works** abounding in our lives - "...**equipped for every good work**"(17). We want our **relationships** to be full of good works. We want our **ministry** for the Lord to be full of good works. We don't want our lives to be **empty**, or **vain**, as the Scriptures put it. We don't want to be spinning our wheels. We don't want to hold some isolated beliefs about God that make no difference to the fruitfulness of our actions and plans.

So Paul says God has a plan. He has provided something very special. Because it is very easy to **overlook** or **undervalue** this provision Paul reminds Timothy the Bible isn't just another book of information or instruction. There is lots of religious instruction in this world. Most of it is helpful enough as far as it goes. But the Bible is different from anything else. The reason it will accomplish its goal in our lives is its unique **origin** and its unique **inspiration**:

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

Those terms "**breathed out by God**," and "**profitable**," are related. God is very good at accomplishing His purposes in this world. Think of the power of His Words. Think of the power of the **speech of God** as His words alone form matter from non-matter, to bring physical effects from non-physical causes, to spin galaxies into space, cause various forms of **non-life** to turn into **life**. That's the power of God's Word.

So Paul wants to encourage Timothy that He must not forget this. God's Word - the Scriptures - mustn't be thought of as anything other than **living and active and powerful** to accomplish their purpose in our lives.

With the **goal** in mind (making us into men and women of God), and the **provision** of the means (the Scripture inspired by God) Paul describes the **process** - the **four steps** - to seeing all of this activated in ordinary people like you and I. We studied the **first step** in our last look at this passage. The first step is **teaching (16)**. Nothing can germinate from a closed book or an empty head. There must be teaching. The Word must get into our lives. This takes more than most people think, and we looked at that whole process in detail.

Now we come to the **second step** in producing Biblical change - "**reproof**" - "**All Scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof...**"(16).

1) **REPROOF IS THE LOGICAL SECOND STEP AFTER TEACHING**

Once I see the standard - once I see the truth - once my mind is informed by the light - I immediately am made aware of **how far short I fall of that truth**. Until my mind is confronted by the divine objective truth from God I can pretty much satisfy myself with the relative thinking of the world. I'm as good as most other people. I'm **better** than many. And if my conscience bothers me too much at some point, if I just wait long enough, it will soon become seared and jaded by a host of experts who will tell me I'm just being too hard on myself. The

modern quest for self-esteem is loaded with conscience numbing effects.

This quest for truth is so misunderstood. People who **contend** for absolute Biblical truth aren't just interested in proving they're **right**. The whole process of **transformation** is stopped cold in its tracks unless there is absolute, knowable truth to **confront** my life with **reproof**. **Relativism never confronts**. Relativism always **accommodates**. And this shuts down the whole process of the Holy Spirit bringing healing **reproof** into my heart.

But once my mind sees the truth, **God's** truth, my subjective moral standards hit the speed-bump of objective, divine revelation. I'm awakened to the ugliness of the sin in my own heart. What I once saw as merely a **weakness** is now identified as **rebellion**. Something begins to hurt in my soul.

It's important to remember that this whole process is perfectly healthy and Scriptural. Paul described it in his own life:

Romans 7:7-9 - "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." [8] But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. [9] I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, ***sin came alive and I died.***"

"***I died***"(9). That's the beginning of **reproof**. That's why the Bible is called the "***sword of the Spirit.***" ***Swords kill.*** Don't miss Paul's simple point. Without the knowledge of God's law Paul didn't **see** the sinfulness of covetousness. Without the truth of God's Word he was as blind to this sin in his life as if it didn't exist at all. In fact, he was much more at peace, at least with **himself**, **without** God's Word than **with** it.

That's why it is always dangerous to measure the spiritual health of your heart merely by the state of inward peace or comfort or serenity. The only reason Paul wasn't bothered by the sin of covetousness was **he was unaware of the presence of that sin in his own heart.**

But then the truth came. The light was turned on. And it turned up all those unexposed areas in the corners of Paul's religious heart. That's the process of **reproof**. It is designed to follow the teaching phase. In fact, contrary to what many have been led to believe, if there is no period of reproof after the teaching, then somehow the teaching has been incomplete and deficient. Certainly the process should never **end** in reproof. But it must always **include** reproof.

Now, why does Paul go into such detail relating all this to pastor Timothy? Why does Timothy need to be reminded about the ongoing need, both in his **own** life, and in the ministry he has to the **church** he pastors, about this step of reproof in the making of a man or woman of God?

I'll tell you why. It's because we'd all like to get to Godliness **without** reproof. It is no accident that we fun-loving people have unceasingly come to call all our worship gatherings "***celebrations.***" Celebration is an **up** word. We'd all like to feel that we can just be **encouraged** into the kingdom of God. We'd all like to think the presence of God always brings **nothing but peace** into our hearts. In fact, there is a very popular brand of spirituality around that teaches God is constantly working to do nothing but **affirm** His children. He never makes them feel uncomfortable.

But that's not true. So much theological confusion abounds right at this point. We constantly need to maintain the distinction between the terms **condemnation** (which the Holy Spirit never does) and **conviction** (which the Holy Spirit constantly does). Here's how you can always tell the difference:

Condemnation only emphasizes the negative. It settles and dwells only on the **fault**. Condemnation goes

nowhere else. There is no emphasis on the **solution** after the fault has been exposed. **Conviction**, on the other hand, initially **feels** like condemnation. Conviction is like a needle that **does** hurt when put under the skin, but it is leading up to something healthy and life-giving. Conviction **exposes** sin, but only with the intention of **removing** it and opening up the door to **new life and holiness and hope**.

That's why preaching and teaching without reproof is spiritually dead and useless. It can never be anything but barren, though it's also very popular. That's why most television ministries are about healing, miracles and victory. Reproof will land your program in the 2 to 5 a.m. time slot.

O, how we need the rock solid revelation of the Scriptures on this point. Teaching without reproof has always been embraced by our fallen human nature. The prophets encountered it way back in the Old Testament:

Ezekiel 13:9-12 - "My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord God. [10] Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash [remember those words], [11] say to those who smear it with whitewash that ***it shall fall!*** [remember those words] There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind break out. [12] And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the coating with which you smeared it?'"

Those are very important words. They are much more than just a record of some holy temper tantrum on God's part. That's not what those verses are all about. God's anger is expressed against any teaching that **purports** to be Biblical and life-giving in nature when, in fact, it's death-dealing because it doesn't name, expose, and root out the problem of sin.

That's where that image of plastering a rotten, decaying wall with whitewash comes in. If the drywall is all rotten and pulpy, you can't just buy a can of cheap paint and cover it all up. First you have to replace the old drywall. You have to scrape and tear out and sand. Then you have to replace and fill and prime and clean and paint some more.

And the issue here isn't just some legalistic hankering to hammer Christians over the head. Remember God's word to the prophets in Ezekiel's day. The issue is **fixing the wall so it will stand firm - fixing it so it will stand up - fixing it so it will bear the weight of whatever structure God wants to build up in that life!** That's the issue. And you can't accomplish that without the temporary pain of reproof.

2) **BEFORE THE FALL, ONLY INSTRUCTION WAS NECESSARY. SINCE THE FALL, REPROOF MUST FOLLOW INSTRUCTION**

The Fall embroidered the need for reproof right into the fabric of creation. **Before** the Fall, before the **entrance of sin** into this world, all mankind needed was **instruction**. But **since** the Fall, since mankind **disobeyed** what he knew from God in his heart, reproof is the only step that opens up the heart to healing grace.

Every person needs to be absolutely convinced about this in his or her own heart. Ask yourself this question: **Do people just need instruction from God? Or do they need reproof?** All of this has to do with how we conceptualize evangelism. Do people just need to see our love, as is so often said? Or do they need, while in a loving and wise manner, some exposure to God's revelation on human sin and wickedness? Or, put in a slightly different way, **do people suffer from ignorance in their relationship with God? Or are they guilty of rebellion against God?**

Of course, you're free to answer that question any way you want. But if you want to line your thinking up with

the Word of God, your only option is **B - *we are all guilty of rebellion against God, not just ignorance.*** This is Paul's whole point in the unfolding assessment of mankind in Romans chapter one. At some level, Paul says we all "***suppress the truth***" from and about God.

That's what the Fall has done to mankind. And whether or not you have developed an appreciation for reproof will hinge entirely on your view of our present position as human persons. What do you see as our most urgent need? If our problem is merely unhappiness or low self-esteem then all we need is fulfillment and encouragement. If our problem is merely one of loneliness or discouragement then all we need is fellowship and happiness.

But if my problem is my willful rebellion and my replacement of God's place in my life with my own agenda, then I stand in need of correction and reproof from on high. And the attempt to ***evade*** the truth about ourselves and our actions is constant in the world and frequent in the church:

"Pastor Don, I've been rejected since I was a child and now I can't love anyone else. My parents constantly blew up at me and now I lose my temper with everyone else."

"Pastor Don, my wife and I are calling it quits. We've tried to make this marriage work, but we're just not compatible. We just weren't made for each other"

We are such ***blame removers***. We ***do*** want our problems fixed. We know we're needy people. We all want change. We all want to be men and women of God. And God has a tool that He promises will be perfectly able to accomplish that task. But ***before*** it will work, it must be embraced and received on ***His*** terms, not ***ours***. And wholeness always comes on the far side of reproof.

There is nothing more damning to your soul than the attempt to make the Christian life feel wonderful ***too soon*** or wonderful ***all the time***. Spiritual life is a life following the Spirit of God. It isn't just life on the "sunny side of the street." Let seasons of reproof run as deep as the Holy Spirit would take them. Blessed are those who learn to ***mourn*** their way into joy. Allow repentance a chance to bear its sweetest fruit. Because if you try to ***brush past*** reproof and repentance, you're only locking your entire life into perpetual bondage to repeated sin. And there's no joy whatsoever there.

Wasn't this lesson taught by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer? "Give us this day our ***daily*** bread, ***and*** forgive us our ***trespasses.***" ***Daily*** bread. ***Daily*** confession. Don't try to live more than one day without allowing the Holy Spirit to bring life giving reproof into the front part of your mind.