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1000 Words

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A Meditation on

PROVERBS 1:23

by

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Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

"I'm sixteen now and I'm gonna do what I want. My parents try to tell me to do things but I just ignore them. There isn't anything they can do about it: I'm too old to be spanked and I just go out anyway when they try to ground me. They try to scare me by telling me all the trouble I might get into if I don't listen to them but I'm big enough to take care of myself. I don't need them!"

The girl who spoke those words was kicked out of high school, kicked out of the house by her parents, married, divorced, and in trouble with the law, all within a year after she spoke them.

Reproof is not pleasant. Being told that we have done wrong almost automatically causes us to become rebelliously defensive. We deny. We rationalize. We try to justify our actions. The Hebrew towkachath, which is figuratively translated as "reproof" in this verse, literally means "chastisement" and also figuratively translates as correction or refutation in some locations. "Chastisement" is really just a formal way of saying "a spanking" and those of us who can remember being spanked as children can also remember our frantic attempts to "talk our way out of it" even when we knew we fully deserved what we were about to get.

Many of us can also remember the time we spent struggling against the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin before we accepted His assessment and turned to Jesus for salvation. Much like the rebellious teenager mentioned above, we refused to accept the reproof, we refused to admit that we were sinners and needed salvation. We rebelled against God's reproof and chastisement because it was painful. To accept the reproof would be to suffer the stinging knowledge that we were unworthy and unacceptable. So instead we denied it; we tried to rationalize and justify; we tried to talk our way out of the need for salvation.

But God's reproof is much like a spanking: as much as it stings, as much as we hate it, as much as we kick and struggle and try to get away from it while we are getting it, afterwards the sting quickly dissipates and we are ushered into a time of love, peace, and comfort. The Hebrew shuwb literally means to "turn back" or "turn away". God is telling us that if, instead of rebelling against his reproof, we turn away from our wrongdoing and turn back to him when he reproves us and calls our attention to our sin, then He will bless us and comfort us in a fashion analogous to the way our earthly fathers hugged and comforted us and dried our tears after they had finished spanking us.

God says that if we turn back to him when he reproves us, he will pour out his spirit upon us. The Hebrew naba' literally means to "gush" forth. But, we know that we became indwelt by the Holy Spirit when we accepted Christ as our saviour and that the condition is permanent: the Spirit never leaves us. So, what does God mean when he says he will pour out his spirit unto us if we turn at his reproof? For those who are not christians and who turn at his reproof and accept Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell them is the immediate result. But, does this verse also have an application for christians

who turn back when God reproves them for some wrongdoing? Yes it does!

Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit is one thing. But the pouring out of the spirit brings to mind the analogy of the pouring out of the oil that was used for the anointing of priests, kings, and prophets in the old testament. For us, as christians, the indwelling and anointing of the Holy Spirit are actually two different things:

"Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (II Corinthians 1:21,22).

Note the word "also". The indwelling of the Spirit is our "earnest"; it is the confirmation in our hearts that we belong to Christ. The anointing of the Spirit, on the other hand, is the act by which we are set apart and consecrated to the service of God:

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.... But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (I John 2:20,27).

It is true that we are both indwelt and anointed by the Holy Spirit at the very moment that we accept Christ. But, while the indwelling of the Spirit never changes, the effect of the anointing is dependent upon our behavior. The anointing of the Spirit is the gift whereby the Spirit leads us to a clear understanding of God's Word. But, he cannot so lead unless we are willing to follow.

It is possible to accept Christ and thereafter spend very little time with the Bible. If we never examine God's Word, the Holy Spirit cannot lead us into an understanding of it.

Proverbs 1:23 is part of "Wisdom's" passionate appeal in Proverbs 1:20-33. This passage is the first of many in Proverbs where wisdom is personified. The Hebrew for wisdom in Proverbs 1:20 is hokmot which is a Hebrew plural expressing

intensity and fullness and, like the plural Elohim (God), it uses a singular verb. This whole passage is directed to the man in the street and is designed for instruction in daily living; it is not directed to any elite group for the pursuit of scholarship or other esoteric reasons. It is meant for each and every one of us. The passage ends with a promise:

"But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." (Proverbs 1:33).

Dearly beloved, let us reach out and take hold of this promise in this day wherein we are beset on all sides by evil; in which events make it difficult to avoid constant gnawing fears of what horrible disasters the next day may bring.

When we have stepped aside from God's path through the cares of the flesh or the tempting of Satan, and feel the sting of God's chastisement, let us not rebelliously struggle against it but rather joyfully acknowledge that God loves us and chastens us as children rather than punishing us as enemies. Let us turn away from our sin and turn back to God so that he can "forgive us our sins, and... cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9). And, let us remember that we do not need to allow the cares of this world to overcome us:

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (I John 5:4,5).

END