

2Timothy 3:14-17

The Rules of God's Corrections

All scripture...is profitable for...correction... v. 16

Whenever you enter a prison or a correctional institution to visit someone, you usually discover a list of rules posted on the wall that gives you the do's and don'ts of your visit. I remember some years ago reading these rules and how impressed I was that they went so far as to impose a dress code on those that would enter the prison to visit a friend or a relative. This prison would not allow immodest and provocative clothing. And I remember thinking to myself how ironic this rule was and how far ahead of the rest of society this prison was at least in that respect.

Now there is a sense in which a Christian, who has entered into the true church by means of salvation – there is a sense in which such a Christian has entered into God's correctional facility. Salvation itself can be viewed as one great big correction that encompasses the sinner's entire life. There are so many things, you see, that become corrected. The Christian's view of sin becomes corrected. His view of God becomes corrected. His view of heaven and hell becomes corrected. Simply put – his view of life, indeed life itself becomes corrected.

You didn't come into this world with a right view of any of these things. You viewed God with indifference if you thought upon him at all. You treated sin as something trite and harmless – to each his own is the common philosophy of life where most sin is concerned. If you thought at all upon hell you viewed it as a place that you didn't have to worry about. Hell is a place for people like Hitler and Stalin and the worst of the worst of the world's cruel tyrants and dictators. Certainly not a place for normal everyday people who are good at heart – so the thinking goes.

Your view of heaven would have been to see it as a place where all people, for the most part, with the possible exception of the worst of the worst are headed. Or you may have simply viewed it as a superstitious fantasy – a gimmick that we utilize to console ourselves when loved ones pass away – Some fictitious story to help explain death to our children.

Salvation corrected your erroneous views of these things. This is why I say that there's a sense in which salvation wrought upon the mind and soul by the Holy Spirit which brings forth such radical change that it's called a new birth – salvation, or the power of the gospel brings about drastic correction to a saved sinner's life.

You've entered into God's correctional facility, but God's correctional facility is not a prison. Indeed God's correctional facility sets you free. *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed* Christ says in Jn. 8:36. And so it has been in the power of gospel freedom that so many things about you have been corrected.

What I want you to notice from the text this morning is that correction is an ongoing thing. Hence, it's stated as one of the reasons scripture is given to us. Notice what it says: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for*

correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. In order to be furnished unto all good works we find ourselves in need of correction. Even as Christians we still find ourselves in need of reproof and correction. The very fact that we still possess sin natures and that these sin natures can get the best of us should indicate to you that the need for correction in the Christian's life is ongoing.

If correction was not an ongoing need for Christians, then most of Paul's epistles would not have been necessary. Most of them are written in order to correct wrong thinking or wrong behavior or wrong attitudes.

The problem I'm afraid that many Christians face – especially those that have been in the faith for a number of years is the problem of admitting to yourself that you are still in need of correction in various areas of your lives. It's possible for seasoned Christians to reach an impasse in their lives in which they think that they are beyond correction when in truth there may be areas in your lives that for the longest time have been in need of correction, and you know that there is need for correction but you've simply been too insensitive to such needs and have come to accept certain things about yourself that you may acknowledge are less than ideal, but after all you can't teach an old dog new tricks which means really that you can't correct bad habits, or you can't begin to establish good ones.

I referenced that posted list of rules in correctional facilities a moment ago. What I'd like to bring to your attention this morning are the rules for correction in the church of Christ.

Following the Rules for Christ's Corrections in the Church

That's my theme and what I want to do in the moments that remain is elaborate a few of those rules. Think with me first of all, then on what I'll call:

I. Rule #1 – You Must Affirm the Grounds for Your Correction

Prov. 3:12 For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son [in whom] he delighteth.

The Lord, out of his love to us in Christ corrects us. We are taught in the gospel to read our harsh providences as manifestations of Christ's love. I have often referred to this phenomenon in terms of our Christian liberty. We have the liberty to read God's providence this way because we know that the issue of our judgment has been settled through the cross work of Christ. *There is, therefore, now, no condemnation to those which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.* (Rom. 8:1,2).

The law of sin and death says to the conscience of the sinner that God is his judge and his miseries in this life is due to God being his judge. Our shorter catechism tells us that the misery of man's fallen condition consists in his loss of communion with God, being

under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself and to the pains of hell forever.

The gospel, however, tells us that Christ was cursed for us, and that he subjected himself to death for us and thus has enabled us to re-establish communion with God and to escape God's wrath and curse and to enter into eternal life and escape the pains of hell forever. This does not, however, mean that we escape miseries in this life. We know that we undergo them. But we also know that they are dealt to us in order to correct us and we should be sensitive to them along those lines.

And so Job's cry to God in the midst of his sufferings is given to us in Job 13:23 and keep in mind here the spiritual caliber of Job. There was none like him in the earth, an upright man and one who feared God and eschewed evil. So he saw in his sufferings God's design for correction when he cried out: *How many [are] mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin.*

That's not a bad thing for us to cry to God in the midst of our own suffering and hardship because there is a purpose of grace in our sufferings. They are dealt to us by our heavenly Father who loves us. And if we lose sight of our right to call upon God as our Father who art in heaven, then the temptation we face is to despise the chastening of the Lord and we'll grow weary under his correcting rod.

Whenever I think of Christians who stood in sore need of correction my mind immediately takes me to the church at Corinth. Here was a church in need of a lot of correction. There was strife in that church because of divisions between the people there. There was immorality in that church and equally as bad as the immorality was the attitude that was being shown toward that immorality. There was chaos and confusion in that church. There was a good deal of pride in that church because pride is often times the cause of divisions and the cause of chaos and confusion.

If you knew nothing about that church but the problems it faced you would certainly want to steer clear of it. Indeed some commentators and preachers wonder why Paul didn't write off that church altogether and conclude that his labors there must not have really been life transforming. He must have gained only shallow ground hearers or stony ground hearers whose interest in Christ is temporal and superficial.

That would be an easy conclusion to come to if you didn't think that in the gospel there is a ministry of correction. All Scripture is given to us for reproof and for correction. And the reason that Paul didn't simply write off that church was because while he knew there was room for correction he also knew that the grace of God had been evident in that church.

The first thing Paul writes to that church after his opening salutation is *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.* (1Cor. 1:4-6).

There is certainly an important lesson in these words when it comes to correcting our attitudes toward other Christians. Even though this church was in need of extensive corrections that need did not blind the Apostle to the truth that grace had been manifested in the lives of those Christians. They had been enriched by Christ and the testimony of Christ had been confirmed in them.

Paul would not allow their problems to blind him to that truth. I listened to a sermon some time ago on the subject of Christian leadership. The preacher of that sermon made much of this fact that Paul saw the grace of God in the Christians at Corinth. And he drew from Paul's sight of that grace a very important truth when it comes to the ministry of correction. That ministry will not be effectively administered if the grace of God is not first acknowledged in the lives of those that stand in need of correction.

It's tantamount to saying that Paul could see the best in people and not just the worst in them. That's something, I believe, that needs to be put into practice not only by those that are leaders in the church but by those also that are leaders in their homes. As parents you see very clearly the faults in your children. You know that they need so much correction and perhaps you wonder how many rods of correction you're going to wear out in your efforts to bring their behavior into line.

And it's fine that you see their faults, but do you see their virtues as well? Do you see and acknowledge the things that they say and do that are commendable? If you're to follow Paul's example you will not only see those things but you will make the acknowledgement of those things your first priority. For it is only when grace is acknowledged and when love is acknowledged that the groundwork is laid for correction to be administered.

Rule #1 then pertains to the grounds for correction. The grounds for being corrected is the love of God in Christ and the grace of God in your lives. Those that are conscious of God's love who believe in God's grace will manifest submissive spirits when it comes to being corrected. They will imitate the Psalmist who says in Ps. 141:5 *Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.*

II. Rule #2 – You Must be Willing to Receive Correction

I refer again to the church at Corinth. When Paul sent his first epistle to them he was very anxious for them. How would his letter be received? That letter did contain many corrective measures that needed to be exercised on their part. And to make matters worse there were factions there that were not so keen on the Apostle himself. There were those who would challenge his authority. There were those that would endeavor to undermine his ministry. And so Paul would be understandably anxious about the reception of his first epistle to them.

We learn of their reaction to his first epistle in 2nd Corinthians. Listen to the words of 2Cor. 7:5-9. These words show us Paul's anxiousness for them as well as their response to

him. *For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. 6 Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; 7 And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more. 8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. 9 Now I rejoyce, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.*

Paul's epistle had been received favorably and the corrective measures that he administered to them were taken to heart. And here is where the Corinthians, I believe, become very impressive. The zeal that they manifested in making the needed corrections to their lives was impressive. Listen to the way Paul describes their zeal in 2Cor. 7:11 *For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

Oh that we might imitate the zeal of the Christians at Corinth when it comes to making corrections in our own lives. Let it be said of you and of me that we sorrowed after a godly sort and manifested indignation not toward the one who would correct us but indignation toward our own sin. Oh that we might know indignation that leads to vehement desire and zeal and revenge when it comes to our own correction.

It's no wonder Paul could testify regarding the saints at Corinth that they came behind in no gift waiting for the coming of Christ (1:7). They had received the gift of grace. They had responded and been transformed by the gospel of Christ. And perhaps the most visible manifestation of that grace was not to be seen in the exercise of spiritual gifts, but rather in their submissive spirits and zeal with which they made the needed corrections in their lives and in their church.

Their example stands in stark contrast to the Jews during the days of Jeremiah. Listen to what Jeremiah was to testify regarding their willingness to receive correction. This is found in Jer 7:28 *But thou shalt say unto them, This [is] a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.*

Earlier in Jeremiah God testifies *In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion (2:30).* Jeremiah himself would have to bear the brunt of their resistance to God. He would be committed to prison. He would be let down into a miry pit. He would face the thankless task of proclaiming God's word to a people so proud and so hard that they thought they were above correction.

So we have the Corinthians, on the one hand, who demonstrate impressive zeal when it comes to correction and we have the hard-heartedness of the Jews in Jeremiah's day, on the other hand who were totally unwilling and were too proud for any kind of correction. If we were to produce a scale with the Corinthians on the positive side and the Jews of Jeremiah's day on the negative side, I wonder where on that scale would you be found?

Certainly where the gospel of grace has been wrought in the heart of the sinner with power, the evidence of that power will be found in a willingness and even a zeal to apply the corrections of God's word to your life. May the Spirit of God himself inspire your zeal and may we all be delivered from the kind of hardness that resists God's word and resists correction.

III. Rule #3 – You Must Utilize the Means for Your Correction

Our text tells us that the means to our correction is through the inspired scriptures. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

This verse not only tells us the purpose that God's word serves but it also identifies for us some of the areas in which we need correction. There is an element here that pertains to our thinking. There are times when our thinking needs to be corrected regarding our doctrine and the scriptures are profitable for doctrine.

The word *reproof* is defined by one commentator as meaning *convincing* that is convincing a man of his sins. The word *correction* means the leading to an amendment of life. And so the verse may be analyzed this way:

We need corrections to our thinking – we need corrections to our morals – we need corrections to our behavior. I would add that we need corrections to our attitudes. And these corrections are ministered to us by God's word. You begin to see the importance of time in the word of God.

Those that neglect the scriptures neglect their own corrections. I would say that they come closer to those on scale I described a moment ago that correspond to the Jews in Jeremiah's day. And what was the attitude of those Jews in Jeremiah's day? They were infected with pride and indifference and the thought that because they were the people of God, they were fine. Corrections were for Gentiles. Corrections were for others who were not among the people of God but because they were the people of God they became presumptuous regarding their need for correction.

Their condition brings concern to my mind regarding Christians that have been Christians for some time. I'm afraid that seasoned Christians can become vulnerable to presumption. They presume that all is well with them. After all they're Christians, and not just Christians but those that have named the name of Christ for many years. Go talk to young Christians about the need for correction but don't talk to me about it. I've been a Christian for years and even decades. I've been in the church all of my life.

And yet, when you stop and think about it – how many characters can you find in the scriptures that start out well but end poorly? There are any number of characters that teach us that it's not how you start but how you end that counts. I'm reminded of David, a man after God's own heart who nevertheless sinned and needed correction in his later days. A mark of Christian maturity should be an increased willingness and zeal for correction rather than a hardness against it. But hardness is too often the case among those that have been Christians for a long time.

So we utilize the word of God for correction. We also utilize the place of prayer. Listen to the prayer of Jeremiah in Jer. 10:24. I think this petition demonstrates a tremendous degree of spiritual maturity. *O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.*

The word *judgment* could be translated *justice*. Correct me with justice, not in anger. Wouldn't you think that justice and anger would go hand in hand? Isn't it because sin violates God's justice and invites God's anger that we think of justice and anger going hand in hand?

Or could it be that the prophet understands as David before him understood, and as Abraham before David understood the doctrine of justification by faith. I have defined justification by faith as salvation as it relates to God's justice. And when you understand the connection between salvation and justice and how salvation is compatible with justice because of justice being satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ, then it could make sense to pray to God – *O LORD, correct me, but let your correcting me be in keeping with your satisfied justice. So you are treating me not as a recipient of condemnation but as thy child redeemed by the blood of the lamb.*

The knowledge of our salvation and faith in the salvation of Christ should move us and will move us to invite God's corrections to our lives. And so we've come full circle in our rules of God's corrections. Rule #1 – we must know the grounds for correction. Our correction is grounded in the atoning work of Christ. Rule #2 – we must be willing to be corrected. Where grace has been truly wrought in the heart this willingness will be present. And Rule #3 – we must utilize the means for our correction. This means time in the word and time in prayer inviting God to correct us.

I wonder this morning as we close – What corrections needs to take place in your lives? I must admit that as I pondered this question in my own life I didn't have to probe too deep to come up with some answers. I dare say that there are areas in all our lives which need correcting. This truth applies from the youngest to the most seasoned saint. The real question you must face is – will you make those corrections? Will you make those corrections that you have known for the longest time ought to be made? May the Lord grant to us all submissive spirits to his word and His Spirit and may he lead us out of the temptation of ever thinking that we're above or beyond correction.