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A Teachable Spirit



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "A Teachable Spirit," Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of being open to correction and instruction in order to achieve Christian growth and maturity. Drawing near to God requires continual change and transition towards God-likeness, and a teachable spirit is essential in this process. A person with a teachable spirit craves every opportunity to learn, finds instruction and correction everywhere, and extends this attitude to every area of life. Through meekness, a willingness to learn, and a hunger for correction, a teachable spirit can successfully lead to transformation into the image of Christ.

Transcript

And I'd like you to look at the last verse in that chapter, which we won't have at this time the time to go into all the context of it and everything. We will in a few weeks be going through the book of 2 Corinthians and be able to pick up the context in this whole chapter, which has a lot in it. But I just want to focus on this last verse, verse 18, for now.

It says, But we all, with open faith, beholding as in a glass, or as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Now, the main thing I want to focus on in this verse right now is the fact that we are being changed. There's much more in that verse that we can deal with when we're dealing with another subject, but just the fact that Paul says that it is our privilege and our experience that we are being changed from glory to glory into the image of Jesus.

Therefore, we can expect our lives to be a series of continual changes with a certain goal and view. Now, the image of Jesus suggests that our character needs to be radically modified. When we were born, we did not have the character of Jesus.

We had, in fact, all the tendencies to please ourselves and to serve ourselves rather than others, and many of these things hardened into firm policies and patterns in our lives. And our character then, when we come to Christ, begins to undergo a change. It says,

even as by the Spirit of the Lord, and that's very fortunate because in our own power, we would neither have the motivation nor would we have the power to make these changes that is impossible for someone simply by sheer strength of will to be changed into the image of Christ.

This is a work of the Spirit of God, and yet the change is occurring, and this wording seems to imply to us that the change is gradual and by stages. We are being changed from glory to glory, or we might say, from one stage to another of glory. Glory implies the image of Jesus, and as we go from one point to another, we're moving closer and closer to the final result, which is to be in his image.

I'd like you to look at a few other scriptures with me before I even introduce what our topic is. Look at Hebrews chapter 6. I'd like to read the first 12 verses and then make a point from that. Hebrews 6, verses 1 through 12, Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of the laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

And this we will do, that is, we will go beyond these things unto perfection or maturity, if God permits. Certainly won't do it if he doesn't, because we can't do it without his power. Then it says, For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

For the earth which drinketh in the rain, that cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth herb, meat for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, that ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience, or endurance, inherit the promises. Now the promises have to do with our becoming like Christ.

That is the ultimate promise that is made to Christians. He says here that there is need for us to have patience and faith until we inherit such promises, until we actually become like Jesus. In the meantime, we are exhorted in the first verse to go on from where we now are.

We are at a certain place in our development as Christians. We are hopefully more like Jesus than when we started. But also I hope that we are less like Jesus than we will be, meaning I hope that we shall be better in the future.

I hope that we are still growing. And he points out that growth is not likely to occur as the result of continuing to study the same old things that we already have known, repentance from dead works, faith toward God. The study of these basic foundational Christian things, valuable as they are, nonetheless to continue in them again and again without going on to deeper things at all, will not result in our maturity or in our perfection.

In the earlier chapter, in chapter 5, he points out that in order to grow into mature people, we need meat and not only milk. And he's referring to various types of Christian teaching. The teaching that is for babes is milk.

The teaching that is for the mature is meat, solid food. Anyway, he says that there are people who have been enlightened and have tasted of the good word of God and of the powers of the age to come, and some of those people seem to have fallen away. The writer makes reference to that fact, and he says to the readers that it is impossible for them to renew such people to repentance.

Now, of course, that's a very controversial passage. My feeling is, as I've studied the scripture on it, I really feel that he's saying that the readers who have not gone on to perfection, whom he says are really babes, he says they are babes in Christ, that they are unable to minister to people who have gone even further than they have gone in the faith and have now fallen away because these readers have not even gone on very far themselves. And it is needful for them to go on to maturity so that they might be able to minister to those who have fallen away, who previously had gone on to a place of maturity and then fell away.

So, in other words, a babe in Christ who knows very little of the deep things of God is not likely to make an impression in trying to win someone back to the Lord who has gone on further and knows more than that babe does. And so he makes reference to the fact that certain types of ground receive blessing, the ground that waters or that receive watering and brings forth fruit receives blessing from God. But that which brings forth thorns and briars is near to being cursed and burned.

And he's talking about different kinds of lives. The rain that comes down is the instruction of the word of God, the teaching of the milk and ultimately later of the meat. And people who do not bring forth good fruit in their lives, then he's making a solemn a warning that such land as does not bring forth fruit will be burned up.

And then he said that he is persuaded in verse nine that the people to whom he is writing will not be fruitless. He's persuaded better things than that of them, though he

says these things as a by way of warning. And he says in verse 11 that we desire of every one of you to show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.

That is that we should be diligent, not slothful, he says in the next verse, seeking diligently to reach the desired end, which is apparently maturity or perfection, which really is the same thing as the image of Christ. To be brought into the image of Christ is to be brought to the state of Christian perfection. Now, I'm not really planning to teach about Christian perfection per se tonight.

I'm more interested in teaching about the course to that goal. I'm not going to put anyone under fear that they aren't Christians or something because they're not perfect. None of us have reached that place yet.

Some have come closer than others, judging from the fact that some have been at it longer. But along this road, we are to be continually moving. If we become complacent and satisfied with the level of maturity and the level of spirituality that we have now attained to and say, well, I'm much better off than I was before.

I remember those early turmoils and those early travailings of my Christian life when I had to give up drugs and when I had to give up sex and partying and worldly music and entertainments and things. I remember how hard that was, the early travail of early growth. Oh, that was so difficult.

But now I have rid those things from my life and I feel that I'm really in a pretty good place now. And there's no more need to travail. There's no more need to trouble myself.

I'm quite good enough as I am. Certainly, I'm as good as the other Christians around me. And that ought to be good enough.

And if I'm not good enough, then everyone else is in trouble, too. So I might as well just be happy where I am. And that is an attitude that is very easy for us to fall into, that we judge ourselves by the standard of the national average or of the norm of the Christian group that we are associated with.

And we look at others and we say, well, they're not doing any better than I am. Therefore, why should I struggle to be any better? It's such a pain to keep growing. Growing in the Lord requires a certain amount of suffering, a certain amount of giving up, a certain amount of, well, changing, of course.

And change is one thing I want to focus on tonight, because we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18 that we are being changed and we need to be prepared to go through the painful experience of change, the painful experience of growth and maturing. And we should not be satisfied to give up that painful experience until we have reached our goal. Through endurance and faith, we need to obtain the promise of being like Christ.

We saw in the Psalms just this morning in our morning class, in Psalm 17 and verse 15, David said, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. And I believe what that means is that David was not going to be satisfied until the day that he awoke in the likeness of Christ or in the likeness of God. He was not going to settle for any lesser goals.

He wasn't going to just be complacent in the fact that God had declared him to be a man after God's own heart. That is a high compliment coming from God. David could have said, well, I guess I must be in pretty good shape.

But he said, I'm not going to be satisfied if we might take his same statement in Psalm 17, 15 and turn it around to the, uh, the, uh, inverted into the negative form. I will not be satisfied until I awake in God's likeness. And certainly we as Christians having the promise before us of being like Christ should not be satisfied until the day that we awake and are quite like him.

Now that may be the, the awakening of our bodies from death and resurrection. And many Christians are quite happy to say, uh, nobody's perfect. It's foolish to expect to be perfect in this life.

After all, when Jesus comes back, we'll all instantaneously be changed into his image simply by the crisis of his appearing. So why should we struggle anyway? Jesus has saved us by grace, not by our works. And why struggle to be like Christ? Well, because the more like him we are, the nearer to him we are.

Uh, it was A. W. Tozer, I believe, who wrote a little piece in one of his, uh, magazines that, that was called Nearness is Likeness. And he was talking about how the Bible exhorts us so frequently to draw near to God. And yet, how do you draw near to someone who is everywhere? When we think of drawing near to something or to someone, we think in geographical terms.

If I am here and that object is a certain distance from me, then in order to draw near to it, I must reduce the distance between it and myself. And it is a matter of me moving my body from one place to another, or else moving the object and causing it to become more near to me. However, if that object were in all places at once, if the object were across the room and right next to me at the same time, and on the other side of the earth at the same time, in what sense could I draw near to it? The psalmist said in Psalm 139, where can I flee to escape thy presence? There's nowhere to go to get away from God.

What in the world does the scripture mean when it says draw nigh to him, draw near to him? How do I do that? And, uh, the answer to that, I think, is found when we discover the secret that nearness to God is the same as likeness. It's not proximity of geography, but proximity of likeness. And that fellowship with God requires that we draw near to him

in likeness.

I pointed out in some of my other studies, and those of you who have been, uh, have sat under my teaching for any period of time have perhaps heard me mention this, but in order to have fellowship, even in the natural with other living things, it's necessary that there be a certain amount of likeness. In spite of the fad, that was around a few years ago, of having pet rocks, nonetheless, no one really ever had anything like fellowship with a rock, because there's nothing, we have nothing in common. The only thing in common is that both the rock and we are made of atoms, but they have nothing else in common.

They are harder than we are. They have no intelligence. They have no life.

They don't grow. They don't reproduce. There's nothing like us.

Therefore, it is absolutely impossible to have fellowship with a rock. And yet, some people actually feel quite affectionate toward their plants. And we would probably say, most of us, that you can't have fellowship with a plant.

Yet, we know that there's some people who talk to plants. I haven't heard of any who hear from their plants, but I know I've heard of people who do talk to their plants. Now, it's more logical to talk to a plant than to a rock, because we have, at least in common with plants, life.

But, of course, it's not really very intelligent to talk to plants, because beyond having life, we have nothing else in common with them. When you get to the animal world, and you have a goldfish or some kind of an animal like that, of a very low intelligence, some people actually are fond of their animals. And the more like you an animal is, the more you are likely to feel close to it.

It's very obvious that an animal that is more intelligent is likely to be a better companion, because you are intelligent. You're more intelligent than animals are. And therefore, the closer they get to you in intelligence and in likeness, the more you're likely to get any kind of gain from fellowship with them, from friendship with them.

And the dog is considered to be man's best friend, but actually, I think the best friend a man can have is another man. Because a dog, while it resembles us in some respects, in that it moves, it can run and play like we can. Again, it doesn't talk, but it does learn to understand certain commands and all.

There is a certain amount of satisfaction to be had in fellowship with your pet dog, but much more with your own child or another human being who can respond and resembles you in many ways. But even among human beings, there are those with whom you can have more fulfilling relationships than others. And of course, we would think, and I think we would be correct if we said so, that the nearer a person is to being like you, the more

you have in common with them, the more you're really going to enjoy them.

If you both like to jog, or if you both like to read Shakespeare, or if you both like to play musical instruments, or you both like to eat the same kinds of food, Chinese food for example, or if you both like to sit around and drink coffee and talk for hours, you're going to get along just fine. But if you don't have some of these things in common, though there can be fellowship, those things become disadvantages. So what I'm saying is that nearness, even in human relationships, has got to be on the basis of likeness.

And the more like you someone or something is, the more you will be able to draw near to it in the sense of communion and fellowship. And drawing near to God requires that there be some form of likeness to Him. There are human beings, all human beings are made in His likeness, but the likeness of God in terms of our character has been greatly lost by the fall.

And you never know quite how far man has fallen until you try to make your way back up to where you fell from. You know, people who are in the world probably have no idea how far they fell from the image of God. But once you start that journey back to God likeness, it takes years and years and years and you begin to say, wow, that was a long drop.

I sure fell a long way. I didn't know it'd be such a long hike back up. But it's evident that in order for us to be like God and to draw near to God and have the fulfillment of communion with God on the greatest level that we are created to experience, requires that we constantly be in a state of change and transition from the way we were to the way we shall be.

And so change should be the mode which we cast our entire life in. Instead of ever settling in and saying, this is far enough. I've reached a good enough place in my Christian walk.

We need to say, this is better than yesterday, but it's not good enough. I will not be satisfied with this. And so we need to see that change is absolutely necessary.

In Psalm chapter 55 and verse 19, there's a description of a wicked man. And in that verse, it says, concerning wicked people, it says, they have no changes. It says, because they have no changes, they fear not God.

Now, I don't know exactly what the psalmist is saying there, but it sounds to me like he's saying it's not a desirable thing, spiritually speaking, to be a person who never changes. Psalm 55, 19, second half of the verse. Because they have no changes, they fear not God.

Now, it may be that when you were younger, you didn't fear God. But the reason you fear God now is because you were willing to change. You're willing to change your whole

value system.

You're willing to change your whole pattern of living. You're willing to change your goals in life. And you chose to follow God and to begin this pilgrimage to God-likeness because you wanted to change.

Now, a wise person is a person who is intent on changing and will not ever stop or become complacent until he is changed altogether. In the first verse we read tonight, which says we are changed from glory to glory, the Greek word is a word that appears only three places in the New Testament. Actually, it appears in all three of the synoptic Gospels in the parallel passages to each other, then in two other places.

And that is the word metamorphosized, if we change it into English characters, the word that is translated changed is metamorphosized. But we get our word metamorphosis from it. And the only other times that it's used are in Romans 12, 2, which says, be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The word transformed is from the same Greek word as we are changed, transformed or changed. The other occurrence of the word is in the three synoptic Gospels in the three places that talk about the transfiguration of Jesus. It says that Jesus was transfigured before the disciples, the same word.

Jesus was transfigured. That is, he took on a different form. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds, Romans 12, 2 tells us, and in the place we started, we are being transformed or changed from glory to glory.

Now, the word metamorphosis actually means the kind of basic change that takes place in the form of an individual. We use the word metamorphosis in English to describe the change from a caterpillar to a butterfly. That's probably the most common usage of the term metamorphosis in our language.

When a caterpillar goes into a cocoon and remains there for a while, a certain change in its bodily structure and its very nature takes place and it is transformed into another creature. And that process has been dubbed by scientists metamorphosis, and it is a correct use of the word. And when the Bible says we are being metamorphosized from glory to glory, it means that we are actually undergoing a basic change in nature into the image of Christ, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

And we'll say more about that word metamorphosis when we get to studying Romans chapter 12. But I want to point out that this is a major thing. Being a Christian doesn't simply mean accepting a few doctrines and giving up a few vices from our lives and saying, now, look at that.

I'm as good as other Christians. I believe the right things. I do mostly the right things.

Therefore, I'm in. But being a Christian doesn't mean just getting in. It means getting it on and becoming like Jesus and moving along and changing continually, which, as I said, often involves embarrassing or painful situations.

Now, in Hebrews chapter 12, you're probably still open at this point to Hebrews chapter 6. You can turn to Hebrews chapter 12, and we have that well-known passage about the chastening of the Lord, or that the word chastening in the Greek means to bring up a child. We sometimes think of it as disciplining, but chastening in the Greek doesn't only mean disciplining. It means the whole process of raising and rearing and training up children.

And God is in the process certainly of chastening or training us up as children. And it says in verse 5 of Hebrews 12, and ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. The quotation now is from Proverbs chapter 3, and it's verses 11 and 12.

And it says, my son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth and scourgeth or whips every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.

For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement of which all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, human fathers, which corrected us and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the father of spirits and live? Verse 10.

For verily they for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit. Now why does God chasten us or bring us up or rebuke us? That we might be partakers of his holiness. In other words, his nature will be given to us.

We're being changed in the sense of our nature and our character into his image. And so we become partakers of his likeness, his holiness. And verse 11.

Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it. No one enjoys being chastened.

No one enjoys being disciplined or rebuked or exhorted. But if we endure it patiently, the result is it brings forth the peaceable fruit in our lives of righteousness. Now that is the direction that we desire to be changed in.

We want to become righteous. We want to be like God. We want to be holy.

Not like God in the sense of ruling over other individuals, but like God in the sense of being good and righteous and holy like God. And this tells us that it is the chastening or the disciplinary action of the Lord and the whole process of his training us up as children

that brings us to that place. So in viewing our need for change, we are, in fact, having to take into consideration that change requires rebuke.

Change requires exhortation. You have forgotten the exhortation, he says in verse 5. And he says, don't faint when you are rebuked of the Lord. Now the Lord rebukes us in various ways.

Sometimes he'll rebuke us simply in our conscience. Other times he'll rebuke us by putting a hasty end to our plans and by circumstance. Other times he'll rebuke us by the mouth of someone or another.

In the case of Balaam, God rebuked him through the mouth of a donkey in the book of Numbers. So God may rebuke a man in various ways and through various means. But note that you are not to faint when you're rebuked of God.

You are, in fact, to welcome it, to embrace it, to say this is going to change me. I receive it. And so tonight, it's about time I announced my topic, tonight I want to talk to you about what I would call a teachable spirit, which of course refers to the ability to receive correction, to receive rebuke.

And there can be hardly anything more basic or needful to a Christian attitude if we desire to grow. A friend of mine and I, actually he had been through one of our discipleship schools and he was traveling with me across country in the ministry and we were fellowshiping about lots of things. And he, once we were just riding along on the highway and he said, is there anything we can do to speed up our spiritual growth or is it just something that God does in his own time? And he was just asking for basically one key and it seems like every teacher has a different key.

You know, the key is to praise God more or the key is to read your Bible more or the key is to pray more or the key is to stay in fellowship or the key is to pay tithes or something or another. You know, everyone's got an idea of what the key is and I had to think about it and I didn't want to be too glib because I knew that it's very possible to think of just the last thing God's been teaching me about and say, well that's the thing, because usually it's the thing God's dealing with us about that we see is all important and we have to lay it on everyone else. But going back to just the most basic thing I could think of that a person can do to enhance and to speed up their own spiritual growth, the only thing I could think of was to say, well, keep a teachable spirit.

That's the only thing I can think of. In the book of Ecclesiastes, there's a description of what Solomon calls an old foolish king who will no longer be corrected. A man who has come to the place where he feels like he's seen it all, he's got experience, he's read all the books, he knows everything that he's going to have to know and therefore no one can tell him what he ought to do.

No one can tell him he's going wrong. He's an old foolish king, Solomon said, who no longer will be corrected. A man will stop growing, or a woman, as soon as that person ceases to be of a disposition to receive correction.

Until we are just like Jesus, we must remain in a state of change and change is brought about and facilitated by correction, by rebuke, and it doesn't even have to be offered through the mouth of someone who knows more than we do. Many times it may be out of the mouths of babes and sucklings that God will give a rebuke to us. It might be out of the mouth of an unbeliever, but the point is that we have to have a teachable spirit that seeks after understanding and seeks after knowledge and anyone who thinks that they are above correction because they consider that they are wise enough only demonstrates that they are not wise at all because they have set their goals way too low.

They are satisfied with where they are. They have failed to take into consideration that God is not finished bringing them up and that he might use any instrument, even the most unlikely, to bring about a corrective word, a rebuke, or an exhortation. And the wise man then is the one who, rather than saying he is too wise to hear correction, is wise enough to hear it and consider that it may be true.

Let's look at some passages in Proverbs, and as you're probably aware, you know that Proverbs is a book about wisdom. In fact, it is even part of a body of literature called Wisdom Literature of the Jewish canon of scripture, and it's mostly about wisdom. In fact, the purpose of the book of Proverbs is stated at the beginning of the book where it says the book is written to give wisdom to the simple-minded person.

Solomon wrote this book to his son, and he spoke to his son and exhorted him concerning the things that Solomon, the wisest man in the world, thought were the best counsel that he could give to his son. Now, consider, this was a man who, first of all, was the wisest man alive, so his counsel would be good, so long as he had good intentions and wasn't trying to give someone faulty counsel. Secondly, the counsel was made to his son, and a man's counsel to his son is usually the most sincere and well-intentioned counsel that can be had.

A man wants his son, in many cases, to do better than he himself has done, and so Solomon, reflecting on the things that he would tell his son, if he could only have a few words, tells him primarily to seek after wisdom. In Proverbs 4, and verses 5 through 7, he says, Get wisdom, get understanding, forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, meaning wisdom, and she shall preserve thee, love her, and she shall keep thee.

Wisdom is the principal thing. Therefore, get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee.

She shall bring thee to honor when thou dost embrace her, and so forth. So, he just raves about the great values and merits of getting wisdom, but how is wisdom gotten? Well, Solomon does not leave his son uninstructed in that matter either. Wisdom is gotten by a teachable spirit, by one who receives correction, and we'll find that throughout the Proverbs, again and again, we find this theme coming up.

If you receive correction, you first of all demonstrate that you are wise, because a wise man will receive correction, and secondly, you become more wise by receiving correction, because that is the way of life and the way of knowledge. Let's just look at a few passages. Last time we met in the evening, we were talking about the fear of God, and we went through a lot of passages and Psalms and Proverbs about the fear of God, because that is a major theme in Proverbs.

There is nothing that is more a major theme in Proverbs than this that we're talking about tonight, and I want to do something similar tonight as we did then. That is, just go through the book of Proverbs and see the kinds of things that Solomon said about a teachable spirit and the wisdom of one who goes to great pains to maintain a teachable spirit and receive correction and rebuke and instruction from others. Look at Proverbs 12 and verse 15.

It says, the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkens unto counsel is wise. That rhymes in our Bible. It doesn't in the Hebrew, but the fool's way is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkens to counsel is wise.

It's interesting that a fool is the man who is least likely to make the right decisions. If he's a fool, he doesn't have much intelligence, and yet because he is a fool, he doesn't realize that he can't make intelligent decisions, and therefore his way is right in his own eyes. Now, it may be that a man whose ways really are right will be right in his eyes, because he'll recognize them as being right, but there's always the possibility that if a man is defensive of his ways and says, my way is right, even when there are other people giving counsel to the contrary, there's the possibility that he may be a fool, because even fools are willing to justify and defend their own ways, but the wise man is the one who will listen to counsel.

Now, again, that is the man who humbles himself to put himself in the position of a learner, instead of the instructor. Some people always have to be the one who's giving instructions to the other guy, but the wise man is the one who's always wanting to learn more, and he doesn't care who it is that's talking. His ear is looking out for wisdom and looking out for instruction, and therefore he'll listen and see if there's any wisdom in the counsel that this individual is giving, regardless of the person's qualifications who's giving the counsel.

Let's go a little further. Proverbs 15, 5. A fool despises his father's instruction, but he that regards reproof is prudent, and prudent means wise. The man who regards reproof...

Now, reproof is when someone says, you're wrong.

A man who hears that, instead of getting defensive, is the wise man. The man who gets defensive is, again, in this passage, the fool. And going a little further here, in chapter 17, in verse 10, it says, a reproof enters more readily into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool.

Now, what does that mean? A hundred stripes actually refers to lashes from a whip, and it's saying that there are two kinds of people, and both kinds of people have to learn. No one knows everything. Everyone still has a lot to learn.

However, a wise man will learn simply from hearing a reproof from someone. Someone once said, a fool or anyone can learn from their own mistakes, but a wise man will learn from another's mistakes. That's because a wise man has a teachable spirit, and is looking for wisdom, and looking for instruction wherever he can find it.

He won't wait till he makes mistakes. He'll see the mistakes others have made, and say, okay, I get it. I'm going to avoid doing that same thing.

That's a wisdom. Instruction or a reproof enters into a wise man more than a hundred lashes into a fool. That is, it takes a hundred lashes from a whip to get it through the head of a fool, to the same extent that a wise man gets it just from a word.

We have an expression that is not found in scripture, but is definitely the concept of this verse, which says, you've of course heard it, a word to the wise is sufficient. What that means is, to a wise man, a mere word is enough to correct them, or to cause them to change. And of course, the reverse of that is to a person who's not wise, it takes something more than a word.

It may take a hundred lashes. A wise man can avoid such heavy disciplinary action by being teachable, and receiving reproof when he first hears it. Let's look also at James, which is the New Testament counterpart to the book of Proverbs.

Did you know that? There is no book in the Old Testament that more resembles James than the book of Proverbs. There's no book in the New Testament that more resembles Proverbs than James. James and Solomon, in some respects, had a lot in common.

When we study the book of James together, we'll talk about what some of those things are that they had in common. But look at James chapter three, and we should expect, if what I said is true, that James is the New Testament counterpart of Proverbs, that James will have a lot to say about wisdom also. And in fact, he does.

In James chapter three, he says, beginning with verse 14, But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, do not glory, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. In other words, this kind of

wisdom that is striving and so forth, this debating kind of a spirit, this defensiveness of one's own way.

This is not wisdom from above. This is earthly wisdom. It's earthly.

That means it's from the world. It's sensual. That means it's of the flesh.

It's devilish. That means it's diabolical. It's of the world, it's of the flesh, and it's of the devil.

Therefore, it's not desirable to Christians to operate in such wisdom as that. However, we have the refreshing contrast given to us of what godly wisdom is like. And it says in verse 17, But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Now, the part of that I want to nab out of the description of godly wisdom in verse 17 is that a person who has godly wisdom will be easy to be entreated. Now, we don't use the word entreated very often in modern English, and maybe you don't have a clear concept of what entreated means. Maybe we can give you a more clear picture by turning your attention to 1 Timothy chapter 5, where the same word entreat is found.

It says, Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father. Now, you can see that entreating then is a somewhat milder form of rebuke. It is a matter of correcting a person.

It's basically begging them or beseeching them to consider what you have to say. And what James says is the wisdom from above is easy to be entreated. It means that it's not stubborn against hearing counsel and correction.

It very readily receives correction. It doesn't even need to be rebuked. If a person is wise, he will not require a sharp rebuke to stun him from his wrong way.

Just being entreated will be enough, and he will be approachable and teachable and easy to be entreated, and that is wisdom. So, as we've said, the person who is wise will receive instruction, will receive correction, and by receiving correction will become more wise. And let me show you a few proverbs on that point, that not only does the teachable spirit demonstrate that a person is wise, but it will cause them to become more wise, to cause them to change, to cause them to grow, to cause them to become more mature more quickly, and not have to go through the same lessons again and again, making mistakes that he needn't have made if he had only received correction.

Look at Proverbs chapter 12 again, this time verse 1. It says, Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge, but he that hates reproof is brutish or stupid. The word brutish means stupid. So, the person who loves to be instructed is a wise person.

He loves knowledge. He's going to gain more knowledge, but the person who hates being reproofed, who doesn't like it when people arrest him in his course of action and say, wait a minute, that's the wrong way. You need to do it this way.

You need to change your attitude, brother. You need to go and do this differently, sister. This is not what the scripture says.

You are wrong. Whenever that kind of thing happens, the person who hates that happening to them is stupid, it says, brutish, because why? Because they are stupid. And he that hates reproof shall die.

So, the way of life is the way of receiving reproof. In James, again, chapter 1 and verse 21, it says that we should receive with meekness, and meekness means teachable-ness or teachable attitude, James 1.21, receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. Engrafted is a King James word.

In the modern English, it would be implanted. Remember, Jesus talked about the sower and the seed, and the seed was the word of God, and it had to be scattered on various kinds of ground, which represented different people's hearts. Well, James says we need a meekness about us, a teachable-ness about us.

We should receive with a teachable attitude the implanted word. Now, most of us are willing to receive an implanted word directly from God. That is, if an angel appeared, I've heard people say, if an angel appeared and told me to do so, I'd gladly get rid of my television.

Well, of course. In fact, they'd be afraid not to. And most people are quite willing to respond to a direct word from God.

If God spoke from heaven, or even if they were reading the Bible and a certain exhortation or command just leapt from the page and struck them like a ton of bricks and said, this is you, this is for you, change. Most people are willing to accept that kind of correction, because they say, wow, the Lord really spoke to me. But to receive an implanted word means that it doesn't matter who the gardener is, as long as the word is a word from God.

And a person with a teachable spirit who will grow is the person who will receive the word no matter who's planting it. And it is possible that God will use people to plant a word or an exhortation or a rebuke to me or to you. Whom we deem even inferior to ourselves in spirituality, consider how inferior in spirituality Balaam must have considered his ass to be.

And yet in 2nd Peter and chapter 2 and verse 16, it says that God rebuked the prophet speaking by an ass. You might want to look at that. Balaam was a prophet.

He could have said, who are you to instruct me? I'm a prophet. You're just a dumb ass. But in fact, he received rebuke slowly.

He wasn't quick to receive it. But in 2nd Peter 2, verses 15 and 16, it says, which have forsaken the right way and are gone astray following the way of Balaam, the son of Bozor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. He was going the wrong way.

He was going his way to curse the children of Israel, though God had warned him not to because he wanted to get money. But it says, but he was rebuked for his iniquity. The dumb ass speaking with a man's voice forbade the madness of the prophet.

Now, the man would have never described himself as mad. That means insane. Yet the scripture says that his course of action was insanity.

Now, he was very cool and calm. He wasn't acting like a madman or like an insane man. And yet the course that we see as being so justifiable and so reasonable often can be viewed as madness and insanity from a more objective point of view.

Many times we desire something so much that we can't see whether it's even a good choice or not. And in this case, God even used a donkey to bring reproof and correction. And fortunately for Balaam's life, because he would have been killed otherwise, an angel told him, he listened to the reproof of the donkey.

Though, as I said, he beat the donkey at first. He wasn't happy with the donkey. He didn't like reproof, but he did receive it.

And it saved his life. But note that God can use a donkey to bring rebuke. And he can even rebuke a prophet by such an unworthy spokesman, spokesperson or spokes thing, whatever.

So we have to realize that a teachable spirit must be willing to receive correction no matter who implants it. We with meekness must receive the implanted word. We receive it not because of the agent who carries it, but because of the word itself, the value of the word.

We need to be considering that though the person is speaking, we don't necessarily have a great deal of respect for. Yet God might have a seed of truth, a seed of his word in the things that they are saying. Some of you might recall, I've told the story before how as a teenager, I was rebellious, not as rebellious as some.

I never forsook the Lord entirely, but my parents and I had some major differences of opinion. And one of them had to do with hair length. And I used to have long hair when I was young, before I got it short like it is now.

But I had very long hair at one time. And my parents felt like that wasn't the right length

for a man's hair to be. I was about 16.

And I was convinced that I needed my hair to be long because I had a ministry to people who had long hair. In fact, there was a certain amount of validity to the reasoning that I had. And I believed that people with long hair would be more open to hearing the gospel from someone who had long hair.

I was a Christian. I was in the ministry. But my parents and I had a major difference of opinion about it, especially my father and I. And we had a few arguments about it.

And on one occasion, one afternoon, we had a heated argument and I was angry at what I considered to be the spiritual blindness of my parents on this matter. And I left the house in a heat. And I didn't know where to go, but I just decided to go for a walk to cool down.

And I was quite sure that my parents were way wrong about this matter, not considering that the Bible teaches that a child has to submit to his parents. And as I walked down the street, I went by a schoolyard where a bunch of preschool children were playing and they were quite in the distance and there was a fence between me and them. And I hardly noticed them.

And I certainly didn't expect them to notice me. I was just walking along the sidewalk as people would ordinarily do. And I certainly wasn't an unusual phenomenon, having long hair in those days.

A lot of people had long hair. So I certainly wouldn't expect to draw their attention on that count. But as I was walking by the schoolyard, some of the children in the distance happened to glance over and not only notice me, but take a special interest in me.

And one of the children started to say, look at the hippie, hippie, hippie, and and started to sort of just they'd like the sound of the word hippie or something. So they just started saying hippie, hippie. And I wasn't a hippie, of course, but I didn't mind being mistaken for one.

That was the idea. I wanted to be mistaken for one so that I could reach such people. But the interesting thing about it is these little children, I'm sure not in any way knowing what they were saying, because the word they used was not in the vocabulary of young children.

But one of the children hearing his companion saying hippie, hippie, said hippie, hippie, hippie, hippie, hippie. And I know I just know he didn't even know what a hypocrite is. He no doubt had heard the word that he was a Christian home.

And of course, the word hypocrisy or hypocrite sometimes comes up in Christian lingo and so forth. But it was or even in heathen lingo and talking about Christians. But the

point is, somewhere this little kid, probably four or five years old, had heard the word hypocrite and hearing the word hippie reminded him of the word hypocrite.

And he just started saying hypocrite, hypocrite, hypocrite, hypocrite. And, you know, it was the most unusual thing that could have happened. Certainly, I actually because I did have a right heart about it, I feel I mean, in a sense, I had a wrong heart in one sense, but I didn't really want to prove.

I just saw that as being a word from the Lord. You know, I just knew that this was a rebuke to me, that the way I was acting was not consistent with the testimony I wanted to be in, that I was being called a hypocrite by probably someone who knew about as much what they were saying as Balaam's ass knew what it was saying. But it's as though the Lord opened the mouth as he opened the mouth of Balaam's ass, he opened the mouth of his child to say something.

And through a very unlikely source, I recognized God was seeking to rebuke me and to bring correction. And if I had been a little less interested in doing the right thing, I could have written off the whole situation as just a ridiculous coincidence. But in fact, I just could discern that this is the Lord trying to speak to me.

And it's necessary for us to have a teachable spirit that looks for the word of the Lord in every situation that says maybe God does have something to say in this situation. The person speaking may not be a Christian, may not even be a Christian, you know, someone who's old enough to know even what they're talking about. And yet we have to recognize that God is constantly trying to get through to us.

And he'll sometimes use a very unlikely source just to get our attention. And if we fail to recognize it or even at least consider that this thing may be a word from the Lord, then we will rob ourselves of some growth that God intends for us and some change. So we need to have not only a spirit that is willing to receive correction, but is looking for it everywhere.

We need to have a hunger for change and a hunger for correction. In the book of Proverbs, it describes the wise man exactly in those terms. In Proverbs 24, before we look at chapter 24, let's look at Proverbs 23.

I do have a verse in 24 I want to read, but look at Proverbs 23, verse 12. It says, apply thine heart unto instruction and thine ears to the words of knowledge. That means that you need to actually make an effort to gain knowledge and instruction.

Apply your heart to it. Apply your ears to it. Your ears have to always be on the lookout for a word of instruction from the Lord.

And it might come from anywhere. You'd have to always be tuned in because it might come from someplace that you'd never expect a word from God to come from. But a

truly teachable heart is applying his heart to hear, to get instructed.

Lord, is there something you need to tell me? Is there something I need to know? I'm listening. I'm willing to hear it anywhere, even if it sounds absurd where it comes from. I'm willing to at least consider that that may be something from you and weigh it and test it.

And maybe it is or maybe it isn't. But I want to know anything that you have for me to know. Look at Proverbs chapter 18 and verse 15.

It says the heart of the wise, the word prudent there means wise, the heart of the wise gets knowledge and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. The ear of a wise man is always seeking knowledge, which of course comes through instruction or counsel or correction or rebuke or whatever that your ear is hungry for. It's seeking it.

It's not just there passively waiting in case some comes along and then willing to receive it. It is craving knowledge, craving correction. Because we know that we have a lot of correction that we need.

We know that there is a lot of changing needs to be done before we are in the image of Christ. We will not be satisfied until we awaken his likeness. Therefore, we crave every opportunity to learn more of how we might better fit into God's plans.

And we look for and crave instruction. Therefore, we do not, we do not balk or we do not put off instruction when it comes. In Proverbs 24, this is a very interesting illustration, I think, of how teachable a man can be.

Proverbs 24. And this is Solomon, who himself, of course, is said to be very wise. He's saying in verse 30, Proverbs 24, 30 and following.

I went by a field of the slothful man, a lazy man's field. And by the vineyard of the man lacking in understanding or void of understanding. And lo, it was all grown over with thorns and nettles had covered the face of it, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.

Then I saw and considered it well. I looked upon it and received instruction. And here's what he learned.

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travels and I want as an armed man. Now, what is he saying? Solomon's saying I was just the other day I was out walking and I went by a field that was all overgrown with weeds and nettles.

And there was a dilapidated wall there that used to be a retaining wall of some sort of protective wall. And it was all run down. And it was the kind of scene that the average

man might go by without giving it any special notice, without even thinking about it.

If I walk by fields like that probably every day. It seems like there's places like that. And yet his heart was so teachable and his ear was always seeking instruction.

He says, even from that everyday sort of a scene that he saw, his heart received instruction from it. It's like almost anything can offer instruction and correction and reproof if you're looking for it. He said, I saw this field, which, as I said, most people would just think nothing of.

But he says, as I considered it, I realized this is a slothful man's field. This field tells me that if a person is lazy, a little always seeking a little extra sleep, a little extra folding of the hands, meaning ceasing from work, that a man's poverty is going to overcome, is going to take over his life. Now, we're not here to talk about laziness tonight.

That's another main theme of the Book of Proverbs, exhortation not to be lazy. But the important thing here is that a truly teachable spirit will find instruction everywhere. Won't wait for it to come knocking.

He'll go out looking for it. Everything he sees, he'll consider. Is there something for me to learn about this? Something as ordinary as an overgrown field, as he considers it, he says, I get instruction from this.

This gives me some insight for living. And Solomon was like that. It says, I believe it's in First Chronicles.

It says that Solomon spent a lot of time considering the natural world, looking at the trees and the plants and animals and fish and birds and insects to see what he could learn from them. He said in another place, go to the ant, thou sluggard, notice you lazy person, go to the ant, consider her ways and be wise. And he points out how the ant is diligent, it works hard, it considers that there is a time coming of winter when he won't have as much food available, therefore he collects food in the summertime for the winter.

And he says, if you just watch the ant, you could receive instruction from that. You could just be wise. How teachable Solomon was and how wise.

And how a man who retains that spirit has potential for rapid change and growth because he's willing to consider that anything he sees or hears might have in it some word from God to help him change and to become more like what he wants to become. Just a couple of scriptures in closing. Again, from Proverbs, these scriptures basically tell the remorse and the fate of a person who has not been teachable, has not had a teachable attitude.

And by the way, when I say that we have to receive instruction from any source, one thing that we need to consider is that the most likely source that God is going to bring to us to bring instruction is the godly. It says in Psalm 1, of course, blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. And some counsel, as I said, will have to be rejected because it's wrong, but it at least should be taken in and digested, taken in and considered, mulled over, see if there's any truth in it.

And if there's not, reject it. Paul says, prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. Anything you hear, test it and whatever good is in it, receive that, reject the rest.

Now, God will use Christians mainly, but many times Christians see faults in others that they have themselves. This is very evident from many passages of Scripture. I believe Romans chapter 2 goes into this, how that the most judgmental Christians are often the ones who are doing the same things themselves.

And Jesus said, how can you seek to take a mote out of your brother's eye when you have a beam in your own eye? Meaning that, you know, a person has a small speck of defect in his eye, but you've got a huge quantity of the same defect. How can you seek to help your brother in that respect? But that instruction is for us in telling us to be careful about being judgmental. That is not for us to use as an excuse for not receiving correction.

When someone comes to me and says, you know, I think you drink too much coffee, and I happen to know they drink twice as much as I do, instead of considering that that might be a word of God to me, I can easily say, ah, get the mote out of your own eye, brother, don't try to pull the speck out of my eye until you've got your own acting shape, you know, and all. And, you know, using that as a cop-out, saying, you know, maybe my face is dirty, but yours is dirtier, so I don't have to listen to you. A teachable spirit doesn't make excuses like that.

A teachable spirit says, well, that person who's speaking may be a greater offender in this matter than I am, but I don't want to be an offender in it at all. Therefore, I'll receive the instruction and hope that the person who's speaking will also receive it eventually at some point. Now, reading of the remorse of one who does not have a teachable spirit in Proverbs 5, talks about a man who goes into the strange woman, which is Solomon's way of talking about prostitutes, and it says in verse 11 that after they've gone into the strange woman, after they've gone to the prostitute, it says they will mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed.

This could refer to venereal disease, or it might just refer to at the point of death, when your body is decaying and your soul is now in hell. And you will say, how have I hated instruction, and my heart despised or looked down on reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me. A person who has hated reproof eventually will live to regret that attitude.

In Proverbs 29, in verse 1, it says, he that being often reproofed, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. Proverbs 29, 1. Now what it's saying there is that there are people who get much reproof. The more hard-hearted they are, the more reproof God has to send.

But as they harden their neck, meaning they do not bow, they don't submit, they stiffen their neck and say, I'm not going to bow to that. I'm not going to submit to that. They stiffen their neck, and the more reproof they get, the more they stiffen it, and the more they are unteachable and stubborn, they are to be suddenly destroyed, it says, and that without remedy.

Now a teachable attitude has to extend to every area of our life, whether it's people giving us instruction of what they think we're doing wrong, or maybe what they think we're thinking wrong. And there may be times when people are giving instruction to us, and they don't even know they're talking to us, because a truly teachable spirit will be finding correction even in things that he overhears from other people. I can think of many times when I was not even involved in a conversation, when I was overhearing two other individuals and I received instruction.

One time in particular, again it was the long hair. Every once in a while my hair gets a little long again. I usually have in the past several years have been trying to keep it short, because I know now that some people are stumbled by it, but I don't pay much attention to it, and eventually it gets a little bit long again until I realize, uh-oh, time to cut it again, probably someone's going to be offended if I don't.

But last time I went to Australia, I was trying to decide whether I should cut my hair or not. It might seem like a silly thing for someone to have to puzzle over, but I wasn't sure. To me it was as much a major decision as whether I should wear a tie or not.

And when you're preaching, that's an important consideration. Some people won't listen if you don't wear a tie. Fortunately, I don't speak to that many people like that, so I don't need a tie.

But as far as the hair length, it's the same kind of consideration I was thinking about it. And I was in a restaurant, I was in Denny's actually, drinking some coffee, and I was asking the Lord to give me some guidance about it. And it happened that down the counter from me, about two seats, there were two older men talking.

And I'm not sure if they were talking about me or not. I caught their conversation after it was already in progress. I began to tune in.

And whoever it was, they were talking about long hairs. And my hair was a little bit long and it's a little bit curly and everything. And they were talking about someone who had a big, like a mop on their head.

And they were talking about how they hated that and all. And it was clear that they were offended by long hair. In fact, I wasn't quite sure, but they might be offended by mine.

In fact, I might have been the subject of their conversation. The guy who was the most offended was also somewhat offensive and was a bit verbal. The kind of guy who would say things openly in your hearing about things like that.

And I don't know whether he was talking about me or not, but I just figured that was the word I needed. The man wasn't talking to me, as far as I know. He appeared to be talking to the man sitting next to him, but overhearing it, again, I received instruction.

I realized that the Lord wanted me to cut my hair because there were still people around in our day and age who are offended by long hair. So I don't suppose that most of you need correction on the area of the length of your hair so much, but it's just any area that we need correction on, God can instruct us through any source, and it may even be through overhearing conversations with other people. No doubt every one of you have had the experience of overhearing two other people talking to each other, not to you, and whatever it was they said kind of struck you.

You got convicted by it or something. And you realize that that was, in their mind it was intended one way, but in God's mind it was intended as a word of correction to you. There are times, and there are types of people who will turn off any preacher or teacher who does not hold to their basic doctrinal position.

I know people who are so Arminian that they just won't listen to any Calvinist preach. And yet a person who has a teachable spirit will be willing to hear the other side, will always be willing to consider that if there's a weak point in their own position, they want to find out what it is. Because they don't want to be committed to a position just because that's what they want to be committed to.

A person who's teachable will want to be committed to the truth, and will want to be corrected if he's wrong, and will always be eager to listen to a person who might have scriptural arguments against what he himself believes. He will not be repelled by someone because he hears that they have another point of view on a doctrinal point. If they are presenting scriptural arguments, I always am eager to hear scriptural arguments against the points that I hold to.

There are many points of doctrine that are controversial on which I have, you know, a strong feeling for on one side, but I'm always eager to hear new arguments from the scripture for the opposite side, just in case I'm wrong. If I'm wrong, I want to know. I'm going to be held accountable.

I want to change if I need to be changed. And so, these are just so many examples of different ways in which a person who's got a teachable spirit can learn and can receive

instruction. But what we need to understand is that it is the wise man who is willing to admit that he's not so wise as to not need any more instruction.

It is the fool who despises reproof. He may be able to retain his ego intact without receiving correction, but he will not be able to make any kind of spiritual progress, and he will not be changed. And it's the wicked that says, because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.

The fear of the Lord will cause you to be open to change. If you really fear God, you will fear the possibility of not pleasing him and not learning and not changing, and therefore you will be teachable. And so, this is just an attitude I would like to instill in you for your whole life.

Now, at the beginning of a discipleship school, it's particularly important that you always be looking for the Lord to bring correction to your life. This is a time of changing in a school like this. It's a time of intensified learning and hopefully of adjusting and modifying your behavior to fit scriptural teaching and patterns.

And so, if I can cause you at the end of this school to leave here more teachable in general, more meek, more easy to be entreated, though you gain nothing more in terms of actual factual knowledge about the Bible, if you go with a true teachable spirit, seeking instruction from God in all places, then you will have received something that will be of immense value for your Christian growth in general. Well, let's close with that.