

“TRUE LOVING CORRECTIONS”  
Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 18:15-20  
September 5 & 6, 2020

I love this true account from the life of Charles Swindoll. He says, “Do you remember the last time you got a spanking? I remember the last time I got one. I had reached the ripe old and wise age of thirteen. That’s the age where you are amazed that your father has been able to make it as far in life, being so ignorant without your counsel. As a matter of fact, the spanking was on my thirteenth birthday. And in our home, since this fell on a Saturday, when you had a birthday you were sort of ‘king for a day.’ I remember lying around in the bed and on the sofa, barking orders here and there, demanding response.

“And so my father, from the flower bed outside, sensing the need for some correction, called me, ‘Charles.’ I said, ‘Yeah,’ which was mistake number one, because in our home you didn’t say ‘Yeah’; you said, ‘Yes sir.’ And then he called my name again and said, ‘Come out and help me weed the flower bed.’ And I said, ‘No,’ which was mistake number two. He graciously continued his pleading by saying, ‘Now don’t lie there and act like a three-year-old. Come out and help me weed this flower bed.’ I said, ‘Daddy, I’m not three, I’m thirteen.’ Now that’s the last thing I remember on that day, because with both hands and both feet he landed on my body. And he did not let go until I was very vigorously weeding the flower bed.

“I still remember it, even though it was years ago. As we worked together through most of that day, he said to me at a time that was well chosen, ‘Son, I would be less than a good dad if I did not correct you when you disobey.’”<sup>1</sup>

The reason I like this account is that I can relate to it so very much. I have experienced the discipline and correction from my parents even as a young person in my teens. I don’t quite know when my spankings stopped, but the discipline and correction continued until I left home. But it was then that God continued the discipline that my parents began. Sad to say, I am still being corrected for the things

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<sup>1</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, IL: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 166)

I do wrong in my life. My loving Father, God Almighty says the same thing, “I would be less than a good God if I don’t discipline.” It’s not that I want to walk away from God, or to purposefully disobey His commands, but the lures of this world can quickly lead each one of us away if we are not careful.

You see, God desires that we stay true to His Word, to His Will and to His Way. And when we get sidetracked, or way-laid, or backslide away from Him, His correction comes to us so that we know that He is a loving God who cares about our eternal life, as well as our life here on the earth. So He sends corrections to us so that we might get back onto the right road, following His path set for us.

We hear that kind of correction and guidance in Romans 13 today. In verses 8-14, the apostle Paul continues to challenge us to pursue God’s direction, keeping free from anything that might bar our way and mislead us. He challenges us to have no obligations to any other person except the obligation to love them (13:8). And in having no outstanding obligations to others means paying back any debt we owe, fulfilling all the promises we have given, doing all the chores we are assigned either at home or at work, or making those calls or sending the letters that we need to stay in touch with others. Whatever it is that might keep us from fulfilling our vows needs to be overcome so that we are debt free in all areas of our life.

And by doing this, Paul tells us, “*Whoever does this has obeyed the Law*” (13:8). That’s right, we obey the Law of God by being true to our word and faithful to our commitments and promises. We fulfill the law of God as we faithfully follow the commandments AND show love to one another. In fact by loving one another, we fulfill the whole Law of God as we demonstrate the love we have for Him first in our life and then as we share that love with those around us. But we have to love God **first** before we can love those around us. The Old Testament Shema lists the two most important laws to fulfill: “*To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength*” and “*to love your neighbor as you love yourself*” (Mark 12:30-31). In obeying these two laws, we cover all the others, because we treat others as we would want them to treat us. We are to love one another in the same way as we love God, demonstrating His love to those around us as we love as He first loved us.

Now, Paul did not make this as a request, but as a **demand** for all of us who follow the Lord Jesus to do in our lives. He says, “*You must do this...*” (13:11). So if we are true followers of Jesus, this is expected of us as servants of Jesus! It’s not an option! We can’t be a follower of Jesus Christ and then go on living like the rest of the world. In the world there is adultery, murder, theft, and covetousness all around us. That’s because we live in the darkness of a sinful world focused only upon satisfying our own delights and our own desires. But THAT’S NOT THE WAY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ARE TO LIVE! We cannot live according to the world’s ways and still claim to be followers of Jesus Christ! The two ways are diametrically opposed to each other, so we cannot live in both worlds. Either we live in the ways of the world or we live in the ways of God. No mixing and matching allowed here. It’s one way or the other.

So Paul tells us that we are to wake up from our sin-sleep and become aware of the destructiveness of the sinfulness that surrounds us. And he tells us, “...*stop doing the things that belong to the dark, and let us take up weapons for fighting in the light. Let us conduct ourselves properly, as people who live in the light of day – no orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy. But take up the weapons of the Lord Jesus Christ, and stop paying attention to your sinful nature and satisfying its desires*” (Romans 13:12-14).

Do you hear the correction that Paul is giving to us? He’s saying, “IF you are doing these things that belong to the darkness of the sinful world, STOP DOING THEM!” Why? Because that’s not what followers of Jesus Christ do! Followers of Jesus live in the light of Christ and live for Jesus in all they do as examples of the love of God for this world. We are to live in stark contrast to the ways of this world to let those around us see the difference that it makes. We can’t show the difference in God’s ways if we are living in the ways of the world. We are to separate ourselves from ALL of the things that this world presents as good, and strive to do what the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to do.

It is not easy, because the world doesn’t like the ways of Jesus, so it will do it’s very best to silence you or even destroy you so that your example will not conflict with the ways of the world. But

we are to rely upon the strength of the Lord in order to keep on following Him. Yet, the most dangerous thing for us to do is to claim to be a follower of Jesus, and then live in the ways of the world. And sadly there are many today who are doing just that. They claim to love Jesus, but then live their life completely contrary to any of His laws and commands. We are not to conform to the ways of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds through the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2).

So we have ways to correct each other so that those living outside of the ways of Christ Jesus are brought back into the ways of God. Jesus gave us instructions on how to bring true, loving corrections to our brothers and sisters in Christ so that they continue to follow the ways of the Lord and not fall into living into the ways of the world. And we see that in Matthew 18:15-20. Listen to how Jesus invites us to correct one another. (READ Matthew 18:15-20)

Now Jesus has given us His way in which we correct our brothers and sisters in Christ. This might work for correcting unbelievers, but it usually doesn't work because they have no regard for Jesus in the first place. So to try to correct a foolish man and it will only bring hatred to you (Proverbs 9:8). But correct a wise man and they will love you. So Matthew 18 is only for us **within the church** to bring correction to fellow believers, no matter who they might be.

Jesus first tells us that when a fellow Christian sins against us, we are to go to them and expose the wrong. Remember, this was before telephones, before the internet, and before social media. Jesus says that we are to go to that person, in person – face to face – and address the situation. But that's so hard! Yes it can be difficult. Yes, it can be uncomfortable, but Jesus tells us that it is vital that we go to that person and bring loving correction, in person, one on one. Remember it is a fellow believer and brother or sister in Christ Jesus that we are talking about, one of our own members in the family of God. We are to love them enough to show them the error of their ways, and if it was something that they did against you, you are the one to address it to them. What better way to address the struggle than for the two of you to sit down together and work out the struggle, to allow the other to see the pain and hurt that was caused, and to find reconciliation so that your friendship and your love may continue for each other.

Because this is so hard to do, and we don't want to do it. The easier thing for us to do today is to retaliate and blast the person through the social media venues – we go back to the ways of the world and we let anger and hatred rule our lives and we seek revenge. So you decide to lay out the whole thing on Facebook to all of your friends, or you put it on Snap Chat spilling out all the hurt this person caused, or you send a blog out to all your contacts on email devaluing and destroying the person that did you harm. That's so much easier! It doesn't cause you anything. You don't have to look the person in the eye and share with them the hurt they caused. But it's so much more destructive to do this, and SO MUCH LESS PRODUCTIVE! You've already bypassed the system given to us to solve the situation and instead you've sought to demolish the person's credibility or honor by telling the whole world about the struggle you have with this person. Do you think that will work? IT NEVER DOES! It only drives the division between you even deeper and causes an even greater hurt, which then begins the cycle of hatred and retaliation. This doesn't show love to your fellow believer. It only proves that YOU are not a real follower of Jesus because you have resorted to the ways of this world to settle your differences.

No, Jesus says get on your bike, or get in your car, or get on the bus or train or taxi cab, or walk over to their house, and go to that person, one on one, face to face, and then, right there in their presence, just the two of you, lovingly present the sin that they did against you. Then, if they listen to you and repent of the sin they did against you, then forgive them, **Forgive Them**, and renew the loving relationship you had with each other. Let the incident escape from your memory. You have won them back so that they continue on their journey in the presence of the Lord Jesus right along with you. You've reestablished your relationship and you can love each other and Jesus again.

But if that person refuses to listen to you, if they refuse to repent of the sin they caused, then Jesus says, “...*take one or two other persons with you, so that 'every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or more witnesses,' as the Scripture says*” (Matt. 18:16, Deut. 19:15).

Again, you don't send it out on social media about how bad this person was because they didn't listen to you. You simply leave the person, find two or more who will go with you to address the

situation with that person, and **you try again** to lovingly bring correction to them so that they can once more find themselves following the ways of Jesus. You follow the Law of the Lord to attempt to bring correction to that person who is a part of the family of God, just as you are. If they listen and confess their sin and repent, then forgiveness is given and the relationship begins again.

But if they still do not listen, even to the small group, you don't get in their face and make a big deal over it to force them into submission, you simply leave again, but you then take the issue to the church so that its authority might sway the person to change and repent. You don't go to a lawyer and begin legal proceedings against them. Remember, this is a fellow believer in Jesus Christ that we're talking about. They deserve the courtesy of the right process in order to bring loving correction to them.

So getting the church involved raises the level of the stakes, and involves more people in the situation. You start one on one, then a few to one, and then the church to one. Slowly you increase the number of people who become aware of the sin that has taken place, so that you give the person every chance to maintain integrity and respect. You lovingly provide several opportunities to bring correction to the person, and lift them up as a fellow believer because you care deeply about what this action will do in their life. It's not out of revenge, or in anger, or out of bitterness that you take these steps. You do these steps because you love the other one and want to have a good relationship with them again. If they will then listen to the correction of the church, then forgiveness is to be given and restitution and reconciliation begins.

But, in the event that the person still does not recognize the error of their ways according to the guidelines of the church, and based upon the Laws of God in the Bible, then the person is released from the church and treated as an unbeliever because they will not conform their ways to the ways of the Lord Jesus. They have refused to listen, and have hardened their hearts even against God.

Yet again, you don't make a big deal over the issue and spread it all over the place. It doesn't get into the church's newsletter, nor does it go onto the announcements before the worship service. It doesn't even get spoken about at the church Administrative Board. The person is just released from the

membership of the church and they are given back to the world in which they have chosen to live. Not out of anger, revenge, bitterness or spite, but out of love for that person.

You see, when one who has been a part of the church, learned of its ways, experienced its love and tender kindness, turns their back upon the very One who gave them the peace and hope that they found in their life, they have chosen the darkness of the world to be their delight. They have lost sight of the forgiveness and grace and mercy that Jesus provides to all who will follow Him. They forget the safety that comes when they trust in the Ways of God, and they seek the delights and pleasures of the world instead. Let them go! But don't include them into the life of the faithful followers of Jesus. They have no longer that mindset any more. So they are released back into the world.

I can guarantee that there will be anger from that person toward you and the others in the church. There will be ugly words spoken, unkind things done, and maybe even harassment given to the members of the church. You might receive nasty comments texted to you. You might become unfriended from the social media connections. You might even be smeared by them on their own media blogs and pages.

But Jesus doesn't want us to retaliate against them. You are to show love and respect and dignity despite what you are given. Remember, you are trying to show them the difference that following Jesus makes in the life of a believer, and if we respond or retaliate against them, then WE end up following the ways of the world rather than the ways of God. No, when the persons you have loved as a brother or sister in Christ seeks to get even, against the steps of Jesus to correct their wrongful actions or words, you are to love them all the more, and keep respecting them and treating them kindly.

But once they are outside of the church, no longer a member, will they always be in that condition? Will they never be able to rejoin the church and regain their place in the household of God? No! If a brother or sister in Christ finally come to their senses and find the truth in the correction you have sought to provide through the steps that Jesus has given to us, you, me, all of us, are to forgive that person and enable them once more to join with the body of believers so that they might continue to experience the mercy and grace of Jesus through us. This is not a permanent step, to oust the folks from

membership forever and ever, amen. No, we are to restore them and reach out to them and gently welcome them back into the body of Christ. For God does not delight in the destruction of any person. He does not rejoice when we walk away from Him and reject His Ways. No, there is great rejoicing in heaven when the prodigal returns, once more humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God. And for us to say “No, you cannot return” is as wrong as it was for the initial incident to have happened.

Sadly, what has happened within the life of the church is, that instead of confronting the sin in the lives of the membership, we begin to accommodate that sin in order to “protect the membership.” We are so focused on keeping a relationship with each other that we no longer bring this loving correction to those who walk away from the Laws and Commands of the Lord our God. We don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings, so we fail to address the issues of disobedience to the teachings of the Bible and we end up welcoming those who are in rejection of God’s Ways as if they were sincere followers of God’s Ways. So where do we stop? We rejoice in and welcome everyone and everything to the point that we become just as dark and evil as the rest of the world, and then our witness of truth, righteousness, and holiness departs from us, and God’s Holy Spirit becomes grieved with us. Then we are left to ourselves with no real hope for real life and forgiveness.

Jesus tells us that we are to be ready to forgive and to restore one another back into the presence of the Lord after the loving correction has taken place so that the integrity of the Gospel might remain true and holy. We are to confront sin and evil in all forms and diligently work hard to bring our brothers and sisters in Christ out of the lies and deceit and wickedness of the world back into the loving presence of the Lord our God. Loving correction is always hard and painful, but the end results are purity and righteousness and holiness.

Do not be afraid to correct one another, because discipline and correction are the greatest forms of love that we can share with each other. But in all of your correction, do it lovingly and gently and compassionately as you can so that the love and mercy and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ flows out from you, to touch the lives of others. Show true loving correction, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.