

FAILURE TO CORRECT

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“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for . . . correction” (2 Timothy 3:16). Every Christian should be thankful for the corrective instruction of God’s word. Were it not for the correction provided by His word, a Christian would be doomed to apostasy and eternal destruction upon his first sin following baptism. Correction is one of the great functions of God’s word. And as Christians are entrusted with the ministry of proclaiming God’s word (2 Timothy 4:2; 2:2), they are Christians who are entrusted with the duty of correction. This is not the duty of “correcting” every person with whom one has a personal disagreement, but of correcting those who err outside of the way of Christ. Yet Christians often fail in this regard: They will sit quietly by as denominationalists stand condemned, they will hold their tongues while false teachers shout forth error, and they will blind themselves to the problem when loved ones have “eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin.” Following are some of the reasons why so many fail with regard to correction.

COMPLEX ABOUT CONFLICT: A necessary prerequisite to correction is *rebuke*. How else is one to be motivated to do right if he does not know that he is doing wrong? However, rebuke is associated with conflict, and many Christians have a complex about conflict. This is not unnatural—Most people do not desire to make enemies. This should especially be so of the Christian, as the Gospel commands, *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”* (Romans 12:28). Conflict should be neither sought nor desired. But notice that this instruction had to be qualified with *“if it be possible.”* The same Gospel which commands Christians to live peaceably when possible also commands Christians not to shy away from necessary conflict: *“Ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 3, emphasis LM). Many other times does the New Testament stress the importance of not shying away from necessary conflict (see Matthew 10:34-35; Ephesians 6:10-17; Titus 1:9-11). Conflict is uncomfortable, but comfort was never to be the first priority for the Christian. Comfort certainly never held priority for Christ. Do we simply tell people what they want to hear so that our happiness of life is not disturbed? Do we allow the lost to stay lost just so that we can avoid the headache? As the old covenant instructed Israel, *“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him”* (Leviticus 19:17). One who refuses to help correct a brother or sister in need of correction demonstrates hatred for that person. Words of praise can be uplifting, but they are not always what is appropriate. *He that saith unto the wicked, Thou are righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them* (Proverbs 24:24-25). Correction is a two-way blessing—a blessing is pronounced by God upon the giver of correction as well as upon the willing recipient (James 5:19-20). A Christian should not let a complex about conflict prohibit him from helping another soul either to see or to reclaim the light of salvation.

APATHY TO ERROR: The majority of the world has always followed error. The twenty-first century world is a world marked by so many differences and shades of error that it can be easy to become tolerant of the “lesser error.” When a Christian is surrounded by those who are members of denominations, and then comes in contact with a member of a liberal church of Christ, there tends to be a bond formed. When a Christian is surrounded by those who deny the Deity of Christ, and then comes in contact with a denominationalist who believes in the Deity of Christ, there tends to be a bond formed. When a Christian is surrounded by those who have no regard for moral living, and then comes in contact with a Muslim who lives morally, there tends to be a bond formed. There is nothing wrong with forming such bonds of friendship, but if a Christian is led to believe that the importance of this friendship prohibits him from helping to correct his friend’s error, he is bound by an “unequal yoke” (2 Corinthians 6:14). As well, he is really not being much of a friend at all: *“Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful”* (Prov. 27:5-6). Some have a fervent desire to

combat what they consider serious error, but they are willing to spiritually team with those who are in lesser error in order to defeat serious error. Those who are in error are in darkness, and Christians are to ***“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”*** (Ephesians 5:11). Can one be apathetic about error when fellowshipping it and refusing to correct it violates the commandments of God? Can one be apathetic about error when the one following error stands condemned? There is certainly a wise, kind, and judicious way of correcting error; but it must be done.

INDIFFERENCE TO INIQUITY: There is nothing in the world more serious than sin. By sin man’s perfect fellowship with God was destroyed (Genesis 3:23-24); by sin death has become the lot of every man and woman since (Romans 5:12; Heb. 9:27); and by one’s own sin will one condemn himself to eternal torment (Matthew 25:41-46). Sin is most certainly not to be taken lightly. Oftentimes people who are in sin are at least tentatively conscious of their situation. This puts others in a position where one who cares about that person’s situation can truly help him; but those who are indifferent to iniquity can greatly harm him. Once a formerly ignorant person’s conscience is better instructed, it can motivate that person to remove himself from sin. However, if a person’s conscience is instructed that his sin is acceptable, it is much more difficult to correct later. What do we tell people when they ask us about the sin in which they are involved? Do we help them—or harm them? As brethren J.W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton wrote, “Conscience is one of God’s greatest gifts, and he that destroys it [for example, by telling someone he is O.K. when he is not, LM] must answer for it” (*The Fourfold Gospel*, p. 76). We spend time in God’s word so that we will not be indifferent to iniquity in ourselves (Psalm 119:11)—neither let us be indifferent to iniquity in others.

SHORTCOMINGS OF SELF: Oftentimes, we have so many problems of sin within ourselves that we feel we are unable and unqualified to correct such problems in others. We feel hypocritical trying to correct others when we ourselves are in need of correction. On one hand, this is proper reasoning. One who is guilty of a sin has no business condemning others guilty of the same sin (Romans 2:1). One who has serious sin in his life, or a “beam” in his eye, is not qualified to help another with a small “mote” in his eye (Matthew 7:1ff). Only those who are “spiritual” are entrusted with restoring one who is overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6:1). While one’s sinful shortcomings of self may indeed disable and disqualify one from helping another correct his sins, this does not excuse him from his Christian duty to ***“consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”*** (Hebrews 10:24). Similarly, one who is blemished by sin may be unable to worship God acceptably (1 Corinthians 11:29; 1 Peter 3:12), but this still does not excuse him from his Christian duty to worship God ***“in spirit and in truth”*** (John 4:24). If in any way our shortcomings of self hinder us from performing our Christian duty, it also becomes doubly our Christian duty to eliminate those shortcomings, through the grace of God.

CONCLUSION: Jesus came to earth ***“to seek and to save that which was lost”*** (Luke 19:10). The apostle Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in order that he might ***“present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”*** (Colossians 1:28). He was deeply grieved while there were souls dwelling outside of Christ, removed from the salvation found only in Him (see Romans 10:1; 2 Timothy 2:10). Each of us should have similar motivation to help souls make the corrections necessary to be found in Christ when the final trumpet sounds. Correction begins with ourselves and with our families, carrying over to all those whom we might have the opportunity to help. This may be through stern rebuke, mild chastening, or simply presenting a statement of truth; but it is always to be done with grace and love for God, for the truth, and for the soul in need of correction (Colossians 4:6; Ephesians 4:15). What causes our failure to correct? Does a complex about conflict hinder us from correcting those in need? Correction may require conflict, but remember, ***Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins*** (James 5:19-20). Are other hindrances keeping us from correcting? A Christian cannot have apathy to error or indifference to iniquity when such is what separates souls from God. Shortcomings of self, while they obviously do hinder one from correcting others, do not provide an *excuse* for a failure to correct. Correction is a Christian’s duty, and if we are failing in this regard, we need to correct ourselves.

