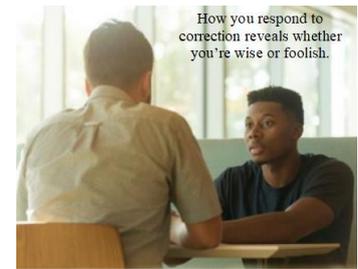


7 WAYS PEOPLE RESPOND TO CORRECTION



Introduction

1. We correct others and they correct us; it is a part of life; it is the way of things. We both give and receive correction from parents, spouses, brethren, friends, bosses, etc.
2. Spiritual correction comes by God's word (1 Corinthians 14:24-25; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12), brethren (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 2:11-14; 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24), conscience¹ (John 8:9; Romans 2:12-16), and circumstances (Luke 15:13-19; Hebrews 12:3-8).
3. Correction must be given from the right motive (1 Corinthians 16:14), for the right purpose (1 Corinthians 5:4-5), and received in the right spirit (Proverbs 8:33; 12:1; Jeremiah 10:24).

A fool considers anyone that tries to correct him as an enemy.

“He who refuses correction despises his own soul, but he who harkens to reproof gets understanding” (Proverbs 15:32 ACV).

4. A wise man will accept reproof, but there are difficulties to overcome²:
 - a. It is hard to believe that the reproving counselor is a true friend because he *appears* to be censorious. We think he takes a pleasure in finding fault with us, and we accuse him of a Pharisaic self-satisfaction in comparing his own virtue with our fault.
 - b. It is difficult to admit the application of the accusation to ourselves. David is angry at hearing Nathan’s parable of the ewe lamb, but fails to see that the moral of it is directed to himself until the prophet exclaims, “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:1-14).
 - c. It is not easy to confess our own humiliation. When we see that we are accused, pride rises up to defend us. It is possible for a large amount of pride to lodge with a great quantity of folly. Indeed, the more a person is emptied of real worth the more room is there in him for self-inflation.
 - d. It is troublesome to yield to a reproof. To do so we must not merely admit our fault, but consent to mend our ways. We must allow the reproof to work actively in us if it is to be of any use. The drunkard is often ready to confess his sin, but he is not so eager to renounce the cause of it.
 - e. It is distressing to bear the reproof of God. In reading the Bible people are tempted to appropriate the promises to themselves and to leave the threatenings for their brethren. It needs a divinely inspired wisdom to help us to profit by the warnings of Scripture.
5. In this lesson we will consider seven ways in which people react to correction. The first six ways are wrong responses and the seventh is the only correct response – repentance. Spiritual growth can only occur as we continue to put off folly and cloth ourselves with wisdom. It is essential, then, to heed the voices of God's word, brethren, conscience, and circumstances.

An openness to correction means making one’s self vulnerable, which some are not willing to do.

It is not always easy to accept correction and reproof because of our pride. But a mature Christian is able to overcome any difficulties because he knows that correction is for his own good.

Note: I use the word “correction” with some wideness in this lesson.

¹ A Christian must let the word of God dwell in him richly in order for the conscience to function as a reliable guide.

² These five, slightly edited, points are from the Pulpit Commentary.

7 WAYS PEOPLE RESPOND TO CORRECTION

1. Denial. "But I have obeyed the voice of the Yahweh" (1 Samuel 15:20).
2. Excuses. "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12).
3. Ignore. "Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father..." (1 Samuel 2:25).
4. Pretend. "... Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense..." (Jeremiah 3:10).
5. Anger. "When the council members heard Stephen's speech, they were angry and furious" (Acts 7:54).
6. Attack. "But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him... shut John up in prison" (Luke 3:19-20).
7. Repent. "I have sinned against Yahweh" (2 Samuel 12:13).

7 WAYS PEOPLE RESPOND TO CORRECTION

1. DENIAL

Some people simply deny they are doing anything wrong when they are confronted.

- a. When Samuel sought to correct him for his disobedience, Saul denied he had been disobedient. Indeed, he insisted he had been obedient to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:1-20).
- b. God charged the Israelites with robbing Him in not bringing tithes and sacrifices, but they denied it saying, "How are we robbing you?" (Malachi 3:8-15).
- b. Abraham corrected Sarah for laughing at the angel's announcement that she would bear a child, but she denied laughing (Genesis 18:1-15).



Denial is often a preface to justification

WARNING

Denying a fault is often a preface to justification. If this develops into a habit, then spiritual growth becomes impossible. Indeed, spiritual decline is inevitable.

2. EXCUSES

Some people will acknowledge their faults when confronted, but will offer excuses to justify their behavior.

- a. When God sought to correct Adam, he tried to excuse himself by blaming his wife and even God Himself (Genesis 3:12), and Eve tried to excuse herself by blaming the serpent (Genesis 3:13).
- b. In the face of Samuel's correction, Saul offered excuses or justifications for his disobedience (1 Samuel 15:13-21).
- c. When Moses sought to correct Aaron and explain himself regarding the golden calf, he had his excuses ready (Exodus 32:1-25).



What often stands between us and our obedience are the excuses we keep telling ourselves as to why we can't do what God says.

WARNING

"An excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie" (Billy Sunday). This form of lying destroys your credibility and prevents your spiritual growth. Those in the habit of giving excuses are liars that have no place in the kingdom of God (Psalms 101:7; Revelation 21:8).

3. IGNORE

Some people know they are at fault and they will listen to your correction, but then simply ignore it.

- a. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were very wicked (1 Samuel 2:12-21) and when he sought to correct them, they simply ignored him (1 Samuel 2:22-25).
- b. The Israelites inquired of the Lord concerning a certain fast, but the Lord corrected them regarding their motives and behavior; they ignored Him (Zechariah 7:1-13).
- c. Amnon was about to force himself on his sister Tamar and she sought to correct him, but she was ignored (2 Samuel 13:1-14).



WARNING

One that continually ignores correction hardens his own heart (**Zechariah 7:1-12**), despises his own soul (**Proverbs 15:32**), and goes astray (**Proverbs 10:17**). Indeed, a person that ignores correction is very likely ignoring those commands of God it does not please him to keep; though he may hide this from himself.

4. PRETEND

The one that ignores correction and the one that feigns repentance are twins. The latter are of a more rotten character because they are deceitful and hypocritical.

- a. Judah had seen how Israel had sinned and were punished and so they “repented”. However, it was feigned; it was all a pretense (**Jeremiah 3:6-10**). “And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense, says Yahweh” (**Jeremiah 3:10**).



- b. Despite the Lord's blessings Israel sinned, and so the Lord sought to correct them. They returned to the Lord but it was actually an insincere, pretended repentance (**Psalms 78:32-37**). “But they tried to fool Him with their words; they told Him lies. Their hearts were not really with Him” (**Psalms 87:36-37 ERV**). All that they said was a mere pretence in an attempt to flatter God and win His favor.

“I do not sit with false persons, nor fellowship with pretenders” (**Psalms 26:4 AMPC**)

- c. After Samuel had corrected Saul he says, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before Yahweh your God” (**1 Samuel 15:30**). I hope you can see it? Coupled with his supposed confession of sin, Saul insists that Samuel get him out of the consequences. Saul is only concerned about Saul. “...yet honor me now before the elders of my people...”. Real repentance never uses this kind of language.

True repentance is the result of godly sorrow (**2 Corinthians 7:11**).

WARNING

If you are in the habit of saying you will change your behavior when corrected but are really just pretending, then you are a liar and a hypocrite. Hard facts to face! Yet worse, it is highly likely that your claim to be a Christian is a sham. Some hypocrites, like fools, are so deceived that they do not know they are pretenders.

5. ANGER

Some brethren know they have faults, have no desire to correct them, give them no thought, and suppress their consciences when pricked. So, as you might imagine, they don't like anyone exposing them and *poking their noses into their business*, as they see it. When someone attempts to correct them, and feeling embarrassed and humiliated, they erupt in a fit of anger. This anger serves two purposes: it deters the accuser and drives him away, and it acts as a kind of anesthetic on the mind and conscience until peace is restored.



- a. The Scribes and Pharisees were watching Jesus closely to see if He would heal on the Sabbath, so they might have an accusation against Him. Jesus sought to correct their faulty thinking by asking them a simple question that exposed their hypocrisy. Their response to Jesus' correction was one of rage (**Luke 6:6-11**).
- b. After the Jewish council heard Stephen's correction (**Acts 6:8-7:53**), they were filled with rage (**Acts 7:54**).
- c. When God sought to correct Cain because of his unacceptable offering, he was filled with anger (**Genesis 4:1-7**).

“Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools” (**Ecclesiastes 7:9 AMPC**).
“Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go” (**Proverbs 22:24 AMPC**).

WARNING

If you are filled with anger and resentment when your faults are exposed, then you are simply revealing your guilt. If you display your anger (when confronted), then you will eventually be disfellowshipped. If you keep your anger hidden (e.g., perhaps when listening to a sermon), then it will multiply within you and cause all manner of conflicts in your mind; it will corrupt your spirit. Anger destroys relationships. Spiritual decline, then, is already evident and will grow worse.

6. ATTACK

These people not only become angry, they launch into a verbal attack on the one that seeks to correct them; which may even lead to a physical attack!

- a. The first kind of attack, and the most common, is verbal and restricted to name calling and counter accusations.
- b. The second kind of attack is also verbal but goes beyond name calling and counter accusations to include gossip and slander (the way of the coward) – character assassination.
- c. The third kind of attack will include verbal attacks but goes beyond them to include physical violence:
 - 1) After the Jewish council heard Stephen's correction (Acts 6:8-7:53), they were filled with rage and stoned him to death (Acts 7:54-60).
 - 2) Israel had fallen into idolatry and so the Lord sought to correct them through the prophet Jeremiah. But when Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord, Pashhur, the priest and chief governor in the house of the Lord, struck him and put him in stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-2).
 - 3) Herod had John the baptist cast into prison because he sought to correct him regarding an unlawful marriage. In fact, it was only Herod's fear of the people that prevented him from putting John to death (Matthew 14:1-5).



It may be that a person may desire to respond to correction with a verbal attack – name calling, counter accusations, gossip, and slander, but manages to restrain himself. But the presence of those thoughts in one's heart still count as much as if spoken.

In order to escape accountability for their faults, people will often attack their accuser's credibility. Sometimes they will even resort to physical violence. Such behavior is the proof that one has no desire for spiritual growth.

WARNING

Verbal attacks express more than just your anger and resentment; they expose your hatred and reveal a bitterness of heart. If you hate your brother, then you are a murderer (1 John 3:15). You may call yourself a Christian, but you are far from it.

7. REPENT

Repentance is the desired result of correction.

- a. Simon the sorcerer repented when he was corrected by Peter (Acts 8:9-24).
- b. The man corrected for his fornication repented (1 Corinthians 5:1-5 < 2 Corinthians 2:5-8).
- c. David repented when Nathan confronted him regarding his sin (2 Samuel 12:1-14).



Conclusion

1. As a Christian we have a responsibility to look out for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others (Philippians 2:4). At times this will mean correcting a brother or sister regarding a fault, and, of course, we should expect to be corrected ourselves.
2. How do we expect others to respond to our correction? I think we know only too well how people actually respond: some deny any wrongdoing, some offer excuses, some ignore you, some pretend to welcome your correction but do nothing, some have outbursts of anger, and some resort to verbal and even physical attacks. But there are those that genuinely welcome your correction, are thankful, and make the necessary changes. What about you, *how do you respond to correction?*
3. If we respond in any way except to repent, then we reveal an immature, carnal mind and a lack of desire to grow spiritually. This in turn is the proof that we are not pursuing those things that are good for us (1 Thessalonians 5:15) – righteousness, faith, love, peace (2 Timothy 2:22), and holiness (Hebrews 12:14).

“He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray” (Proverbs 10:17).