

USE THE WORD – CORRECT

By Rev. Will Nelken

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God's Word reveals God to us. It takes us behind the scenes to discover the nature of the universe in which we live and the God who made us. It reveals what is true and dependable, even things that we cannot see with our natural eyes or understand with our natural minds. It is the root of all true faith in God.

Faith comes from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17; NJB)

God's Word is eminently practical. It is useful. It will make a difference in your life, if you apply it. God teaches us truth so that we may live by it; so that truth may also be revealed in our conduct.

To reveal truth in my conduct (to reveal God *through* my conduct), He must first deal with my misconduct. So, once He has shown me what is true, He also reveals my rebellion. He convicts me of my sins, and of my sinfulness (my propensity to sin). Once convicted, I may make course corrections, I may begin to change my ways.

By His Word, God corrects our mistakes.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (MSG)

Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.

Who Needs Correction?

We may think, because we are a sinful race, that we all need correction, but that would be putting the cart in front of the horse; it is ineffective, it does not work. Until we have seen, and recognized, the truth, correction largely falls on deaf ears.

We may say, "Bad people need correction." We would be right, but not entirely. What about good people? Do good people need *no* correction? Is anyone *that* good?

The Psalmist recorded this insight:

*The Lord looks down from heaven
on the entire human race;
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,
if anyone seeks God.
But no, all have turned away;
all have become corrupt.
No one does good,
not a single one!*
(Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3)

Well, then, everyone does need correction, but only repentant people will receive it. When God reveals His glorious truth and we see ourselves in the light of His awesome nature, we are undone, like Isaiah (chapter 6). We are left without excuse and without escape. We are convicted of His greatness

and our smallness, of His righteousness and our sinfulness, of His grace and our helplessness. And we repent.

Are We Evil People?

Evil is the opposite of good and right. But, does evil necessarily mean sinister, malicious, or aggressively rebellious? It may, of course, but perhaps it simply means behaving contrary to God's design and intention. I am suggesting that a man or a woman may be evil in the sight of God because they are doing something that is contrary to God's heart and original design, even if they are not ill-willed, even if they are well-intentioned.

The Bible, and life itself, offers many examples of people doing a wrong thing (as God defines it) in a right way (that is, from good intention). I think of Abraham and Sarah, who tried to conceive a child through a surrogate (Genesis 16), instead of waiting for the Lord to act. I think of Uzzah, who reached out to steady the Ark of God as it teetered on its cart (2 Samuel 6). I think of Peter, who rebuked the Lord Jesus when He disclosed His appointment with death by crucifixion (Matthew 16:22). I don't know about you, but I have become very familiar with this type of sin, since I chose to follow Christ.

Is it possible, then, for good people to do evil? Certainly. And still qualify as good people (that is, still have God's favor and blessing)?

Here is what Ezekiel, God's prophet, had to say about it (33:12-16):

¹² "Son of man, give your people this message: *The righteous behavior of righteous people will not save them if they turn to sin, nor will the wicked behavior of wicked people destroy them if they repent and turn from their sins.* ¹³ *When I tell righteous people that they will live, but then they sin, expecting their past righteousness to save them, then none of their righteous acts will be remembered. I will destroy them for their sins.* ¹⁴ *And suppose I tell some wicked people that they will surely die, but then they turn from their sins and do what is just and right.* ¹⁵ *For instance, they might give back a debtor's security, return what they have stolen, and obey my life-giving laws, no longer doing what is evil. If they do this, then they will surely live and not die.* ¹⁶ *None of their past sins will be brought up again, for they have done what is just and right, and they will surely live.*

Here's what John, Jesus' apostle, had to say about it (1 John 1:8-10):

⁸ *If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.* ⁹ *But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.* ¹⁰ *If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.*

In both cases, repentance is the key. The exposure of my sin readies me to repent. But guilt, if it is not properly dealt with, will bind me to my past in hopelessness. It is my repentance (turning back to God in faith) that releases me to move forward, to make amends, and to behave correctly in the future. Thus, my righteousness is restored—before God first, and also before men.

When should I repent? As soon as my rebellion (sin) has been exposed. Do not wallow in guilt. Instead, rise in faith and claim the mercies of God through Jesus Christ. They are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23).

How Should I Repent?

Repentance is *not* correction; it is the change of mind that ceases resisting God's ways (or simply preferring our own) and agrees with God's way of seeing things (that He is right).

I am going to share one of my own downfalls and describe how I dealt with it, once I became aware of it.

Just yesterday, Martha and I had another discussion about my grandparenting. I have told people before that I never wanted to physically hurt another human being until I had teenage children of my own. Now, by God's gracious help I have overcome that desire, but alas, my grandchildren have also found the trigger of my irritability. My response is more reasoned, but sometimes I am too sharp with them, too abrupt, too physical. God has shown me this, through my wife and through His Word.

Ephesians 6:4 (AMP)

Fathers, do not irritate and provoke your children to anger [do not exasperate them to resentment], but rear them [tenderly] in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord.

How have I been dealing with this problem? I have been repenting to God and putting my trust in Christ to help me change.

Here are the steps to take:

1. Confess your rebellion (agree with God about it), even if it was unintentional or you were unaware of it at the time. Be as specific as you can about the offense. "God, I have not trusted You fully in this matter; I have not followed Your way, as prescribed in Ephesians 4. Instead, I have provoked anger and resentment. I am sorry."
2. See and say the change that is necessary. "I was wrong to allow myself to become irritated and act out of that emotion. I don't want my grandchildren to resent me or fear me; I want them to trust me and look to me with hope. And I want them to know You in the same way. I need to take the time in those situations to let You lead me, instead of reacting emotionally. And I need to communicate my love (and Yours) to them."
3. Ask for correction, just as you would if you had trouble with a math problem (What am I doing wrong? How do I fix this?). "Lord Jesus, You know how I am wired and You know how to re-wire me. Please correct this behavior. Show me what my trigger point is and how to defuse it. Build in me a buffer of peace and confidence in You."

What Is The Purpose Of Correction?

Many people are inclined to regard any correction as punitive and harsh, and our pride easily gets in our way of receiving correction. But punishment does not offer correction, only pain. Punishment, when properly administered, serves to awaken our sense of justice; improperly administered, it dulls our senses and hardens our hearts. If our stubborn pride has been surrendered and our sense of justice has been awakened, then we are ready to receive correction.

The aim of correction is to show us *how to get back on track*. If I have fallen off my bicycle because I rode through loose gravel or deep mud, I can see how it happened and what to avoid in the future. If I have injured a relationship with a friend by my behavior, and want to restore our friendship, the way to correct that may be more complicated.

Is an apology necessary? To apologize is to admit error *and* express regret (it should include both facts *and* feelings). Remember, an apology should *not* include justification for your misbehavior; it is all about the *other* person and how you made them feel. The end result was the same, whether your actions were intended or not.

Is restitution necessary? If something was lost, broken, or taken, yes. Restitution is the cost of repairing a damaged relationship and/or property. It demonstrates the depth of your repentance and apology. It has a spiritual value, as well, as a penitence offering to the Lord.

King David once said, *“I will not give as an offering to the LORD... something that costs me nothing”* (1 Chronicles 21:24).

Is behavior change necessary? Of course it is, if repentance is genuine. However, behavior change, like original behavior, is not without its flaws and setbacks. Don't become discouraged if you experience a relapse.

Proverbs 24:16 (GWT)

A righteous person may fall seven times, but he gets up again.

Behavior change involves practice, and more practice.

How Does God Correct Us?

1. God reminds us of Jesus—of His example and of His grace. Jesus' example inspires and instructs us. His grace gives us wisdom, courage, and strength. Jesus has shown us what to do and told us what to do. He calls us to follow in His steps. He does not expect us to live this Christian life apart from Him; He expects us to live it in dependence on Him.

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹ Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

2. God directs us with His Word. The Bible may offer us an illustration of the change that we need through the life of one of its characters. The Bible may offer us specific steps to follow. The Bible will surely offer us inspiration to make the change, and the hope that lasting change is possible.

3. God energizes us by His Spirit to follow in His steps. If we did not have His Spirit living within us, these steps would be impossible. Jesus minced no words when He said, *“Apart from me, you can do nothing”* (John 15:5). But we *do* have the Spirit, if we belong to Christ, and we can do everything that He requires by the help of the Spirit.

The Word of God is living and powerful and precise (Hebrews 4:12). By it, God:

- Shows us what is true
- Shows us what we have done wrong
- Shows us how to get back on our feet
- Shows us how to stay in the race until we win

Galatians 6:9

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

Don't fear God's correction. Don't let pride plug your ears. Let the Word of God speak to you. Let the Lord lift you up again and put you back on the right track.