

## **WE CORRECT THOSE WE LOVE!**

**Today's Text:** (a) Prov. Chap. 15 (b) Heb. 12: 3-15

### **Extracts:**

1. ***Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction will die... A scoffer does not love one who corrects him, nor will he go to the wise [Prov. 15: 10, 12]***
2. ***And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.' ... Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? [Heb. 12: 5-6, 9]***

*Lean on Me [1989] is a movie based on the true-life story of Joe Clark, the principal of Eastside High in Patterson, New Jersey, USA. Clark inherited an inner city high school that had been abandoned by parents, teachers, the community and the government. It was taken over by drug addicts and dealers and students who hated school but refused to graduate. Joe Clark soon realized that the problem was lack of discipline. Employing a very dictatorial but consistent approach, he expelled the unruly students, almost half of the school, and got the teachers recommitted to teaching the rest. He took on the community leaders who wanted him out for blocking their drug business. He fought with the mayor who was more interested in his re-election than the future of the school. Along the way, he ran foul of the law and was arrested for chaining the doors of the school, contrary to fire safety laws. But, interestingly, the students who should be celebrating that their harsh principal was out of the way were the ones who took on the state and got him released. Summarizing their case very well was a young girl who with tears running down her cheeks, said, "Mr. Clark is the only father that most of us never had and we love him!"*

*The school went on to achieve great scholastic and social ideals and Mr. Clark became a nationally recognised hero. He corrected the wayward students because he loved them. How many of us are ready to risk our popularity and short-term benefits to correct those around us who are erring? Do we even have the credibility to correct others? Why do we resent correction? These are some of the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.*

## 1. Why is correction so important?

My father's mother died quite young, leaving behind a baby just a few years older than my mother's firstborn. That's me! My father had two younger sisters and their father had died much earlier. So, the burden of raising the orphan fell on my mother who tried to raise both of us as her own children. She came from a very disciplined family herself. Soon enough, my mother ran into trouble with her sisters-in-law. Each time she tried to instill some values on their little brother, they would start crying saying, "oh, is it because his mother is dead?" To make matters worse, my father would return home each day and join his sisters to scold my mother for her "high handedness." Out of frustration and lack of appreciation, my mother gave up on that boy and allowed him to grow wild. His older siblings never saw anything wrong. He became a liar, a thief and a cheat. At the age of 20, he was killed when he went out with a gang of robbers. My mother raised her own eight children; all but one became university graduates.

That story teaches us that correction is important for "the rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" [Prov. 29: 15]. Here are some reasons why correction is important:

### a) *Correction draws attention to the norm or standard of acceptable conduct*

Correction by definition implies a deviation from the "right way" and the need to return to it for "harsh discipline is for him who forsakes *the way*" [Prov. 15: 10]. God told the nation of Israel, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" [Is. 30: 21].

This norm or standard may be the laws of a country or the rules of a club or church or professional group. It represents the basis for judging acceptable or deviant behaviour. It could also be the laws of God, especially for believers. That is why "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, *for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" [2 Tim. 3: 16]

### b) *It is a tool for training/raising children*

When children are born, they are innocent and amoral (i.e., they do not as yet know the difference between right and wrong). Through correction, they come to form habits that will later keep them away from danger or harm, physical and spiritual. That is why we are told, "do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell" [Prov. 23: 13-14]. Rod here does not necessarily mean a stick! It represents strict, principled correction. The word of God adds that parents should "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart

from it” [Prov. 22: 6]. You cannot “train up” somebody unless you correct his or her errors and reward good behaviour.

c) *Correction is a sign of sonship*

An average parent wants to raise up a child who will make him or her proud and fulfilled. Therefore, s(he) will not hesitate to correct or chastise that child if and when necessary for “God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten” But if you are without chastening, ... then you are illegitimate and not sons” [Heb. 12: 7, 8]. That was why when Jesus suffered on the cross, His Father did not intervene to set Him free, even when Jesus charged His Father for forsaking Him. Yet, God always called Jesus His beloved Son!

d) *Correction is a mark of love!*

If you do not care about somebody, you do not bother to correct him or her. Therefore, correction is a high mark of love “for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” [Prov. 3: 26]. So, when we are corrected, our first reaction should be to thank the one doing us such an enormous favour. It shows that s(he) loves us.

## 2. But not all correction is right!

*Ordinarily*, correction is good and helpful. However, it is not all correction that is right! Here are examples of “wrong” correction:

a) *Pampering*

Some of us suffered when we were growing up and have decided that our children will never pass through the same ordeals. Consequently, we hate to see them “suffer.” They must get whatever they ask for. They should have an easier life than we had. When they go wrong, we treat them with kid gloves. At school, we look after them to ensure that they are not “maltreated” by teachers or peers. Newspaper reports here in Trinidad and elsewhere have told of parents who hired thugs to beat up their children’s teachers or classmates for daring to “touch” their beloved ones! That kind of correction is pampering and most unhelpful to those who deserve to be corrected.

We saw what damage pampering did to David’s favourite son, Absalom. The young man killed his half-brother, Amnon, for defiling his sister, Tamar, and fled. But what was David’s reaction? “David mourned for his son every day. ... And the king longed to go to Absalom. For he had been comforted concerning Amnon, because he was dead” [2 Sam. 13: 37, 39]. For treating Absalom’s wicked deed with such levity, the young man paid

his father back in due course with rebellion which sent old David into exile! Even when David's troops put down the rebellion and killed Absalom, the king's reaction turned victory into mourning and destroyed his troops' morale. He went into his chamber and wept, 'O my son Absalom-my son, my son Absalom-if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son' [2 Sam. 18: 33]. If David loved him so dearly, why did he not raise him properly?

b) *Misguidance*

Sometimes, we may think that we are correcting others whereas we are actually trying to mislead them! It may be due to our ignorance or mischief but we are misguiding and not correcting. Let us consider two examples from Scripture to illustrate both principles.

Jesus had just praised Peter for recognizing His divinity, when Peter called Jesus "the Christ, the Son of God" [Matt. 16: 13-16]. Soon after, Jesus revealed to His disciples His coming death in the hands of the elders and chief priests and how He would resurrect on the third day. Apparently still basking in the limelight of the praise and recognition from the Lord, Peter took Jesus aside "and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!'" Certainly, Peter's correction was out of his ignorance at the time of Christ's purpose on earth. Nevertheless, Jesus recognized that Satan was behind Peter's rebuke of Him and He immediately said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" [vv. 21-23]. We learn an important spiritual principle here. Peter knew of Christ's divinity not by flesh and blood but His Father "who is in heaven" revealed it to him [v. 17]. Now, Satan was going to use the *same Peter* to misadvise Jesus! Therefore, it is the Spirit of discernment that will enable you to know if the correction you are receiving is from God or from Satan.

The second example is based on mischief. You will recall that David had been anointed after God had rejected Saul as king. Saul did not like that and he sought to kill David. However, Saul's son, Jonathan, and David were the best of friends [1 Sam. 18: 1, 8-9]. Jonathan knew of his father's plot and he told David, "My father Saul seeks to kill you. Therefore, please be on your guard... and stay in a secret place and hide" [1 Sam. 19: 2]. When Saul came to know of his son's actions, he tried to correct him as follows, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? *For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom.* Now, therefore, send and bring him to me and he shall surely die." Jonathan refused his father's correction because he knew that he had mischief in his heart and,

secondly, God had already anointed David, not Saul's heir (Jonathan) as the next king of Israel [1 Sam. 20: 30-32].

So, before you accept correction from anybody, examine the person's credibility: age, experience, authority, track record, etc. Most importantly, test the spirit behind that person because God can use anybody to deliver His message since true correction ultimately comes from Him.

### **3. It takes humility to accept correction**

We all are subject to some authority, whether parents or teachers or church leaders or state authorities. In some cases, we know what can happen to us if we refuse correction. For example, we can lose our jobs! No one will advise us to come early to work or be regular or work hard because the rules will not favour anyone who breaches them. So, in circumstances where there is a clear link between breach and punishment, we have little or no problem accepting correction. The problem comes where we can exercise the freedom to accept or reject it. That is common with obeying God's word or parental control when we are grown up. In such circumstances, it takes humility to accept correction; just as it takes love to correct others.

I read a story on the Internet recently that touched my heart. Dr. Samuel Ogbemudia is a highly respected Nigerian. During and soon after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), he was the military Governor of the Midwest Region (later known as Bendel State), 1970-75. Through his motivational management style, he turned Bendel State into the national leader in infrastructures, economic, human and sports development. He is still well-regarded in Nigerian politics because he has continued to inspire the younger people. Recently, there was a rumour that he was using drugs. When he visited the United States, some young Nigerians there summoned enough courage to request him to offer himself for a medical check up so as to strengthen their defence of his innocence. He agreed and the test proved negative! That show of humility has raised his respectability profile among younger Nigerians who had only heard of him before now. The rumour has died but Ogbemudia's reputation has survived!

We also have examples from the Bible of people who heeded correction and became the better for it. David did not hesitate to admit guilt and confess his sins after the prophet Nathan had confronted him with his sins of adultery and murder. Moses did not despise his father-in-law's advice to delegate more to his deputies so as to free himself for the exceptional cases. Both David and Moses were men of high honour before men and God and yet they were humble enough to accept correction, advice and guidance. They became more successful in their missions.

### **4. Conclusion**

Correction is hard to hear or to accept because truth is very bitter! It is painful because it involves a change of course which we may not like. It can make us angry and resentful of those trying to correct us, but as Paul has asked, “have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” [Gal. 4: 16]. As we have shown in today’s study, with the possible exception of correction meant to pamper or to misguide you, all correction is for your own good and it comes out of love for you. You may not appreciate it immediately. One day, some day, you will find that it was all for your good.

Finally, if you resent human correction, you may soon find that you are resisting God’s correction. For example, God instructed Ezekiel, “when I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked ways, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand” [Ezek. 3: 18]. Therefore, you may not always know that the people correcting you are actually human vessels for God’s correction!

The following should be your attitude to correction:

- Listen attentively to what you are being told;
- Thank the person for the correction (even when you perceive that the person is in error) and pray for him or her because it is a mark of love;
- Evaluate the correction to make sure that it accords with the word of God in Scripture;
- Go ahead and correct the error as soon as possible, especially if it involves confession of sin and restitution.
- Make yourself available to also correct others who are erring. For that purpose, seek God’s wisdom to choose the right approach to correct others [cf: 1 Tim. 5: 1-2]. In general, you can correct with the “rod” [Prov. 22: 15], prayer [Jer. 10: 24] and Scripture [2 Tim. 3: 16];
- Always remember that if you refuse to be corrected, your own wickedness will correct you [Jer. 2: 19]!

God loves you and does not want you to be lost. Accept correction and be saved!