

The Blessedness of Receiving Correction

Proverbs 15:32

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Dear children and young people (and we older people), God has given to us who desire to grow in wisdom a divinely appointed means of getting it: Correction. The Lord grows us in His knowledge by first showing to us our ignorance. How important it is that we learn this truth while we still have so much of life ahead of us and that we not struggle throughout life thinking that encouragement is good and helpful while correction is bad and harmful. The spirit of the age is, “Just tell me the good things about myself and how well I have done a job, and not where I have sinned or need to grow.” We all need encouragement and God calls us to encourage and edify one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). But have we so focused on encouragement that we have forgotten that we are truly wise when we thankfully receive correction from God/others?

One of the greatest hindrances to growing in true knowledge and wisdom is our own stubborn pride. Pride thinks it already knows it all. Pride does not want to be a student, but wants to be the teacher at all times. Pride is unteachable, whereas the wisdom that is from above is “easy to be entreated” (James 3:17). God our Father has sovereignly determined in His most holy plan that the way to obtain true knowledge and wisdom is to crucify our pride, acknowledge we don’t know everything, and thankfully receive the true correction of others as coming from Him.

Let’s consider God’s way to grow in wisdom from our text in Proverbs 15:32: (1) The Consequence of Refusing Correction (Proverbs 15:32a); (2) The Reward of Receiving Reproof (Proverbs 15:32b).

I. The Consequence of Refusing Correction (Proverbs 15:32a).

A. First, we see the folly of those who will not receive correction. Note what is first said to be refused or ignored: instruction (or better, correction). Here is one who hates to be told that he/she has said or done something wrong or is deficient in knowledge in some way.

1. How often do the walls go up when we are corrected? **Perhaps** we become defensive and seek to justify our ignorance, error, or sin. **Perhaps** we become silent and crawl into a shell and isolate ourselves from the one correcting us. **Perhaps** we fight back in anger to show how little the corrector knows. **Perhaps** we murmur and rail behind the corrector’s back after he/she is gone. **Perhaps** we say we appreciate the correction, but then do nothing to change our thinking/speaking/acting.

2. We may have many different responses to correction that we do not want to hear, but the outcome is the same: we will not take it to heart and seek by God’s grace to learn from the correction given to us. Our stubborn pride will not allow us to admit we have a fault, a sin, an error, or are ignorant in some area. Instead of growing in true knowledge, we rather act as though others cannot teach us (God cannot teach us).

3. When we despise correction from others, we will often give reasons why we refused to receive the correction from others.

a. **“They didn’t approach me in love and meekness.”**

(1) They may not have delivered the correction in the most gracious manner, but if what was said was the truth, we should be all ears because we want to grow and become wise. It is true that when we correct or rebuke one another, we should speak the truth in love (we should correct others as we would want others to correct us—that’s the law of love, Galatians 6:1-2).

(2) Let us never refuse to hear and obey the truth simply because it wasn’t served to us in the most pleasing way. If we were starving, we would not care how food was prepared. We would just be thankful to receive nourishment. Likewise, if we hunger and thirst to be filled with true knowledge and wisdom, we will not despise correction even when it is not given to us in the way we desire.

(3) We must even learn to turn even the harsh criticism of others into a lesson in the School of Christ in asking ourselves: Is there any merit at all in the criticism I just received? Can I use anything that was said in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ? The Lord even intends that we benefit and profit from criticism. In that respect, even those who make themselves our enemies become our friends in teaching us how to grow a thick skin, and yet a tender heart. How much time do we waste fuming and worrying about criticism, but not growing/learning from it or being thankful for it?

(4) Even if we do not believe the correction/criticism is justified at all (perhaps it is based upon misinformation or a misunderstanding), let us not easily dismiss the correction or criticism of others just because we do not like what was said or the way that it was said. We may even thank the corrector (if there is merit in the criticism in any way), and then perhaps humbly instruct that brother or sister in how they might improve in gently correcting others in the future.

b. **“They are subordinate to me and should not have corrected me.”**

(1) Where in the Scripture does it teach that subordinates may not humbly correct their superiors? I would submit that we who lead and yet cannot receive correction from those we lead are acting as though our authority is absolute (rather than delegated to us by God). That is where tyranny begins. When a superior receives the legitimate correction from a subordinate, it does not attack lawful authority, but rather reveals that all human authority can be misused and must humble itself before even the smallest child when that child brings in hand the Word of God.

(2) Though Peter states (in 1 Peter 3:6) that Sarah submitted herself to Abraham and called him her lord (i.e. her head), yet, Sarah corrected Abraham when he wanted to keep Hagar and Ishmael in the family and said to him, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman will not be heir with my son, even with Isaac” (Genesis 21:10). God told Abraham in that case to listen to his wife because she was right (Genesis 21:12).

(3) Neither superiors, nor subordinates, nor equals should anxiously await every possible opportunity to wield the sword of correction, lest the sword grow dull and lose its effect. When correction is used sparingly, humbly, and necessarily, it will more likely become an effective sword in cutting to the very heart of a person.

(4) None of us are to hold some supposed office of Corrector in Chief. We are to be careful that when we correct we do so in love and not just to point out the faults of others in order to make ourselves look good or important and that we do so in order to help others, not to hurt others. If we want our correction to be helpful, we must care as much about the way that we give it as we care about the way others receive it. We cannot control how others receive our correction, but we can control how we give it. And how we give it will usually impact how others receive it.

B. Second, note what is the consequence when one refuses the correction of God through others: He despises his own soul.

1. By his refusal to receive correction and to admit that he is wrong in some way, he shows he actually despises himself. The Old Testament commentators, Keil and Delitzsch, give to us (in their commentary on this verse) the true sense of what it means to despise oneself when they say, “The despising of the soul is then the neglecting, endangering, exposing of the life; in a word, it is suicide.” Wow! To ignore legitimate correction in our life is to destroy ourselves—it is to commit suicide. For the foolish person that refuses to be corrected or does not take correction seriously refuses the truth being offered to them that could save their life and rather consigns themselves to destruction (it may start off small, but leads to a pattern in life).

a. What happens to us when we harden our heart to the correction of the Holy Spirit through the use of God’s Law in our life?

(1) If we ignore the correction/conviction of the Holy Spirit, if we refuse to hear the rebuke of God’s Law, we will be given over to more serious sins and will plunge ourselves into great

danger (apart from God's grace).

(2) In such a case, we are like those who refuse to hear that they have cancer, and will not receive the help that is needed to overcome it. By their refusal, they, in effect, destroy themselves.

b. When we thankfully submit to legitimate correction, and understand the legitimate correction of others to be the loving correction and discipline of our heavenly Father (as taught in Hebrews 12), we are taking steps to destroy pride in our lives and are being prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive knowledge, understanding, and wisdom from the Lord. We are saving ourselves from much pain and heartache in the present and in the future.

II. The Reward of Receiving Reproof (Proverbs 15:32b).

A. Here is the flipside of good news to the previous warning.

1. This receiving of reproof is not a work of the flesh in our hearts. For none of us naturally wants to hear reproof from God or from others. When we earnestly and thankfully receive the faithful correction of God and others, we can take no credit to ourselves, for this is an evidence of God's work of grace in our soul apart from which we will continue on a path of self-destruction in not heeding the correction of God and others. It is God working in us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12). If the Lord did not sovereignly and effectually give us a new heart and subdue pride within us, none of us would willingly and thankfully receive correction from God or anyone else.

2. Let us boast not in ourselves that we are able to receive correction from God and others (as if this is due to our own strength or gifts). Let us rather fall down on our faces before our merciful God and with thankful hearts boast in the grace of Christ and in the cross of Christ which have made us willing to receive correction.

B. God sets before us the way of life and the way of death (Jeremiah 21:8).

1. Moses urges us to choose the way of life (Deuteronomy 30:19).

2. Solomon mercifully instructs his son and us (his spiritual children) that the way of life is to earnestly and thankfully receive correction (Proverbs 6:23); whereas the way of death is stubbornly and foolishly to refuse correction (Proverbs 15:10).

3. May we not be filled with all kind of regrets as we grow older because of the heartache we have reaped due to the correction we have refused to receive (Proverbs 5:12-13).

4. Just as Jesus is made unto us the righteousness of God that we so desperately need (because we are sinners), so He is made unto us the wisdom of God that we so desperately need (because we are ignorant and proud)—1 Corinthians 1:30-31. We cannot be truly wise or knowledgeable without the grace of Jesus Christ. We cannot truly receive correction and walk that path of life without the grace of Jesus Christ.

5. Yes, it hurts to be corrected, but it is usually only our pride that is hurt. Let us, therefore, grow in our love of truth, knowledge, and wisdom to such an extent that we thankfully receive all lawful correction as coming from Jesus who loves us. Let us be humbled by correction rather than being exalted by the pride of knowledge that thinks it cannot be taught. Let us choose the way of life that is found in receiving good correction rather than the way of death that hates reproof.

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