

LESSON 5

Receiving God's Correction

The word *faith* is used in many different ways in the Christian community. We often say that someone has strong faith or that someone has come to faith. In this lesson, we will examine the essential components of faith—what faith is, why it is vital, and how it is to be used. Understanding faith in God can lead to amazing things!

God corrects and disciplines His children as is necessary. For some people, correction brings painful memories of excessive punishment during childhood. Others can barely relate to correction because their parents did so little of it. Still others actually look back with grateful hearts, knowing that their parents and others corrected them with wisdom and love with the goal of producing good character in them.

While it is true that Christians are forgiven of their sins and made righteous in

God's sight the moment they accept Christ as Savior, they will be in need of God's correction. Why? While we strive to be Christlike, none of us can reach sinless perfection on this earth. It is still possible to do wrong after conversion. At times, we may even stubbornly cling to attitudes and behaviors that are detrimental to our loved ones, friends, co-workers, the church, and ourselves.

The need for correction is often easier to see in others than in ourselves. For example, adults generally notice when their children are misbehaving and need correction. We are quick to perceive faults in other adults, too. By the same token, others observe our weaknesses and faults quicker than we recognize them ourselves. So everyone occasionally needs correction.

Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, had much experience in the correction of others, inasmuch as she bore and raised nineteen children. John asked his mother to share her beliefs about child rearing. Susanna's response found in *The Journal of John Wesley* states:

In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient temper. To inform the understanding is a work of time and must with children proceed by slow degrees as they are able to bear it: but the subjecting of the will is a thing which must be done at once; and the sooner the better. (Wesley 1951, 63)

While the subject of this lesson is not specifically the correction of children, the goals for correcting the young are also true for adults. The issues of self-will, human independence, and obedience to God need to be addressed by everyone, regardless of age. God, therefore, involves himself in the ongoing process of correcting His people. In this lesson, we will focus on the teaching on divine discipline as taught in Hebrews 12.

LESSON OUTLINE

- The People God Corrects
- Recognizing Correction
- Confession of Sin
- The Motive for Correction
- Enduring Correction
- Submission in Correction
- The Goals of Correction

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Identify who is the focus of God's correction.*
2. *Identify ways God corrects His children.*
3. *Discuss the role of confession.*
4. *Explain what God's love has to do with correction.*
5. *Describe aspects of endurance when undergoing correction.*
6. *Explain the importance of submission to correction.*
7. *Identify three goals God has for those He corrects.*

The People God Corrects

Objective 1:

Identify who is the focus of God's correction.

God assumes the role of a parent as He corrects us. Hebrews 12:5 notes, "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you.'" The focus of God's correction is His people, those who have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ. Here are some truths to bear in mind when God focuses His attention on you personally.

- **Do not make light of it:** Correction should be taken seriously. It helps a person from perpetuating wrong-doing.
- **Do not lose heart:** God's correction for a Christian does not come from His wrath. Correction is not rejection. Christians should not lose heart when being corrected.
- **Do not give up:** Even though it may be tempting for a follower of Jesus to give up during correction, God does not want him or her to sulk.

Determination to trust God in the face of human imperfection is needed.

- Do not doubt your salvation: A person being corrected by God may wonder if he or she is still part of God's family. Satan, the accuser of God's people, could take advantage of this vulnerable time in the Christian's life.
- Do not despair: Many people are trying to prove how good they are, and, often, those who are absorbed in self-righteousness become depressed during times of correction. But God corrects us because He cares for His own. He knows that we still have a sinful nature and are prone to sin. However, a significant difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is that the Christian is no longer in bondage to the sinful nature. God uses the aching life lessons to shape and prepare us to bring Him glory.

Recognizing Correction

Objective 2:

Identify ways God corrects His children.

How can we know when God is trying to get our attention and bring needed correction into our lives? What methods does He use to bring discipline? As you can see, we are using the terms correction and discipline interchangeably. While God is not limited to a certain set of methods, the Bible highlights a number of ways God corrects us.

A Rebuke

The writer of the book of Hebrews quotes from Proverbs: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you" (Hebrews 12:5-6). To rebuke means "to bring to light, expose, set forth, convict or convince someone of something, point something out to someone, reprove, correct, punish, discipline" (Gingrich and Danker 1981). A rebuke is a warning to bring about needed change. A

rebuke may come from the Bible, the Holy Spirit, a friend, mate, parent, sibling, or pastor. It can happen while you are in prayer, in church, in conversation with someone, or while you are doing anything else. Rebuke is probably the most common form of correction and, if heeded, can render unnecessary any more serious corrective action on God's part.

Loss of Intimacy and Joy

If we engage in sinful behavior or harbor improper attitudes, our relationship with God will suffer. God is holy, and He hates sin. So when we are sinning, He may appear to be far from us. No wonder that David, after committing adultery with Bathsheba and ordering her husband's murder, found it necessary to pray, "Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice...Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me" (Psalm 51:8, 12).

Unexpected Struggles

God is able to use struggles to slow us down, get us to reflect on our lives, bring repentance, and renew our dependence on Him. Unexpected struggles can include closed doors of opportunity, sickness, loss of favor, financial reverses, opposition, and—in severe cases of rebellion—disaster. To illustrate, when the Old Testament nation of Israel backslid spiritually and turned its back on God, He permitted their enemies to take advantage of them. Read the book of Judges to see examples of this.

God is sovereign; He is in control of all our circumstances. He can grant rich blessings, or He can withhold them.

Confession of Sin

Objective 3:

Discuss the role of confession.

The moment you begin to sense God is correcting you, confess your sin before the Lord. While it may be helpful

to talk to a spiritually mature and trusted believer about your failure, it is most important to acknowledge your sin before the Lord. Do not make excuses. Do not blame others. Do not delay.

You will discover that God is quick to forgive you when you truly are repentant. The Bible says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9). God is merciful and forgives right away! It is sad that some people wait so long before acknowledging their sin.

Bear in mind that though God has forgiven you, you may still suffer the consequences of your sinful actions. For instance, if you are rebuked for telling a series of lies and you confess that to God, God has forgiven you. However, the people who heard your lies may not forgive you—at least not right away. Your dishonesty might have set in motion serious relational, legal, or financial repercussions.

The Motive for Correction

Objective 4:

Explain what God's love has to do with correction.

Hebrews 12:6 says, “The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” Some people, when corrected, may wonder if they still belong to God. They struggle with God's motive in bringing correction. The following two points relate God's love with our need for correction.

God Corrects in Love

God loves His children. His love for us does not swell or shrink with our victories and failures. His love does not vanish when He corrects us. Christians need to be reminded of God's love when they find themselves being corrected. Consider these verses that connect God's love and goodness with His correction.

- “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (Job 5:17).
- “Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law” (Psalm 94:12).
- “The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Proverbs 3:12).
- “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

God’s Correction Is Never Unfair

Some Christians think that God is treating them unfairly because their correction seems harsher than that of others. But God issues the right amount of correction to bring about change in our lives. He is never abusive with His children.

Think about how steel is manufactured. The workers apply fire to the iron to develop a finished product. In similar manner, God knows what is needed to develop godly character in us. During times of discipline and suffering, we must not rebel against the Lord, for God’s goal is to make us holy.

Neither should we assume that all afflictions are a sure sign of sin and divine discipline. Often they are not. We live in a fallen world, where pain and wickedness exist. Christians are not exempt from the effects of evil in the world. Occasionally bad things do happen to good people. When the believer is in the midst of prolonged struggle and there is no accompanying conviction of sin, the affliction is simply part of living in a fallen world. Yet, God uses even this kind of suffering.

Joseph in the Old Testament is an example of a righteous person loved by God; yet he struggled with painful, unjust hardship. When his jealous brothers sold him into slavery at age seventeen, Joseph went from enjoying enormous favor by his father to suffering the indignity of slavery in Egypt. His feet were shackled, and his neck was put in irons (Psalm 105:18). Although Joseph’s brothers were despicable, still God let Joseph experience this trial. Joseph found God in his pain,

and he bore up under his struggles as God shaped and polished his character. Joseph developed into a leader of impeccable integrity and moral strength.

Even Jesus Christ suffered greatly, though He was innocent of sin. God used unjust suffering to make Jesus Christ, the author of our salvation, perfect or complete through suffering (see Hebrews 2:10). Now Jesus, though sinless, can relate to us because He personally experienced the full effect of humanity's evil and suffering. He feels great compassion for us when we endure pain. What a great Savior we have! If the sinless Son of God suffered in this world, do not be surprised if His followers suffer also.

Enduring Correction

Objective 5:

Describe aspects of endurance when undergoing correction.

Hebrews 12:7–8 instructs, “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.” To benefit from correction requires proper response on our part. We must accept what God is doing in our lives and endure the discipline. Refusing correction will only invite difficult circumstances to increase in severity and/or duration. In fact, repeat lessons may be more difficult than the original correction intended by God. Here are some aspects of endurance that we should remember.

- **Humility:** We are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God (see 1 Peter 5:6). Arguing with God or denying our need for correction will not take away the struggle. Confession of our sin will be more beneficial.
- **Prayer:** We should be prayerful during times of correction. God knows what He wants to accomplish

in each person's life. We should pray that God makes clear the lesson He is trying to teach us.

- **Patience:** People do not change quickly. We can be slow to comprehend what the Lord wants us to learn. His discipline can last weeks or even months at a time.
- **Faith:** God is actively concerned about the ultimate goal of our lives—holiness. God assures us that He is working all things together for our good (see Romans 8:28). A time of correction is no excuse to throw away your faith. Express your trust in Him daily, and speak and act as though you believe what you say.

Submission in Correction

Objective 6:

Explain the importance of submission to correction.

Submission to God is a choice of the will. Hebrews 12:9 says, "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" To submit means to yield to the authority of another. For instance, a parent at times discovers that a child does not eagerly submit to his or her admonitions and discipline. The son or daughter may conform begrudgingly on the outside, but if the heart is still rebellious, real change has not occurred. It is only when acceptance of the authority of the parent and surrender to his or her requirements occurs that positive transformation takes place in the child's life. A loving parent may seem stern during the time of correction but demonstrate great tenderness and compassion afterward. A maturing child comes to appreciate the faithful correction of a parent.

God deserves our utmost respect and submission because His ways are best. As a general rule, humans are completely out of alignment with God. Notice what

the Lord says in Isaiah 55:9, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Two things stand out in this verse—God's ways and God's thoughts. We cannot begin to imagine all the things God knows and contemplates. His thoughts far exceed ours. Also, God's holy and perfect ways stand in complete contrast to humanity's sinful and imperfect ways. Our sad, troubled world is full of corruption and violence because humans' ways diverge from God's.

There comes a point in every person's life when he or she must choose to submit to God. This is a normal part of the conversion process. However, there will be numerous crisis points in the Christian life when further submission is required. Submitting to God may not be comfortable at first, and it may not bring applause from the crowds. But submission is necessary for transformation.

Correction from God will continue at every stage of life. Growing older is not an exemption from correction. Neither does having a recognized public ministry provide immunity from divine discipline. God will deal with sin, no matter who commits it. At no time should anyone assume that he or she has arrived at perfection. If anything, the longer we serve the Lord, the more we understand our vulnerabilities.

Let us further consider the role of the church in the process of God's discipline. The church was designed and brought into being by God. Jesus Christ is the head of the church; He bled and died for it. The Bible describes the church as Christ's body and His bride. He loves it, is vitally connected to it, and works through it.

One role of the church is to be a family in which believers can worship the Lord together, grow, and develop gifts. Because church members are to be accountable to each other, the church has spiritual leaders who guide, teach, and correct. The apostle Paul writes, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Galatians 6:1). A believer who has fallen into sin and who acknowledges

that to the church leaders should not fear a negative response. Those leaders will work with him or her to overcome the improper activities or attitudes. It is liberating to get secret sin into the open. Only then can the sin be dealt with.

A Christian who has enjoyed certain public opportunities of ministry and who falls into sin will be required by church leaders to withdraw from ministry until repentance is demonstrated and trust is restored. The believer should submit to the discipline and remember that no one in the church is punishing him or her. Christ uses the leaders of His body to help fallen members find restoration.

The Goals of Correction

Objective 7:

Identify three goals God has for those He corrects.

God's correction is for the benefit of those He corrects. In no way does He want to cause irreparable damage to our lives. Unfortunately, correction seldom, if ever, feels comfortable. Some may even blame Satan for the correction that comes from God. But followers of Jesus must not rely on their feelings during correction. The results of correction will prove right over time. Consider three goals God has in mind when He corrects His children.

Holiness

"Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). What is holiness? Some people think it is a list of things you should not do. While certainly there are worldly activities that Christians must avoid, holiness is not so much a matter of what a person does not do but how a person reflects the character of Jesus through daily living.

We know from reading the New Testament that Jesus Christ was blameless of transgression. In fact, He is the only person to live on earth who avoided contamination through

sin. He was separate from sin and set apart unto God. This is the essence of holiness as it will be reflected in our lives.

Righteousness

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). In one sense, all our righteousness or goodness comes as a result of faith in Jesus. All experiences with God begin and end through personal faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot do what is right without Him. “No one will be declared righteous...by observing the law” (Romans 3:20). At the time of conversion, God the Father imputes Christ’s righteousness to us. That means God thinks of us as having the righteousness of His Son Jesus. Notice what the apostle Paul writes: “It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

However, during our earthly existence we are trained through divine discipline to do what is right. As we walk with the Lord, we learn the folly of sin and the joy of obedience. We are encouraged by the Lord to pursue righteousness.

Peace

Many things in the Christian life produce peace. One of them is God’s forgiveness. Only a Christian can know the wonderful experience of a clear conscience. The presence of God in our lives produces peace, too. He keeps our hearts at rest in spite of trouble. Our hope of heaven and our anticipation of Christ’s return yield peace. Hebrews 12:11 also tells us that divine correction produces peace in the long run.

Conclusion

A German fable tells of a baron who stretched wires from the towers of his castle on the Rhine River in an effort to create a huge Aeolian (wind) harp. At first it seemed as if the effort was without success. Soon after, a

great storm caused the wind to vibrate the wires, which filled the air with beautiful tones. The Aeolian harp needed the storm to make its music. In some ways, the Christian who learns from God's correction will find his or her life yielding music like that Aeolian harp.

Here are final thoughts to keep in mind regarding divine discipline:

- Choose to trust Jesus Christ for correction in your life.
- Make yourself accountable to authorities in your life.
- Seek advice from godly sources of counsel.
- Be willing to admit where you are wrong.
- Ask for God's help to learn from your struggles, mistakes, and sin.
- Purpose to change with Jesus as your helper.

References

- Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Frederick W. Danker. 1981. *An index to the revised Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon*. 2nd ed. Edited by John R. Alsop. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Wesley, John. 1951. *The Journal of John Wesley*. Grand Rapids: Moody.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Job 5:17

Psalm 68:28

Psalm 94:12

Proverbs 3:12

Isaiah 40:31

Hebrews 12:10–11

Revelation 3:19

SELF-TEST

After completing the lesson, please answer the following questions by circling the correct response. Only one answer is correct for each question.

1. *Why does God correct people?*
 - a) *People normally seek and ask for correction.*
 - b) *God's people still fall into sin and need His help to overcome their shortcomings.*
 - c) *God wants to show His wrath against Christians.*
2. *What is the relationship between born-again Christians and the sinful nature?*
 - a) *Born-again Christians are no longer in bondage to the sinful nature.*
 - b) *The sinful nature no longer exists in a born-again Christian.*
 - c) *The sinful nature makes it impossible for a Christian to obey God.*
3. *Which three ways mentioned in the lesson does God use to correct us?*
 - a) *Failure, fear, and persecution*
 - b) *Rebuke, loss of intimacy and joy, and unexpected struggles*
 - c) *Love, joy, and peace*
4. *God's motive for bringing correction is*
 - a) *that He wants Christians to become humanly perfect.*
 - b) *His love.*
 - c) *that God wants Christians to know He does not forget their sinfulness.*
5. *Which statement below is correct?*
 - a) *People who are raised in Christian homes need less correction.*
 - b) *Not all people are corrected by God.*
 - c) *Every Christian is corrected fairly by God.*

6. Which statement below is true?
 - a) God does not mind when a Christian decides to give up.
 - b) God wants Christians to endure times of divine correction.
 - c) God knows people will sin, so He does not take it too seriously.
7. Which answer below best describes submission?
 - a) Submission to God is a choice of the will.
 - b) Submission to God is always easy.
 - c) Submission to God is discovered through much learning.
8. By accepting God's correction, a Christian can expect to gain
 - a) no more problems.
 - b) immediate happiness.
 - c) forgiveness and help.
9. When does God's ongoing correction on earth cease?
 - a) It will stop when we become perfect.
 - b) It will continue at every stage of life.
 - c) It ceases when we start going to church regularly.
10. What is one goal of divine correction to God's people?
 - a) To help us share in God's holiness
 - b) For Christians to achieve sinless perfection while they are alive on earth
 - c) To make wayward Christians suffer for their sins

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *b* (5.1)
2. *a* (5.1)
3. *b* (5.2)
4. *b* (5.4)
5. *c* (5.6)
6. *b* (5.5)
7. *a* (5.6)
8. *c* (5.3)
9. *b* (5.6)
10. *a* (5.7)

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