

AN ORNAMENT OF GOLD

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In Proverbs 25:12, God describes something that is very beautiful to him and which should also be beautiful to us as His children. God compares the beauty of an earring or ornament of gold to a wise reprove on an obedient ear. Notice the two components of this beautiful picture: 1) a wise reprove, and 2) an obedient ear. Having a wise reprove acting upon a *disobedient* ear is not a beautiful thing. God says such a situation is contrary to the way of understanding (Prov 9:6-8). By the same token, an *unwise* reprove, no matter the ear, is not called a beautiful thing. Let us consider God's words pertaining to both of these components, so that we might be beautiful and pleasing in his sight.

God's commandment

God uses several words, such as chastisement, chastening, admonition, rebuke, reproof, correction, instruction, and exhortation to describe what every one of us needs. First of all, it is important to consider that giving reproof is a commandment of God. There are specific circumstances that require Christians to rebuke their erring brethren (Tit 3:10; 2 Thes 3:15; Luke 17:3). But God has also commanded Christians to admonish each other in a general way by singing (Col 3:16), and preaching (2 Tim 4:2), and even as a daily practice (Heb 3:12-13).

Giving and receiving reproof

It is necessary both to give and receive reproof. One of the major purposes of the Proverbs is to teach us to receive instruction (Prov 1:1-3). Without receiving reproof, we are brutish (Prov 12:1), spiritually poor (Prov 13:8,18), foolish (Prov 15:5; 23:9), and bound for spiritual destruction and death (Prov 5:23, 15:10; 29:1).

Refusing to hear will make even our prayer an abomination to God (Prov 28:9). Receiving reproof is the road of understanding (Prov 9:6-9; 15:31-32; 19:25), and the road of life (Prov 10:17). "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" was the second greatest of all the Old Testament commandments (Matt 12:28-31). It was one of the

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two commandments upon which hung all of the law and prophets (Matt 22:36-40). Rebuking one's neighbor was included as part of loving him. *Not* rebuking him was the same as hating him (Lev 19:17-18)! The second greatest commandment, which includes giving rebukes, is also part of the New Testament (Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14). Furthermore, God is love (1 John 4:8). Part of God's love is rebuking. God chastens whom he loves (Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11). Christ came to earth and loved with the Father's love (John 15:9). This same love included rebuking and chastening (Rev 3:19). We have been commanded to love as Christ loved (John 15:12; 13:34; 1 John 3:23). Obviously this includes giving rebukes. "Open rebuke is better than secret love" (Prov 27:5). Not giving reproof is not only not loving, it is hateful (Lev 19:17).

The purpose of correction

Reproof has a purpose. Paul did *all things* to edify the brethren (2 Cor 12:19) and we are commanded to follow Paul as he followed Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Therefore reproof should be done to edify. Reproof delivers us from sin (Lev 19:17; Jer 30:11-17; Psa 94:12-13; Heb 3:13), while opening to us the gates of righteousness (Psa 118:18-19). Reproof also makes us wise (Prov 19:20). Being filled with all wisdom will cause us to "walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10). Ultimately, this will lead to our being presented "*perfect in Christ Jesus*" (Col 1:28). God's very purpose for man's existence is for us to be complete like Christ (Luke 6:40; Rom 8:28-29). In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we are taught that "all scripture" is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness. The purpose for the reproof and correction is "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Everything spiritual will have perfection (Christ-likeness) as its ultimate aim.