

Loving Enough to Confront

Learning to Give & Receive Correction

Dick and I were already seated as (Andrew) came through the door. He was his usual jovial self. His inquiring eye flashed back and forth from Dick to me. "What's up?" he asked. At that moment I wanted desperately to be on any other planet but this one. I wished for someone else to assume my role and then I wanted to fade into the woodwork and disappear. Oh, how I wanted to avoid the inevitable. But I could not.

"(Andrew)," I said, "we've just had some very disturbing news. Dick and I have been on the phone all morning listening to acquaintances of yours describe you in a way that we have not know you. Two men have been telling us that you have been immoral with their wives. We have talked to the women, and they have confirmed the story. A pastor from the same community called and said that the word was out, and the stories are reaching scandalous proportions. Is any of this true?"

I watched him as the color drained from his face. His eyes lowered, his shoulders sagged. I saw telltale beads of perspiration pop out across his forehead. He heaved one long agonizing sigh, shook his head, and said, "Yes, pastor it's true."

-From Beyond Forgiveness, by Don Baker, page 21

Confrontation. Nobody likes it. It is so much easier to let things slide; to cover over, hope for the best: "Anything, Lord! Just don't ask me to confront another Christian brother. Don't put me in that situation. My motto is a paraphrase of Isaiah 6:8, 'Here I am, Lord. But please send someone else!' And Father, above all. Save me from being confronted by other Christians. Help me to hide my sins so that no one will see. Save me from spiritual fruit inspectors and speck-in-the-eye critics. Let me settle back into a nice comfortable cushioned pew and rest in Jesus. Oh, Lord. Don't put me in that position!"

Those are our words. Human words. Then His Word speaks:

"He who hates correction is stupid." - Proverbs 12:1

"Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it." - Psalm 141:5

"Like a beautiful earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear." - Proverbs 25:12

And about the need to give correction to others God's Word says:

"Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt." - Leviticus 19:17

"Rebuke a wise man and he will love you." - Proverbs 9:8

"Better is open rebuke than hidden love." - Proverbs 27:5

Rebuke a man of discernment and he will gain knowledge." - Proverbs 19:25

God's perspective seems so different. His ways are just not our ways.

Why Bother?

Why a Bible study which talks about rebuking and admonishing and confronting? Why bother with confrontation? Because the Bible records some serious consequences for those who ignore rebukes, admonitions, and confrontations. Proverbs 5:12-14 says that a man who ignores correction can *"come to the brink of ruin in the midst of the whole assembly."* Proverbs 10:17 tells us, *"Whoever ignores correction leads others astray."* Proverbs 13:18 says, *"He who ignores correction comes to poverty and shame."* Even death can await those who refuse to listen to rebuke: Proverbs 15:10 records, *"He who hates correction will die."* This death can be physical or it can even be spiritual death. Matthew 18:14 in the New International Version says the brother who wanders away and is not corrected by others in the church is called "lost." The New American Standard Bible uses an even stronger word. It says the unrebuked brother "perishes."

But this doesn't need to happen. We can help each other. God has provided a way for each of us to assist one another in living the Christian life. It requires that we let down our defensive walls and open ourselves up to some accountability. It requires establishing a two-way channel of communication with our brothers and sisters. We can help each other grow. Or we can choose to allow our brothers and ourselves to suffer the consequences of a life without accountability. *"Speaking the truth in love"* to one another (Ephesians 4:15) is God's solution for strengthening Christians like you and me to walk a straight and narrow path (Matthew 7:13,14 - *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*) within a world of trials and temptations.

Do you really want to grow in your Christian life? Are you really interested in living by God's standards and not your own? Then open yourself to correction. Do you really want to help others to live God's way? Are you tired of a weak and half-hearted church? Then you must learn how to lovingly rebuke your brothers.

The Bible has a lot to say about correcting our brothers and sisters in Christ. Note these words: Admonish, rebuke, reprove, warn, instruct, correct. I don't know what translation you will be using and the translators may have a different word than I refer to here. But don't let that confuse you. These are all words that deal with the very important ministry of giving and receiving correction.

The words "admonition," "rebuke," and "correct" occur over 50 times in the New Testament. Correction is an essential part of our growth. It is an essential ministry in the Body of Christ.

You've Got the Power

Proverbs 18:21 says that *"death and life are in the power of the tongue."* That's not an exaggeration. Words have the power to destroy a person's spirit or they have the power to restore a person to a right life relationship with God. Words may tear and wound or they have the power to heal (Proverbs 11:9; 12:18; 16:24).

There are two ways that God tells every Christian to use word power: to encourage and to correct. Both encouragement and correction have a *positive* result when done properly. As Proverbs 10:21 says, *"The lips of the*

righteous nourish many." Words of correction and words of encouragement will build up, heal, and strengthen the Body of Christ. But words must be spoken. You've got the power.

So let's begin by looking at some passages which clearly command that we are to admonish one another. This may be a new teaching to some of you and you will need to see exactly where God commands us to correct our brothers and sisters. Then we will look at some Scriptural examples of correction, the purpose of correction, what the Bible has to say about giving correction, and also how we should receive it.

The Command

Admonition is one of the important "one another" ministries of the church: we are commanded to "*admonish one another*" (Romans 15:14) and to "*speak the truth in love to one another*" (Ephesians 4:15). That's not an option. It's one of God's commands given for our spiritual health and well-being.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, "*We urge you, brethren, to admonish the undisciplined.*" The undisciplined are those who are not living by God's commands. In the particular case of the Thessalonians, there were some in the church who believed that Christ's second coming was just around the corner and decided in light of this that there was no need to continue working. They became lazy, freeloading Christians expecting their brothers and sisters to feed them without pay (2 Thessalonians 3:6ff). This was contrary to the teaching they had received, so Paul commanded the Thessalonian church to rebuke these lazy brethren. (Even stronger measures were applied in Paul's second letter to the church: 2 Thessalonians 3:10,14 - "*For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.' . . . If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.*")

We find a similar command in Colossians 3:16 - "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*" You'll see by looking at the various translations that it is not clear whether we admonish by our singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs or whether the admonishing and the singing are two separate actions as in the New International Version. Nevertheless, the point is clear that the ministry of verbal correction is commanded by God.

Jesus Himself in His usual short, concise manner tells us what we must do: "*If your brother sins, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him*" (Luke 17:3). God commands every Christian to be part of the functioning Body of Christ and thus be involved in the ministry of admonition.

That Uncomfortable Feeling

Your mind has already imagined the consequences of being involved in the ministry of admonition and there's something in your nature which just planted both feet and cried out, "This must be someone else's ministry--not mine!" You've got that uncomfortable feeling. As Sydney Harris put it, "The most unrewarding task in the world is trying to tell

people the truth about themselves. . . Even Aesop, who cast such truths in fable form, was eventually thrown off a cliff because his morals struck too close to home." And you're smart enough to know that admonishing others will probably result in a few cliff hangers for you too.

But STOP! Don't cover your spiritual ears yet! Don't refuse the ministry of verbal correction! That is exactly why the church is in so much trouble today. We have bought the world's bill of goods. We have refused to follow God's method of problem solving. The world's way of dealing with problems and problem people is to:

- (1) deny that the problem exists
- (2) withdraw from those who hurt me
- (3) spread the problem around through gossip, or
- (4) destroy.

But believers in Jesus Christ are called to be different than the world. We are not told to deny the problem. Christian love doesn't mean glossing over the sin or the problem (1 John 1:8 - *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*). We are not supposed to "pick up our marbles and go home" either--certainly not as a first response (Colossians 3:12,13 - *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*). And gossiping or discrediting or destroying the source of the problem are also the world's ways, not ours. Right? (Proverbs 16:28 - *A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends;* Matthew 5:44 - *"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*).

Christians are supposed to be different than the world. We are commanded to communicate through the conflict. To talk about it. To try and work it out. We should be the best communicators on earth. Admonishing, rebuking, discussing, and confessing, even at the risk of negative consequences -- even at the risk of losing relationships.

"Even at the risk of losing relationship?!!" Yes. There is no greater sign of love than caring enough about a person to confront them, even though you risk their rejection and a broken relationship. Jesus said, *"Those whom I love I rebuke."* He cared enough to confront. And when He did he sometimes was rejected even by those who followed him (read about it in John 6:60-66). And Paul also was willing to risk rejection in many of his admonition letters. He knew the consequences of sin. He cared enough to confront. How about you? Do you love enough to confront? Is the spiritual welfare of your brothers and sisters important enough for you to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15)?

Ponder that question some while we look at a few Biblical examples of admonition. Maybe you won't feel so alone in this ministry after you see some of your brothers from the past involved in this ministry which we 20th century Christians seem to find so distasteful.

Some Examples of Biblical Correction

The Apostle Peter Has a Face to Face Confrontation (read Galatians 2:11-21) -- How would you like to rebuke the apostle Peter, the "rock" of the church? Even apostles need a rebuke once in a while. Peter's sin was causing division in the Antioch church (v.12), leading others astray (v.13), and bringing into question the whole truth of the gospel of salvation by grace alone (vv. 14-21)! Peter needed to be set straight because he was "clearly in the wrong" (v.11) and "not acting in line with the truth" (v.14). But would you have wanted to be the one to do it? Would

you have sent an anonymous letter? Paul knew the Scripture better and took the direct route: "I opposed him to his face" (v.11). Apparently the confrontation had a happy ending.

Nathan's Confrontation with David (read 2 Samuel 12) -- Let me set the scene: David, the king, has committed adultery with a woman named Bathsheba and then to cover up his sin he arranged for the murder of her husband. David was unwilling to confront his own sin, so God sent a prophet and friend of David named Nathan to confront the king. Confronting a king is an unenviable task. Note how Nathan uses a parable. It is used to get behind David's defenses and speak to his heart. The use of emotional word pictures, parable, is a good way to work around those natural defenses that each of us builds up around our unconfessed sin. It is a method which God can often use to touch a man's heart. Jesus used emotional word pictures on many occasions of confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The parable stirred David's emotions. He was ready to execute kingly judgment. The key verse in this chapter is verse 7, "*You are the man!*" That one phrase from Nathan turned all that righteous indignation back on the person who really deserved it. And don't miss the result. Nathan's verbal confrontation brought real repentance (V. 13; cf. Psalm 51).

Christ Restoring Peter after the Resurrection (read John 21) -- John 21 shows how gentle an admonition can be. And in this case, it needed to be gentle, because of the overwhelming guilt and regret that Peter felt over his denial of Jesus. Look at the careful consideration and thought that Jesus has put into this confrontation with Peter! He chooses the time of day (early morning right before dawn - vv.3,4) for a specific reason (cf. John 13:38; 18:27). He makes a "charcoal fire" (the only other place a charcoal fire is mentioned in all of the Bible is during Peter's denial in John 18:18). And Peter is asked if he loves Jesus how many times? Three times. Why three? Because Peter denied his Lord three times. And each time that Peter replies that he loves Jesus, Jesus not only restores relationship with Peter, but also entrusts him with responsibility for His sheep!

Paul and the Church of Ephesus -- Acts 20:31 records Paul's farewell address to the elders of the church of Ephesus. In his message he highlights his ministry of admonition among them saying: "*So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.*" He mentions his example to show how important the ministry of verbal correction is for the well being of the church body. Paul's verbal correction was not done in a spirit of pride either. His admonitions came from a deep concern for the Ephesians' well-being: ". . . *with tears.*" And just by way of a side note, this passage teaches that verbal correction is especially, but not exclusively, to be practiced by the church leaders, the elders.

Eli's failure to rebuke his sons (read 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-36) -- Eli's sons were stealing the choice portions of food (God's portions) from the people's sacrifices. In addition to this sin they were also sleeping with the women who served at the tabernacle. We would say that the leaders of the church were skimming the collection plate and involved in sexual immorality. Certainly these are offenses deserving some sort of serious punishment, wouldn't you say? But note that God's judgment in 2:22-36 is not just upon the sons who committed the acts, but also upon Eli, their father!! Eli! Why, Eli? And why such a severe judgment upon the old priest?

The answer is found for us in 1 Samuel 3:13: "*because he knew and did not rebuke his sons*" (NASB). Eli failed to verbally confront his sons about their behavior, so he became part of the judgment. That's how serious God takes the responsibility we have to admonish one another, especially our children. There is a verse in Proverbs 27:5 which seems appropriate in this context. It says, "*Better is open rebuke, than hidden love.*" Love without correction is not really love at all.

The People, Reason, Goal and the Instrument of Correction

Who are We to Admonish? -- Our Christian brothers and sisters. Not the world, not your non-Christian neighbor, but your spiritual family. We have already seen the command in Luke 17:3 where Jesus says, "*If your brother sins, rebuke him.*"

And, of course, we are told to correct our brethren when they sin. Galatians 6:1 says, "*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him.*" Matthew 18:15 notes that this is especially our duty when the sin is against us: "*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault.*" Correction was a normal part of the corporate life shared among Christian brethren in the New Testament. For example, Paul wrote to the Roman church, "*I am convinced that you are able to admonish one another*" (Romans 15:14). According to Paul, the Roman brethren had established open channels of communication with each other. There was a healthy freedom in the church to rebuke, exhort, and admonish each other.

And there is one other group of people that we have responsibility to correct: our children. Ephesians 6:4 adds this special reminder to fathers: "*Raise your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.*" It is the duty of fathers, in particular, to develop in their children sensitivity to God's laws and principles.

The Reason for Admonishing -- Although we have already discussed this topic, let's look more closely at a passage from Matthew's gospel on admonition. According to Jesus' teaching recorded here we do not admonish our brothers and sisters because we happen to be more righteous than they are!! The reason we admonish our brothers and sisters is because unconfronted sin leads to spiritual death.

We usually think of Jesus' parable of the lost sheep as referring to God and His concern for the unsaved. And it's true that it does have this thrust when Luke records it in his gospel. But on another occasion Jesus tells the same parable in a slightly different context.

The parable of the lost sheep is also found in Matthew 18. If you read Matthew 18:6-35 you will find that this whole section of Scripture gives us instruction on how we should deal with erring brothers and sisters in the church. Many people have missed the essential unity of Matthew 18. An outline of this passage might look like this:

I. God's concern for the purity of His children (vv.6-14):

- A. God's judgment upon those who cause His children to sin (v.6).*
- B. Our need to deal radically with sin lest we cause others to stumble (vv.7-9).*
- C. God provides guardian angels to watch over His children (v.10).*
- D. God is concerned for each wandering child (vv.12-14).*

II. God's method for saving wandering sheep (vv.15-20):

- A. Step one: Go to your brother in private (v.15).*
- B. Step two: Take one or two witnesses (v.16).*
- C. Step three: Tell it to the church (v.17a).*
- D. Step four: Treat him as a pagan or tax collector (v.17b).*

E. *The church's authority for such action (vv.18-20).*

III. *The Attitude of the "righteous" Brethren (vv.21-35).*

A. *How many times do I forgive a brother sheep's wandering (vv.21-22)?*

B. *Seeing things from God's perspective (vv.23-35).*

This time in Jesus' parable of the lost sheep (vv.12-14), the straying sheep is a sinning brother. It is no accident that verses 15-20 follow the parable. Jesus extends the parable of the wandering sheep with this lesson: "*And if your brother sins go and reprove him in private. . .*"(v.15). How does God bring back His wandering children? By the procedure outlined in verses 15-17! These verses explain the very important steps of church discipline. Three of these steps include the necessary ingredient of verbal confrontation, that is admonition, in an ever expanding circle.

What is our reason for admonishing? The sheep that goes astray because no one cares enough to confront is said to "perish" in verse 14. That is, the brother or sister experiences spiritual death. Verbal correction is so terribly important to the health of each one of us. We all have our "blind spots" and usually would rather ignore them than face them.

Correction may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. Admonition fulfills the same function as pain in the human body; it calls attention to an unhealthy state of things. We don't deny pain. We search for its cause. Likewise we shouldn't deny correction. If we care about our own spiritual condition, we will learn to accept verbal correction. And if we really care about our brothers and sisters, we will learn to give it.

The Goal of Correction -- Paul gave us the goal of verbal correction in Colossians 1:28. He said, "*And we proclaim Jesus Christ, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, in order that we may present every man complete in Christ.*" The Greek word translated "complete" is the word which Paul uses to speak of Christian maturity. In other words, the purpose of admonition is to help us become mature.

Admonishing one another is a means of grace in our lives. It is one of the ways that God uses to help us to grow up and to become more like Christ. Do you want others in your fellowship to become mature in Christ? Then you must practice the ministry of giving correction. Do you want to be mature yourself? Then you must be willing to receive correction.

The Main Instrument in Correction -- A carpenter has a hammer. A surgeon has a scalpel. God has given us a tool to use too. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction. . .*". And Paul encouraged Timothy to use God's Word to ". . . *reprove, rebuke, and exhort. . .*" (2 Timothy 4:2). Scripture is our main instrument in the giving of correction. When we speak to another brother or sister it is always good to speak of a Biblical principle upon which there is common agreement or to have a particular Scripture in mind that you can refer to.

Going with God's Word does three things. First of all, it avoids confrontations over "opinions." If you can't find it in the Bible then you shouldn't go. It's just your opinion. And if you can find it in the Bible and you present it to your erring brother, then it is hard for him to rationalize it away as "Well, that's just your theory." If you go to someone with a specific passage of Scripture or Biblical principle, your admonition is not just your "opinion," but God's opinion. Your "opinion" doesn't count for much. But God's opinion better not be ignored!

Secondly, going with Scripture gives your admonition genuine authority. God stands behind His Word and holds us accountable to it. It's hard to ignore that authority, because we all know God's power and that we will ultimately have to face Him some day and account for our response (Romans 14:10,12). There is also an authority and power which lives in the Word itself. The writer of Hebrews says: "*God's word is living and active. It is sharper*

than a double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thought and attitudes of a man's heart." That's genuine authority.

Thirdly, going with God's Word displaces anger. Leaving a person with a Bible passage means that it's the Scripture that they must react to, not you. And God can handle the anger better than you or I. He has had plenty of practice.

Giving Correction

Joseph Addison said, "There is nothing we receive with so much reluctance as advice. There is nothing so difficult as the art of making advice agreeable." There are ways to make our advice more agreeable. To properly give correction we should follow these Scriptural principles:

1. **Learn to cultivate a holy life style yourself** -- No one wants to listen to the town drunk give lectures on temperance. Your admonitions will be better received if you are daily seeking to follow the Lord yourself. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome and said that they were "*competent to admonish one another*" (Romans 15:14). Why were they competent? The first reason that Paul gives was that they were "*full of goodness.*" That is, they were (generally speaking) living holy, Christlike lives.
Caution: Don't use this principle as an excuse not to admonish: "I can't admonish her. I have things in my own life that I haven't dealt with. After all, the Bible says, 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.'" There will always be sin in your life. That's not an excuse to avoid confrontation. Just admit that to your sister or brother when you speak to them: "Ted, I know that there are things in my life that you can probably point to, as well, and I'll give you an opportunity to do that after I'm through. But, Ted, I really love you and I'm deeply concerned about the relationship you have with your secretary. Will you let me talk to you about it?"
2. **Know God's Word** -- Looking again at Romans 15:14 Paul says, "*You are complete in knowledge and competent to admonish one another.*" The Roman Christians had an adequate knowledge of God's Word and spiritual truth.
3. **Go in a spirit of humility** -- Matthew 7:1-5 warns us to be careful of taking splinters out of other people's eyes, when we very well may have a log in our own eye! The first question you should ask before confronting any brother is: "Do I have the same sin as the person I am going to?" Christian parents will tell you--what they intensely dislike in their children are often faults they themselves possess. Likewise, faults we see so readily in other people are often found in ourselves. Do a splinter check. That's humility.

Correcting with the right motivation is so terribly important. If you are going to argue, to exercise self-righteousness, or to put down, then get your spirit in plumb with God's. Nothing does more to destroy the ministry of admonition in a church than one individual running around knocking others down so that he can look good. God forbids that prideful attitude. You have no ground for pride. You are a sinner saved by grace, just like your erring brother. Accept him. Acceptance demonstrates humility.

Finally, be open to learning something yourself. don't assume that you have all the facts. Take time to get the total picture, so you can be as helpful as possible. listen to the Spirit of God speaking to you as you talk with your brother. That is also humility.

4. **Confront in private** -- Matthew 18:15 makes the matter very clear--initial admonition should occur *"just between the two of you."* Find a place in private. Find a time when neither of you are rushed. Confrontation takes time and privacy.
5. **Correct with patience and gentleness** -- Paul wrote to Timothy: *"The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will"* (2 Timothy 2:24-26). And 2 Timothy 4:2 says, *"Correct, rebuke--with great patience and careful instruction."*
6. **Watch out for temptation yourself** -- Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians: *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1). One particular temptation that Paul seems to have been thinking of was that of pride, since he continues: *"If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to someone else (i.e. the sinning brother)"* (Galatians 6:3,4).
7. **Never admonish to shame a brother** --In 1 Corinthians 4:14, Paul was concerned that some of the rebuke that he had given the Corinthians might be interpreted as given to shame them. He tries to reassure them that his admonition is never given to bring shame by writing: *"I am not writing this is shame you, but to admonish you, as my dear children."* A Christian rebuke should never be a put-down. Correction is not given to devalue the person who sins. It is given because they are valuable, and we should consider them so.
8. **Age can make a difference in the way we approach people** --1 Timothy 5:1,2 says, *"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."*
9. **Correction will be very difficult (if not impossible) with people who are not aware of the Scriptural commands to admonish one another** -- If you try to admonish Christians who are not part of a church where this is taught, you will usually get a response like "What right do you have to say that about me?" Some low key teaching may be necessary before you can even approach the subject of their fault.
10. **Be careful of taking on the offenses of others** -- It is easy to take sides and become involved with disputes that are none of our business. Avoid this temptation. Do not take upon yourself an offense made to another person. I suppose this is why Jesus added the important words "against you" in both Matthew 18:15 and Matthew 5:23.

Of course, the trouble with giving advice is that people always want to repay you. So on to our final topic: learning to receive correction.

Receiving Correction

Executive manager Frank Keiler realistically appraised the situation. "About 95% of the advice I get is no good," he said, "But I have to listen to all of it to get the 5% that's worth having." You may find that this is true of Christian admonition. That's one problem with receiving correction. Not all of it will be accurate or true. We must become convinced that it is worth opening ourselves to admonition just to receive the worthwhile correction which we all need.

And then there is another problem with receiving correction. It hurts. Let's face it. No one likes to have their faults pointed out. To some extent all our self-images are based upon what other people think of us. And for some of us who feel poorly about ourselves anyway, correction is downright emotionally devastating.

And then there is always the fear that we will be controlled by the opinions of others. After all, this wonderful ministry of admonition can be misused. It can become an excuse for people to vent their hidden anger or a way to make themselves feel better by putting others down or even a method of motivating others by guilt.

These are all true and realistic concerns: Not all the rebuke we hear is true. The ministry of admonition is painful. And it is open to misuse and abuse. But let's look at the other side of the ledger.

Without admonition we may "perish" (Matthew 18:14). At the very least we will be a pale shadow of what we could have become in the Lord Jesus Christ. Opening ourselves to admonition means great risk, but it also means great gain. We will not be all that we can be, nor will our church, until we open ourselves to the ministry of admonition. Norman Vincent Peale said it: "The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism." That is a "trouble." And an unwillingness to receive correction will lead to "trouble" and "ruin" (Proverbs 5:12-14).

Are you willing to open yourself to correction? God has given some terrific promises for people who are willing to risk the pain of verbal confrontation:

"He who heeds correction shows others the way to life" - Proverbs 10:17

"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise." - Proverbs 15:31

"A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool." - Proverbs 16:10

"Whoever heeds correction gains understanding." - Proverbs 15:32

"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear." - Proverbs 25:11,12

"Whoever heeds correction is honored." - Proverbs 13:18

Do any of these promises appeal to you? Do you wish to be honored? Show the way of life to others? Be at home among the wise? Gain understanding? Then make a commitment today to open your life to correction.

A person who is open to correction is a strange bird in most churches. You will probably need to relate to your brothers and sisters your desire for correction. What should you say? Here are some examples:

"Friend, do you see anything in my life that needs changing - family life style, finances, child discipline, holiness?"

"Brother, you seem more Christlike than I do, more joyful, more under God's control. Where am I weak? Can you help me?"

"Sister, please let me know any area of my Christian walk that needs improvement. Your eyesight is more objective than mine."

We are to listen to correction, heed it, receive it. Of course, we must evaluate all we hear. Sift it. Search for the golden apples. But when we find the fruit of the rebuke, we must willingly embrace the truth. When you do, you will grow. Your church will grow. And God will be glorified as the Bride of Christ begins to walk in the beauty of holiness. Let's cherish the ministry of correction. Care enough to confront. Be wise enough to receive it.