

**“Hating Reproof”**  
**Proverbs 1:20-33**  
**May 3, 2009**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

As we continue in our series of sermons on the “little” sins of Proverbs, we come today to the sin of hating reproof. As a personified wisdom states her case against the foolish who refuse to listen to her, she says that they have **“despised all my reproof”** (1:30). At one level, I don’t suppose there is anyone who enjoys reproof. Most of you have probably had that experience where someone calls and asks if they can come see you at your earliest convenience. By the tone of voice used, you suspect that they may want to talk to you about something they think you did that needs correction. So you begin to dread the appointed meeting date, trying to imagine what they will say to you and then preparing your defense to these imagined accusations. When the appointed time arrives, the meeting is even more painful than you feared and you lose sleep over it for quite a few nights after it’s over.

You’ll be glad to know that I don’t think the Bible requires us to love, enjoy and seek such situations. It does require us to receive rebukes as from the Lord and to allow ourselves to be corrected by them. While people have always found it difficult to accept reproof, our modern culture seems to have conspired with our human nature to make this especially difficult. Our society is governed by an “I’m okay, you’re okay” philosophy that gives everyone permission to hate reproof. I can still remember my piano teacher when I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, who had embraced this philosophy. Though I was not a very good piano student, she would never correct me. Instead, she would say, “Brad, you did really well on that piece. You did so well that I’m going to let you do it again next week.” I read recently about a teacher who never gave a failing grade to any of his poorly performing students. Instead, he would give such students a grade of “future success.”

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the fool is portrayed as one who rejects correction. It sees this not as a minor defect, but one that ends in complete and eternal destruction. The call of wisdom in this opening chapter speaks clearly of the importance of accepting reproof, summarized in three statements.

**I. The Simple Despise Reproof.**

The book of Proverbs uses a variety of terms to describe those who lack wisdom. One of them used in our text is the *simple*. In English, a simple-minded person is one who is lacking in intelligence. That’s not the sense here. It refers to someone who has not reached the majority age of adulthood, which

came at age 20 in the Hebrew culture. A youth below that age was called simple. One of the purposes of the book of Proverbs is to help that immature person to grow up and gain wisdom. But maturity is not just a feature of one's age, is it? There are some young people who exhibit great maturity, and some middle-aged and older people who still act like immature teenagers. One of the features of many teenagers, and this was definitely the case with me in my teen years, is the rejection of correction. My estimation of how smart and wise I was reached its high point in my teenage years. That's somewhat ironic, because looking back on it now I can see that my actual wisdom was at a low point at the very time I thought it was so high. If you think you know it all, then you are not going to listen to reproof and correction from anyone. The voice of wiser people then becomes like the voice of the teacher in the *Charlie Brown* cartoons. It's just so much noise to be tuned out.

Over and over again in the book of Proverbs, the immature are described as those who refuse to accept correction. So in our text Lady Wisdom says, **"I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof"** (1:24-25). In verse 30 she says that the simple have **"despised all my reproof."** This person comes to the end of his life full of regrets. He looks back to a wasted life and finally sees, when it's too late to do anything about it, what his fatal flaw has been. **"How I hated discipline and my heart despised reproof"** (5:12). The immature don't just hate reproof, but also the person who dares to reprove them. **"Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you"** (9:8). Proverbs 12:1 says it very simply, **"He who hates reproof is stupid."**

What are some of the common ways people refuse to heed correction? Probably the most obvious form of this is when the person who attempts to correct us is dismissed and ridiculed as foolish, while we remain confident in our own wisdom. This was definitely the case with me as a teenager. My friends who agreed with me were the ones who were truly wise, and anyone over 25 who represented authority was so incredibly foolish. It's not just teens who are guilty of this today. Many do the same thing with God, ridiculing and rejecting the authority of his word, thinking themselves wiser than God himself.

Another common way people despise reproof is by erecting a high wall of defensiveness. Whenever there is even a mild suggestion that things could perhaps have been done better or different words spoken, there is an immediate attempt to defend oneself with great energy. The defense could be in the form of excessive explanation, or even the more aggressive form of counterattack or blame-shifting. But one thing the defensiveness person will not tolerate is any hint of wrongdoing aimed at himself.

There is one more form of despising reproof that is more subtle and probably more common inside the church than any of these others. It is the

effort to deflect reproof by half measures. It usually starts well, with an agreement with the correction. And it even goes further commonly with an intention to do better and maybe even a prayer request made to one's prayer group for God's help in doing better. All those are good things and should be done. But here's where it becomes a half measure, because nothing more is ever done. The attempt is basically one of trying to quiet the voice of correction by throwing it a bone, but without really making any changes. This is what King Saul did when Samuel came to correct him after his disobedience. God had told Saul to devote to destruction the Amalekites. That was to include all their animals. But Saul disobeyed and kept the best of the sheep and oxen. When Samuel came to rebuke Saul, he offered a half measure. He claimed that he was saving the best animals to sacrifice them to the Lord. He had not done what God asked him to do, but now he intended to do something good by offering them in sacrifice.

We often despise God's correction by the same kind of half measure. One of the most common forms of this is when we settle for the intention to make changes in our lives, but don't actually do anything. We become like a nice drunk. Do you remember Otis in *The Any Griffith Show*? He was a nice drunk. Whenever he would drink too much, he would accept enough correction to come and let himself in the jail cell, but not enough to deal with his problem. He was offering a half measure. This leads to an important application. It is better to do one act of obedience than to intend to do twenty. Is there one act of obedience God's Spirit has laid on your heart and about which you have done nothing? Maybe it's the Scripture memorization program I invited you to participate in last week, where we would take one verse or passage each week this summer and memorize it together. If God laid it on your heart to do that, and you intended to do so but have not actually gotten around to doing anything about it, you are guilty of despising God's correction by giving him the half measure of a good intention without fully trusting him to move toward actual obedience.

## II. The Wise Accept Reproof.

There are a couple of promises given here to those who allow God to correct them. **"If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you"** (1:23). And then the last verse of the chapter says, **"Whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."** Last week we looked at the fear of the Lord, and we said that to fear God means to give him a weighty presence in our lives. Doing so requires that we listen to him in all things, especially as he graciously steps in to correct us.

I want us to consider two questions under this point. How does God correct us and how can we be motivated to accept his correction? God's correction of

us takes several forms. One of the common ways God corrects us is through his word. We allow ourselves to be corrected by it when we receive even those parts with which we disagree. If we do the opposite and only receive those parts with which we agree, then we are not allowing God to correct us. When we read the Bible, our need is to listen to it and to allow God to disagree with us. A second way God corrects us is through the deprivations brought on by suffering. Many have learned to trust God more fully through such deprivations as unemployment and ill health. Third, God corrects us through the rebukes of our friends. **“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy”** (27:5-6). There is something very powerful about the faithful rebuke of a friend, and we are blessed if we have people who are willing to speak into our lives in that way. Another way God corrects us is through the hate-filled attacks of enemies. Even though our enemies may intend their attacks upon us for our harm, God is big enough to take them and use them for his good purposes in our lives. If someone accuses us hatefully, it is easy to dismiss everything they say because of their hate. But God is bigger than we give him credit for. Since he can use even the tainted instrument of a hate-filled rebuke, we can take it to him and ask, “God, would you show me any truth that lies in the words of my accuser?”

It is not easy to accept correction. How can we be motivated to do so? The memory verse I have selected for this week speaks to this issue of our motivation for accepting God’s correction. It’s a well-known verse that also appears in the New Testament (Heb. 12:5-6). **“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights”** (3:11-12). He addresses two of the reasons we tend not to receive the correction—despising and growing weary. The bold tend to despise and openly reject God’s discipline, getting angry at him, and the timid tend to fall into despair. Both are forms of rejecting God’s correction. So he gives a reason for us not to do so, telling us that God corrects the sons he loves and in whom he delights.

Let me give an illustration to help us. Woodworking is a hobby of mine. If I am making something that is purely functional and will not be seen by anyone, I will not take the time to work the wood so that it becomes perfectly smooth and uniform. I’ll pretty much just leave it alone because I don’t much care what it looks like. But if I am making a piece that will show up more prominently in our house, I will work it over more extensively, planning, sanding, cleaning and finishing the wood. The one that is valued gets worked over much more. C. S. Lewis has pointed out that when we complain of our sufferings we are not asking for more love, but for less. We are asking God not to take us so seriously. The result of grasping this is that we will no longer need to fear correction from God. As we become more secure in God’s love, we can actually begin to welcome it.

### III. Eternity Hinges upon One's Response to Reproof.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, warnings of trouble are given to those who despise reproof. Lady Wisdom says that because the immature person has ignored her reproof, she will laugh at his calamity. Elsewhere, we read, **“Whoever hates reproof will die”** (15:10). If we are to flourish, corrections will always be necessary. Think about it like driving a car. In order to drive a car safely, the driver must make constant corrections. Drivers soon learn to do this without even thinking about it, correcting their steering so as to stay in the middle of the road, correcting their speed so as not to go too fast or to run into anyone else. Without constant correction, you wouldn't make it any further than the couple who thought the cruise control in their new motor home was like an auto pilot. It didn't take long after getting up out of his seat for the driver to discover otherwise.

When we turn a deaf ear to God's reproof, we invite calamity into our lives. But notice here that the calamity is more extensive than we might imagine. After it is too late, the fool realizes that he should have listened to God's rebuke. But when he calls out, there will be no answer. **“Because I have called and you refused to listen... Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer”** (1:24, 28). Just as God called to him for years and he did not answer God's call, so now he calls to God and finds him unresponsive. Charles Bridges remarks, “Prayer, once omnipotent, will then be powerless.”

Why should this be the case? Why does the hatred of reproof turn out to be such a serious matter? Because we cannot begin a relationship with God without accepting his correction. God tells us that we are by nature deeply flawed, so deeply flawed that we are beyond remedy within ourselves. It would be very hard to imagine a more humbling reproof than this one. But unless we receive this reproof and really listen to it, we will have very little use for Jesus. Jesus is God's remedy for what otherwise could never be remedied. To all who come to God in the kind of complete dependence that is borne out of this rebuke, God gives them new life in Christ.

### **CONCLUSION:**

I'd like for us to close by inviting God to correct us. To do so is both very scary and very liberating at the same time. It scares us because it shakes the foundations of our lives, and it liberates because it takes us to Jesus. So will you join me as we pray and invite God's correction?