

HOW'S YOUR POSTURE

Brad Bach

Open:105 Satisfied With Thy Likeness

Close: 198 More Likeness To Thee

Our subject matter for this hour has to do with developing self-awareness, through receiving constructive criticism. To some this may sound like an unpleasant topic to discuss- “constructive criticism”. Some say, “oh there is too much of that already thank you”. Normally when the topic of criticism comes up, we think of scriptures like “removing the plank from thine own eye, before you try to remove the spec from thy brother’s eye”. Or – “judge not that ye be not judged”. And some tend to confuse the topic with an entirely different topic known as “busybodying”.

But let’s try looking at it from this angle. Constructive criticism, as a principle, is a beneficial component of our education during this time of the “permission of evil”. That is to say God has allowed evil to go on... it is permitted isn’t it? But the Lord wants to bless His creation now, even while they are going through the experience with sin, so He offers constructive criticism throughout the experience. It’s for our benefit you see, and by this education, in the end, God wants us to realize for ourselves what is the best remedy for sin. Further, we (the church) are in training to be judges, to be as parents so to speak to the world. And as earthly parents we have to exercise certain aspects of judgment and constructive criticism at times. So in some respects we can think of present experiences with constructive criticism as a good training ground as concerns our future mediatorial work.

As we go through our consideration on this topic you may find that you agree or quite possibly that you have a different opinion or view of the matter. I want you to feel free and comfortable to offer me your constructive views or criticisms to help me in rounding out my awareness on the topic. As we go on I think it will become clear why I believe this to be a proper and good request.

Let me take a little poll first:

How many feel that they are nearly perfect and have little to no room for making improvement? Seeing no hands go up I now feel re-assured that this is a good audience for this talk.

If I ever see a lot of hands go up I won't know whether to set down my bags or to run.

Let me start out with a little story of an experience I had about 15 years ago. It's an experience that held a good lesson and that lesson has stuck with me all this time.

Some people are blessed to have good posture. Me, I get tired sometimes and I don't stand up very straight. (May happen this weekend)

Now I had a man that worked for me and he used to tell me when we were out working, "stand up straight, you're slouching".

My initial response the first time he did this was, "I'm not slouching". That was Denial.

A split second later my thought was, "and who asked you anyway, mind your own business". Defensive.

But after a moment to pause and stop being defensive, (because he was telling me something that was true), I had to thank him for telling me. You see, I didn't even notice that I was slouching. And here's what's interesting. Everyone else did. But I didn't notice, because I wasn't seeing myself from their perspective, through their eyes. We don't see ourselves the way that others see us.

I was the only one that didn't know.

Now you might ask, why would this man care, that he should say something? Well, two reasons really. 1) I like to think it's because he didn't want me to look bad to others. He was actually looking out for my best interest. 2) Since we were working together there was an association with each other, and as such some amount of reflection upon each other. So he didn't want me to make "us" look bad.

Now we are not so much concerned with physical posture, but let's look at the same point that we are making in a spiritual sense.

How is my spiritual posture? Spiritually, how straight and tall are you and I standing? Are there areas in life that we are spiritually slouching, and while everybody else sees it, we don't? And how then are we to become aware?... And if we are slouching, (spiritually) are we reflecting a bad appearance on the fellowship, and on the truth, and on the Lord whose name we have taken?

Eph 6:13-14 (NIV) "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you

have done everything, to stand, and Stand firm..." Really gives me a mental picture. Good posture.

Now the question you have to ask yourself, (and this requires some real reflection). In life's affairs, would I rather that someone tell me of my poor posture, or would I rather that they just keep it to themselves? Do I really want to know of my condition? That is to say, how my behavior and my actions appear to others? You see it's not always pleasant to hear these bits of news about ourselves.

It's been said "honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a perfect stranger".

LET'S CONSIDER A LITTLE ACCOUNT IN SCRIPTURE THAT ILLUSTRATES THIS POINT.

2 SAM. 12:1-13.

12:1-9 "The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!

He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.

I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.'

(Then Nathan tells David more about God sparing his life but also his punishments)

13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

Over this matter God was greatly displeased. This was a great sin, but it did not remove God's love. God dearly loved David, and because of this love he sent Nathan to David. That's how God could bless him. To help David to see his posture in this matter, to see as others saw it.

It was in this spirit, that we read the following 2 statements:

Rev 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:

(NAS)Heb 12:5-6 "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him"

Now it's not our intention here to get into the distinctions between chastening and scourging. But when we look at the definitions behind the words reprove and rebuke in these verses, it is saying, "don't have little regard for; don't disesteem, be careful not to reject the tutorage, the education, and training that the Lord is providing". No... don't reject it, but rather treasure it as something of value, for your self-awareness in the way.

The Lord sent Nathan to rebuke David. Why?

As we have said, because of His deep love for David.

Now how do you suppose Nathan felt toward David? Do you think he wanted to sort of rub his nose in the dirt, to "put David in his place"?

No, I don't think so. Nathan was a prophet of the Lord. I have to think that Nathan was pained to carry out this commission. But, it had to be done. It was from the Lord and David had to be recovered, he had to be shown his failing.

Let's take another example.

Matt 16:21-23 "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan... thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

This must have blown Peter away. You know... don't you just feel for Peter sometimes? He was so true hearted and trying to do the right thing, and just sometimes runs into the wall at full speed. It was a hard rebuke, but it was what needed to be said at the time. Jesus knew better of where things stood in the work that was planned for him to do, and he had to really tell it to Peter like it was, whether it hurt or not. It was the wound of a faithful friend.

Job 5:17 "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:"

What we want to notice here is that in the two occasions just reviewed, with Nathan and David, and then with Jesus and Peter, was the way that the Lord chastened and corrected; by delivering His message through an individual. It was God's word, but it came via a human messenger.

I guess you could say that this is somewhat the crux of my message today... that we must be receptive to God's messages to us, regardless of who the messenger is... and that we must be able to look past the sting it may cause to our flesh. Remember "denial" and "defensive"? We must be careful not to disesteem, or reject the tutorage that the Lord is providing.

You know David could have responded much differently toward Nathan. He could have stormed, "how dare you, just who do you think you are talking to? I am the king. I could have your life for this insolence". Many heads have been lost to offended kings.

Or even Peter. Peter too, could have exhibited the response of hurt pride at Jesus connecting the concern he was trying to show to him, with the workings of Satan. Much responsibility lies with us, as to how we receive it when we are told of our poor posture.

Prov 27:6 "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."

Psa. 141:5 "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, my head shall not refuse it:"

R5692 " <"LET THE RIGHTEOUS SMITE">

"The class that are thus in fellowship with God, through prayer and through seeking to be obedient to His arrangements and laws, are so fully engaged that they are able to say, as in this Psalm, that they will take no offense if reproved by the righteous--rather the reproofs of such will be to them like an excellent oil (Psa.141:5), such as a guest received from his host in ancient times. The true Christians, the class who have the fellowship with God through prayer, have the qualities of heart which the Apostle describes as the

fruits of the Holy Spirit; namely, meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love. (Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Peter 1:5-8.) And because possessing these, they are **not easily offended**, but indeed are glad to have such experiences and lessons as the Lord's providences may direct to them—**especially if these come through the brethren**, and **particularly if the brethren who use these, administer their rebukes in a Christian manner**--in meekness, remembering themselves, lest they also be tempted.--Galatians 6:1. In such cases, **the reproof will be a blessing from the Lord--if given in that spirit and received in that spirit**. Neither their heads nor their hearts are broken by such Scriptural reproofs; and they themselves learn to administer admonitions to others in similar manner, so as not to injure, but to help."

You know, I have always really appreciated this thought "faithful are the wounds of a friend". It takes a true friend, to love and care enough for you, to be this direct, to lower the boom so to speak. To tell you if your Christian posture appears badly... It's much easier to simply offer a kiss and let the poor behavior go on unmentioned. This is a strange form to find it in, but being brave enough, having enough courage, to give constructive criticism can be a true test of love and friendship.

Let's look at several scriptural examples and see if we have a good scriptural foundation on this matter:

2 Tim 4:1-2 "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

This text in NIV translates the word "reprove"; "correct" and adds a couple very important ingredients – "with great patience and careful instruction".

It seem that this word "reprove" is a little more mild than the word "rebuke" in this verse and carries more closely with the thoughts of our talk today.

It comes from Str.#1651 and Thayer offers the following meanings:

b) by conviction to bring to the light, to expose

2) to call to account, to show one his fault,

The same word found in Matt.18:15 it is translated; if you have ought against a brother to "tell him his fault".

Another example of the wound of a friend:

Gal 2:11 “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.”

Paul brought his criticism right to Peter, face to face. Notice what Paul didn't do. He didn't go sit at a table with the Gentiles and talk to them about Peter's behavior and say, “can you believe this and He's supposed to be an apostle, a leader in the church!”

What was Peter to be blamed for?

Gal 2:12-13 “For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation”- hypocrisy- we're more familiar with it as hypocrisy.

Was Paul overstepping his bounds? Ya know, how did Paul know why Peter was eating with the Jews? I guess Paul, saw what he saw, and felt that it was pretty clear what was happening and it was affecting the thoughts and behavior of the others, namely, Barnabas. So what did Paul do?

Gal 2:14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

Paul goes on at length in the succeeding vss. to express his beliefs on the matter. But what we want to notice here is that Paul criticized Peter, and that before them all. Why? Because he wanted to be constructive to the walk of Peter and Barnabas and all that were present.

What about “rebuking not an elder”? Something we'll leave for your discussion.

1Thes 5:12 “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

1Thes 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. The word translated in vs.12 “admonish” is the same word translated “warn” in vs. 14. These are both from: Str.3560 to put in mind, or calling attention to, i.e. (by implication) to caution or reprove gently: a mild rebuke or warning.

1 Cor 4:14 “I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.”

Again “warn” from the same word and we notice that it is not out of harassment or desire to shame, but out of love, that Paul brings issues to their minds.

We’re trying to demonstrate that there are a great many scriptures dealing with this topic that we are terming “constructive criticism”.

II Th 3:11-15 “For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish (bring these matters to his attention, gently reprove) him as a brother.”

The word here translated “admonish” is our same word. The point I would like you to think about in this real life situation is how the person walking disorderly, being a busybody would have responded to this reproof. Denial and defensive... or would they have looked at it like “an excellent oil, that their head would not refuse”?

While we are here, this vs. mentions “busybodying” and as we said some confuse our topic with busybodying. Briefly, one difference between the busybody and the friend offering constructive criticism is that the friend is not on the lookout for minor, trivial things to point out. On the contrary the friend would for the most part be overlooking any faults under the mantle of love, but would put forth an admonition reluctantly, only after having spent a good deal of time in thought and prayer as to the importance and value of such an admonition. It would be done out of love and for their betterment.

Col 1:27-28 “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:”

Again, the purpose of giving a warning is not punitive, but rather it is offered with the hope of making ready the bride of Christ.

Col 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Doesn't Paul do an excellent job in this vs. of couching this concept of giving each other constructive criticism (cautioning or gently reproving) into such pleasant terms? And yet there it is... a well established scriptural principle.

Vines on: ADMONITION, ADMONISH in Col.3:16.

"The difference between 'admonish' and 'teach' seems to be that, whereas the former (admonish) has mainly in view the things that are wrong and call for warning, the latter has to do chiefly with the impartation of positive truth,"

Rom 15:13-14 "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." The ability to admonish is spoken of here as a crowning achievement. Having the strength of character to be able to give constructive criticism, and being able to receive it as well this shows true character growth.

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<RIGHTEOUS REPROOF AND FORGIVENESS OF WRONG>

<"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him>

<reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil,">--`Psa. 141:5`.

"IN THE SCRIPTURES the word righteous is used in a two-fold sense. In one sense, <absolute righteousness> is referred to, as when we read, "There is none righteous, no, not one." In the text under consideration the intimation is given that our Lord Jesus is the Righteous One who smites. In this sense, of course, the chastisements would come from our Lord; and the one chastised would receive them with appreciation, knowing that the Wisdom, Justice and Love of God are connected with such reproof.

But there is a secondary use of the word righteous, applying to mankind.

Various persons are spoken of in the Scriptures as being righteous, not because they were perfect, but because they were right-intentioned, right-willed, and manifested in their conduct the Spirit of God, the spirit of righteousness. In this use of the word righteous, the text seems to imply that all who are the Lord's people should be able to give reproof and correction in righteousness, in a manner that would be helpful to those corrected and for their good; in a way that would bring a measure of comfort and blessing and refreshment; in a manner that would be like excellent or fragrant oil, whose perfume would linger for hours. With this thought before our minds, there is

a valuable lesson here. First of all, we should be of those who receive the corrections as of the Lord; and who are glad to be set right if we are wrong in any manner; secondly, we should be of those who recognize that if reproof be proper to give, it should be of a kind that would not be injurious, but such as would be spiritual, uplifting and refreshing. In order to accomplish this end a reproof should be sympathetic. We should remember that all of the Lord's people are fallen according to the flesh, but are New Creatures in Christ; and, if they be New Creatures in Christ, they must have the mind of the Lord and desire to glorify Him. Any of the brethren giving a reproof from this point of view would recognize that the person reproofed had not bad intentions, and would explain as gently and kindly as possible what are the real facts. A reproof of this kind should not be given suddenly; and the person reproofing should judge of the punishment to be given and of the proper time, etc., as of the Lord. Thus should any one that is righteous do in administering reproof to another. It should be done only after careful consideration and prayer, and after having arrived at the conclusion that this is the best possible way to help the brother or the sister. If all reproof were given under such conditions we may readily suppose that it would be much more helpful than is the usual reproof.”

This is wonderful advice from Br. Russell. In order that we might realize the greatest amount of character growth as Christians, one of our development goals should be the ability to effectively offer constructive criticism to others, a very gentle art indeed, and to be prepared to receive it well ourselves, and even to desire it, when the same is being offered to us.

As we stated earlier, this is done with cautious reluctance. It's not that we're looking for things to point out. On the contrary love should really be overlooking the minor faults of the flesh. This kind of interaction is usually with someone you know well and have spent time with, and you do it out of love and care for their good, as it was with Nathan with David. Someone once said “the best mirror is an old friend”. When you look to an old friend they can reflect back much about you, if you are receptive.

We notice also his point of not being done suddenly, but after prayerful consideration and thought. A suggestion: If there is a matter we feel we want to address to someone, but aren't just quite sure of how to approach it, it is good to be patient, to just wait on it. It may be that the Lord has not directed your mind as to how to approach the matter because it's not timely. Maybe you will find out more information to do with the matter, or maybe the one you want to approach is not ready for it at the time... or possibly because you are not ready to present it to them in the most appropriate, helpful way.

Don't procrastinate out of discomfort in dealing with it, but let the Lord lead and direct your mind to the right point. It will happen.

In Psa.19 David is writing about the wisdom and excellence of the physical universe, and how the natural expanse speaks with its own language about the wonders of our creator. Then he turns his thoughts to the words of God and how precious they are, and he observes:

Ps 19:10-11 "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

AND THEN OUR VS. IN SPECIFIC

Ps 19:12 "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

You know, this is an interesting statement. How can one be cleansed from a fault, if it is a secret? If it is concealed from ones own view? First it's clearly not a secret to God. And as we have said, there's a very good chance that it's not really a secret to others around you. First then, in order to be cleansed, the owner of the fault has to be let in on the secret.

"understand" 995 biyn (bene); to separate mentally (or distinguish), discern, perceive, view, to have insight, or understanding.

So the question really becomes then, how do we gain this view this insight? How do we discover our faults, that are hidden to us? Well the obvious answer is given in what we just read. We discern it through study of His word. This is where we should find the vast preponderance of our information. But individually, we don't get it all.

Did you ever hear the saying "the person doing something wrong is often the last one to know".

So how does this work, this revealing of secret faults, through Gods word?
Five Possibilities;

- 1.) It could be by reading scripture and it just suddenly dawns on you. A realization as you read the account you just see it, and it speaks to your heart.
- 2.) Another way is by prayer and meditation. That is taking the time to really get quiet. Really letting go of all the cares of life, and entering into a meditative, observant physical and mental state. In this relaxed and quiet state, prayer can be deep and the mind can reveal much.
- 3.) It could be by reading in the volumes or reprints that are guiding you through the scriptures. There is great pastoral guidance in their content.
- 4.) It could be through a discourse, a testimony or class study.

There are many ways, but a fifth way that the Lord may be pleased to use is by an admonition, a reproof, from a brother or a sister in Christ. This of course may be to our flesh, the most sensitive source from which to receive this type of information. But, it is a very valuable source, and one that should not be esteemed lightly. It can be of great value. It again raises the question, how badly do you really want to know how your posture is? Now maybe there is no problem to be disclosed, but when I asked for the hands of all that are perfect, in need of no improvement, none went up.

The fallen nature would have us be reactionary. “I’m not slouching!--Who asked you anyway!?” Our demeanor should speak to others telling them, “I’m open, you can talk to me, you can approach me.” If we are not approachable and open we may be offending brethren at every turn, but all are too afraid to tell us what we really need to hear.

The proper reaction to receiving constructive criticism is, “let me listen to your thoughts. Let me consider what you are saying. You must feel this is pretty important for me to know, maybe there is something I’m not aware of that needs correcting.”

Prov 17:10 “A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.” We want to be of those with understanding.

You know, approaching somebody with a constructive criticism is a very difficult thing to do. At least it should be. And it should be done as we’ve said, in love. It should be done after careful consideration. It should be done infrequently.

As humans, we seem to be more apt to criticize than to praise. And that’s a problem. And the criticism may not always be constructive. And that’s also a problem. So there is an important balance. We should be very careful to add the dimension of praise.

It’s like parents with children. When they’re doing good- well they’re just doing what they should be doing... right? But when they’re doing bad then you gotta kinda jump on ‘em. And yet it can be easy to forget to tell them when they’re doing good. And this applies to the fellowship as well. We need to do a little accounting. Do we remember to speak words of appreciation and praise, or do we just open our mouth to criticize?

Now what’s not helpful is fault finding. That is being picky over trivial matters. Being ready to jump at any opportunity to point out a mis-step or a slight error. Sometimes something is done wrong, and it has to be pointed

out, but there are different ways of doing that. There is the “GOTTHCA” method, and there is the “let me lend a little gentle hand of assistance method”. The latter is the one we want to adopt.

As with most everything we need to be balanced, and the balance for the various scriptures on admonition or reproof that we have already reviewed might be ones like:

1 Pet 4:8 "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." This covers all the little stuff. The things that are not really worth mentioning.

This is the thought we get from Jesus about straining at a gnat. In Matt.23:24 Jesus denounces the Pharisees for being such sticklers for little things, the less weighty, less important matters. They were really caught up in the formality while overlooking more important character issues.

There is another term for this. It's called being a “nitpicker”. This term comes from old time weaving, where a weaver is combing out his material. Nits are the eggs of little insects that attach themselves to flax or cotton or whatever material is being worked, and as the weaver is combing out his material he looks for these little unpleasant eggshells to remove them. But the point is that he really has to look for them. They are so small that he has to search them out. We don't want to be looking that hard.

Prov 17:9 "He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends."

Love covers all the minor issues, personality traits, personal preference matters, even principle infractions with the hope that it may not be repeated. But in this Proverb it adds another ingredient. Scripturally, a vitally important ingredient, that of repeating a matter. You know, the old issue about speaking your mind, when the person you are speaking about is not present. The proverb says this separates friends, and how much dearer can friends be, than Brethren in Christ?

R:5884 "The Principles of Love and Justice Contrasted" we quote: "These two basic principles must cover all of our conduct in life. Justice tells us that we must cease to do evil--that we must not speak a word, nor do an act that would work injustice to another, nor even by look imply such injustice; that we must be as careful of his or her interests and welfare as of our own. Justice must govern all of our dealings with others."

"There is nothing much more unbecoming and unlovely in the children of God than a disposition to petty criticism of the individual affairs of one another. It is a business, too small for the saints, and manifests a sad lack of

that brotherly love which should be especially manifest in broad and generous consideration, which would rather cover a multitude of sins than to magnify one."

R:4501 "those who are of a contentious disposition, fault-finding, irascible, the dissatisfied, are continually making trouble for themselves as well as for others, and are cultivating a disposition which neither God nor anybody in harmony with God, could approve-- a disposition which will not be rewarded by eternal life, but bring its possessor into more or less trouble continually, and spell failure for him in the end."

Br. Russell says, "Not only are some of the brethren in darkness, in ignorance and superstition, and need our assistance out into the glorious light of Present Truth, but, additionally, some of them have weaknesses and blemishes, and need our consoling sympathy and strengthening encouragements, or loving rebukes. To the extent of our faithfulness in these matters, we are self-sacrificers, pleasing and acceptable to our heavenly Father and our Redeemer.

So in Conclusion:

What do we want to say?

We are all here to learn. And we are all here to learn how to teach. This life, for the church, is our training ground, in advance of the rest of humanity. We want to be good students in the school of Christ. And we want to use all of the tools that He has supplied for us to work with.

What we don't want to do, is miss opportunities to develop our character because we're protective of our flesh.

Be open, be inviting to admonitions, and be a student of people so that when the time comes, you can be capable of giving admonitions and receiving them well too.

Pray the Lord be pleased with these words, and forgive us and instruct us in any words spoken amiss.

OPEN COMMUNICATION

WE DO NOT WANT TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD. WE ARE NOT SUGGESTING A FAULT FINDING, CONTENTIOUS, OR BUSYBODYING DISPOSITION. FAR FROM IT.

"Not only are some of the brethren in darkness, in ignorance and superstition, and need our assistance out into the glorious light of Present Truth, but, additionally, some of them have weaknesses and blemishes, and need our consoling sympathy and strengthening encouragements, or loving rebukes. To the extent of our faithfulness in these matters, we are self-sacrificers, pleasing and acceptable to our heavenly Father and our Redeemer.

The Apostle explained to Timothy, an Elder, that he should in meekness reprove those who opposed themselves, and not render evil for evil, nor railing for railing, nor accusation for accusation, but contrariwise by meekness and gentleness, patience and love, should show the brethren the more excellent way, and should develop ourselves in Christlikeness of character."

"For, as the Apostle points out, God has predestinated that all who will be of the elect Church, of the Bride class, must be copies of his Son in character, in heart."

"Alas! that amongst those who are in the Truth these contentious persons are to be found in considerable numbers, doing a destructive work, an injurious work, instead of a helpful work. Surely they must know that they are injuring and blemishing their characters and making themselves less and less fit for the Kingdom, or for eternal life on any plane. Surely they must know that they are doing a destructive work in the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Surely they must know that they are sowing seeds of discord, and planting roots of bitterness, which are sure to bring forth an evil fruitage, hurtful to many."

FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF OUR LORD. WHEN HE SAW AN ISSUE THAT NEEDED TO BE BROUGHT OUT, HE DID SO. DID HE DO BECAUSE HE WAS PICKY OR PETTY OR QUARELSOME? NO,

HE DID IT BECAUSE HE HAD THE HEARERS BEST INTEREST AT HEART. HE DID IT IN LOVE.

With respect to criticizing elders.

"The Apostle James admonishes the brethren respecting the peculiar dangers which beset those ambitious to be teachers, saying, "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we (teachers) shall receive the greater condemnation (judgment, or trial). For in manythings we offend all"--we are all imperfect."--`James 3:1`.

"St. Paul wrote, "He that seeketh the office of a bishop (of a shepherd, of an overseer) seeketh a good service," and so we should recognize that whoever out of a pure heart seeks to serve the Lord's cause as an under-shepherd of the sheep, and as a co-laborer with the Redeemer, is engaging in a most noble service. If he approach this service from this standpoint of earnest desire to serve the flock, an earnest desire to be in full accord with the Great Shepherd, he should not be ashamed to rejoice that he has to this extent the Spirit of the Lord. But if he find in himself, in either great or small measure, a spirit of ambition, a spirit of pride, a spirit of boastfulness, the desire to lord it over the brethren of the household of faith, then let him fear. With trembling heart either let him resign the service, or at the throne of grace rid himself, purge himself, of the evil ambitions of his heart, and be filled with the Spirit of the Master."

"unconsciously the Lord's dear people who make no pretensions themselves in the direction of teaching are often responsible to a considerable degree for the deflection of those whom they recognize as teachers, and whom unconsciously they lead into temptation. The besetments of teachers are, (1) pride, and (2) arrogance.

(1) Encouraged by the laudatory words of the brethren, the tendency is for them to feel that they are somebodies, and to attribute the success of their efforts to natural ability, talent, etc., rather than to the wonderful power and beauty of the Truth."

"Beginners should not be hastily pushed forward, as St. Paul points out, and when any Elder-brother advanced in the Truth begins to show signs of headiness, and of disregard for the voice of the Church, and a disinclination to submit to it all the questions pertaining to its affairs, the Church should curb such arrogance promptly and thoroughly by declining the further election of such brother, and by insisting upon the rights of the Church. The insistence should not, however, be in the nature of wrangling or contention,

but in a kindly, brotherly, noble manner the rights of the Church should be set forth, and the vote of the Church on the subject should be asked."
"where a faithful servant is found, all the loyal brethren should seek in every way to be helpful and to co-operate with such. Instead of being fault-finding and inclined to criticize this, and that, and the other word, and manner, and tone, and look, they should be so full of love and sympathy, and so appreciative of his loving zeal, devotion and humility, as to let trivial and unimportant matters pass unmentioned, and indeed unnoticed. Realizing the responsibility of his office they have some reason to doubt if they would be able to fill his place with as good or as great ability and humility."
What about 1Tim.5:1, Rebuke not an elder. Also 5:19-20.

R:5941 " It is not strange that the Adversary was able to stir up some little sectarianism even in the primitive Church, as St. Paul remarked, criticizing it: Some said that they were of Paul; some, that they were of Apollos; some, that they were of Peter. (1 Corinthians 1:11-13; 3:1-7.) But all such partisan sentiment the Apostle rebuked, reminding them that not one of these teachers had died for them; and that they should all be Christians, taking none other name than that of the Master." And let us not forget that "Saul of Tarsus, he had showed himself to be very narrow and bigoted in his warfare against Christ and His followers. But after his eyes of understanding had been opened," demonstrating that we ALL need to learn, and as we have example here the learning can often come at the hand of our brethren. If we can hear.

1 Cor 6:1-5 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?

R5967 "Thus in God's providence, He overruled for their good a mistake made by these followers of the Master, by using a faithful and courageous Apostle, who gave the proper rebuke in a proper, loving manner."

<CRUSHING REPROOF IS UNRIGHTEOUS>

The expression, it "shall not break my head," would mean that a reproof should not be disastrous, not be crushing, but it should be an anointing or blessing. To crush the head would be to kill the person. The righteous are not in the world for the purpose of doing injury to others or of harming them, but for doing good in the world. Those who injure others are to that extent unrighteous. Those who use their criticism and reproof, etc., so as to exercise a crushing effect upon the reproved are not righteous. Such should learn how to properly administer criticism. They should learn that the Apostle's statement, "reprove," "rebuke," etc., was not made to all of God's people, but to Timothy, who was an Elder. And only those should be chosen as Elders who are men of moderation, men of development, men who have learned to control their own lives and their own tongues, so that they would not crush, but that their rebuke would be helpful and intended to draw the person nearer to the Lord, and to be encouraging and helpful generally." " In `2 Tim. 4:2` the Apostle, as a minister of the grace of God, explains that the declaration of the Gospel may include three features: (1) reproof; (2) rebuke; (3)

exhortation. But it is safe to caution all of the Lord's people against too liberal use of the first two features. In order to reprove properly, the heart should be very full of love and sympathy; else the reproofs and rebukes might be sharp and possibly do more harm than good. Even with the heart full of love, it requires a head that is exceedingly well balanced to be able to make use of reproofs and rebukes to good advantage to those who really need them. And herein God's people are to be "wise as serpents, harmless as doves." Exhortation is the form of service which quite evidently can best be used by the majority of the Lord's people. And even this form, as well as the other efforts, should be characterized by patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness."

R5417 " <PROPER AND IMPROPER OCCASIONS FOR ANGER>

As we come to see that the whole race of Adam is fallen--some more, some less--we develop a broad sympathy for mankind. We grow compassionate. We desire

to lift them up out of their degradation. We would like to help them as much as opportunity affords. Hence we are far from wishing to render evil for evil. We

wish to be peacemakers as far as possible. Therefore, unless it would be injustice to <refrain> from speaking sharply, we should be careful that our words are kind and loving. However, even though our words might not be angry, there are times when sharp utterances might be helpful, but even these should be tempered with love; tempered with the spirit of the Master."

Ed Bilecki " Criticism. We see that too much criticism makes people say 'here then you do it', they are discouraged". "Then we have an engineer, working on a big project, and he sends people to the site to spy as it were, to hear what the criticisms of other engineers are saying, so that he could learn from their comments".

Couple of examples:

It could be a parent that needs a little constructive criticism. Did you ever try to offer a parent some observations about their little angel?

This is especially difficult if the one doing the offering has no children of their own.

Now from my point of view, I have always welcomed such input from friends. Yes... even people that have no kids. Sometimes they can give a very refreshing perspective. Parents... try to be open and approachable. Listen. Evaluate the information. You don't have to accept it as correct. Maybe its just another persons view. But... don't get immediately defensive. Give it hearing. It may be very well placed advice.

Again:

Husbands and wives. Bad posture may show up in how husbands talk to their wives. Harsh, disrespectful, condescending tone. As a Christian and a husband, if you were viewed this way by others, wouldn't you want to be informed? Wouldn't you want to know if this was a fault that was a secret to you? This one I know personally. Now one brother when I first came into the truth pointed this behavior out to me. And sure enough, I thought, "what are you kidding, I don't do that". But apparently I did, at least to some degree. And this brother thought it was noticeable enough from his perspective to say something to me. And that's good.

Another area I've noticed is that we as a group are a bit too quick to talk about "nominal" Christians. That oh they do charitable works and build hospitals and run food banks but their really just nominal. Now this could be a whole discussion, but the point I wish to make here is that for those, visiting or outside of our circle of fellowship it could appear as very poor Christian posture and cast a bad light on the truth that we would hope to share. Scripture tell us "give honor to whom honor is due". If you hear someone repeatedly saying this type of thing, perhaps it's bad posture and they should be informed.

Another area that may benefit from a little constructive criticism is if one dominates a meeting and is unaware of their impact. It's not that you don't want them to participate it's simply that they may need to see how others view it when they get a little carried away.

How about a word to those that come into the meeting late. Not once in a while, but every week. I suppose that it is possible that they may not realize that it is disruptive to the meeting. But again, mentioning it is not intended to offend but to be constructive, to obtain a better result.

Your loveliness is fading.

Now what do you need to have good posture? Well, exercise helps. If you strengthen and tone your muscles it will naturally cause straighter posture. Focus, concentration is also an element. You have to actually think about how you are standing. But... even with these ingredients which would correspond to study in the word and self examination, we can still sometimes need a little reminder from a friend.