

Accepting Criticism

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[0:00] Well, this morning we're going to look at our last lesson in our series on peacemaking. I think it's been good for us to go through this whole peacemaking series again.

Ephesians 4.3 says, Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. That word keep means to protect, to guard.

We are to guard diligently the unity that we have in the Spirit, in the bond of peace. We're to keep it diligently. And so, Lord willing, this series will help us to do that.

We thank God so often for the peace that we have here. And it's not something that we want to take for granted. And one way that we can be sure to continue to enjoy it and continue to be thankful for it is if we keep it and guard it.

And so, hopefully this series will help us do that. Now, for our last lesson, I want to talk about an area that we haven't talked about yet, that we didn't see from the video series.

[1:05] And we've seen, we've thought about, how do you go to someone who needs correction, who you have an issue with, you have a problem with of some kind?

How do you go to them? You go humbly. You go as a sinner to a sinner. You get the log out of your eye first.

You go graciously. You're holding forth the grace of our Lord Jesus, even as you confront them, as you deal with them. Remember the example that he gave, Ken Sandy gave, of going to his son, and how his initial reaction was to go harshly.

But, as he thought about it, and as it came up at the time to see him, he said he went breathing grace, and as he breathed grace out to his son, that changed the dynamic of that confrontation, of that meeting.

And it changed it from something confrontational or aggressive to standing alongside and helping. And parents, that is something that we, I think we all need help with and continual reminder of.

[2:19] It's so easy for us to go with a hammer instead of a helping hand, especially to our children. And so going and talking, it's something that we spend a lot of time on, but there is another side of that meeting.

There's another issue, as we have, as we are thinking about confrontation. And it's actually the harder side for most of us. Maybe not for all of us, but for most of us.

And so today we're going to talk about how to handle correction. How to handle criticism. And so we're not talking about the one who's going.

We're talking about the one who is receiving someone, who's now talking to you about a problem that they have with you or an issue in your life. Now, I want you to know right from the outset that this lesson is taken from an article by Dr. Alfred Poirier.

It's entitled, The Cross and Criticism. He's a former chairman of Peacemaker Ministries. And this article that I'm taking this lesson from, to a great degree, originally appeared in the Journal of Biblical Counseling.

[3:35] And if at the end of this lesson you want to read that article for yourself, please come and see me and I can give you the link or I can even print it out for you and give it to you.

And so, as we begin, I have a survey question for you. I want you to raise your hand. Raise your hand if you like receiving criticism.

Don't be afraid. Anyone? Lou. Wow. Lou, you are an older saint in the Lord and you have progressed farther than most of us.

Yes. I'm with most of you. Receiving criticism is hard. I would much rather receive praise.

Wouldn't you? I'd much rather be commended than corrected. I would rather judge than be judged.

[4:42] So receiving criticism, receiving correction, is hard. It's dangerous. And it's a part of life.

It can be a big part of our lives. It's a big part of peacemaking because it only takes one person to break down a relationship. And so, I think it's important that we talk about this then. How do you receive criticism or correction? Well, first, let's define what I mean. And I mean criticism in a very broad, wide sense.

I'm referring to any judgment made by another about you which says that you fall short of a particular standard.

So any judgment about you made by another which says you fall short of some standard. It might be God's standard. It might be man's standard.

[5:44] It might be true judgment. It might be false judgment. It might be brought with gentleness and love and kindness. It might be done with harshness and condemnation.

And it might be a mix of all of those. Criticism doesn't come in one package. It comes in all sorts of packages. So whatever the case, whatever the case might be, it's a judgment or a criticism about you that says you have fallen short in some way.

Do you understand? We're talking very broadly. We're not just talking about right criticism or wrong criticism. We're just talking about the whole matter. So, whatever the case might be, it's dangerous and it's hard to deal with.

So let me ask you to think about your life. What kind of sins can you be tempted to when you're being criticized? What sort of sinful attitudes come so easy or you fall into so easily when you're being criticized?

or corrected? What are some of the sins that come out of that, come out of a heart that's in that position? Pride. Not sure who said that, but pride, yes.

[7:01] Self-righteousness. Retaliation and revenge. Yes, Mickey?

Just anger. Just anger. Defensiveness. Along with that, self-justification. Self-justification.

Very good. Beating yourself up. Okay, beating yourself up. I'm not sure what the really good word for that is, but I know what you're talking about. So, despair, maybe.

Despair. What else? How about gossip? And what I mean is, so they correct you, and now you go and talk to your spouse, or you go talk to someone about their faults.

How about lying? So you're in this situation and you lie to protect yourself. Brawling. Brawling.

[8:03] Now, that's not something that I think most of us struggle with, but just think about this world. Brawling comes out of being corrected, where you're, and you're not just angry and you're not just retaliating, you're retaliating physically, violently.

Resentment. Resentment. Bitterness. Bitterness at what they said about you. And I think, if you think about it, all these things are really, they're interrelated, aren't they?

They don't, we don't usually just struggle with one of those things, it's usually several, it's this complex, this matrix of things that come to us. And so it's dangerous and it's hard.

And if we want to guard the unity, keep the unity and the bond of peace, then brothers and sisters, we have to think about how we receive, how to handle criticism.

Now, all those sins, despair, resentment, anger, lying, gossip, retaliation, anger, brawling, they have a central, there is a central sin.

[9:16] There's a central idol at work. There's a root for all of those. So I just said, you know, they're complicated. But what's at the heart?

What would you say? I think pride. Pride. Okay. What's the idol of pride? Self.

Okay. So pride is that love of self. Selfishness. Self-righteousness. So why do we get all worked up when we're criticized? Why do we struggle with it?

Why are our hearts and our emotions and our minds so engaged? Why do we immediately fire up in defense? The answer is simple because something that we think that is very valuable is at stake.

Isn't it? Something that's supremely valuable. So we defend things that are valuable to us. I read a crazy story this week of a mom who went into her daughter's school and helped her daughter beat up another student.

[10:20] And I thought, what in the world? Why do you do that? Why do you do that? I'll tell you why you do that. Because something you love is at stake.

Something you love is in danger. And so why do we act crazy when we're criticized? Why do we get so defensive when we're criticized? Because we are defending something that is very valuable to us.

We think it's our life we are saving. We believe that something we can't lose is at stake. Something, there's something there that is worth any means to rescue.

And what is it? It's our name, our reputation, our honor, our glory, our self.

And so we say in our hearts, if I don't point out that I'm being misunderstood, if I don't point out that they misquoted me or they're not understanding the circumstances, if I can't convince them that they're wrong and I'm right, then nobody's going to know about my righteousness.

[11 : 32] No one's going to know about really it's not what they seem. If I don't point out my rightness, then nobody will. So I have to do it.

I have to go in my defense. And so do you see the idol of self there and this desire for self-justification to declare, to get ourselves to be right, to make ourselves right.

So I want to justify myself and so I fight and quarrel. That's how churches split. This is how marriages fall apart and families fall apart.

It's at its heart a worship issue. And it's at its heart a justification issue. Yes.

You know what? I'm not going to disagree with you. I think you're right. Our culture becomes ultra-sensitive, hasn't it?

[12 : 35] I think it's ultra-sensitive because it's ultra-selfish. So at its heart, it's a justification issue.

So how do you apply this? Just how do you apply what we've talked about so far? You critique yourself. You criticize yourself. So I want you to think about yourself.

How do you react to correction? How do you react to criticism? Do you pout? Do you tell them off?

Do you attack? Do you clam up and shut down? Do you... Are you teachable? Can your teachers, can your spouses, can your friends correct you?

Or are you someone that they have to walk on eggshells around? Because who knows when you might go off. So think about yourself.

[13 : 35] Don't think about others. Don't think about your spouse. Think about yourself and critique yourself. Now, we've seen what criticism is and we've seen why we struggle with it.

It's because of this idolatrous love of self. And it's our desire to justify ourselves. Now, let's look at what the Bible says about criticism, about receiving criticism, what the Bible says about it.

First, it says that the ability to hear criticism is a mark of the wise. The ability to hear criticism is a mark of the wise. Where do you think we're going to turn to look at these verses?

Proverbs. Turn to Proverbs 12, 15. Proverbs 12, 15. We're just going to take a sampling and it's not exhaustive.

There's a lot more verses that we could refer to. But Proverbs 12, 15. The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

[14 : 45] Seems right to him, the way of a fool. What does that mean? Does he think he needs advice? If you think you're going the right way, men, if you're driving and you know the way to go, you're not going to listen to your wife when she says, I think you need to go a different way, are you?

Even if you're going the wrong way. If it seems right to you, you don't listen to advice, but a wise man listens to advice. Turn over to Proverbs 13, 10.

13, 10. Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice. So we're covering, what's the mark of the wise?

Well, they take advice. So it's a mark of wisdom to be able to take advice, to take correction, but also the wise see criticism as a way of gaining wisdom.

The reason they are willing to take it and listen is because they see it as a way to gain wisdom. The wise see criticism and correction as the pathway to gain.

[16 : 02] And so, David says in Psalm 141, let a righteous man strike me, it is a kindness. Let him rebuke me, it is oil on my head. Proverbs 15, 32.

You can turn over there. 15, 32. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.

Proverbs 9, 9. You don't have to turn there. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still. Teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.

So, not only is the ability to take advice the mark of the wise, it marks them out. You can tell a wise man by the way he handles criticism, but the wise man himself sees criticism and correction and advice as a pathway to gain.

As something good. David says, it is a kindness, it is oil on my head. So, we have to ask ourselves, is that how we look at criticism?

[17 : 20] Is that how we look on correction or rebuke? Unless you're a super saint, it's probably not your first reaction. It's probably not your first reaction.

It's so much easier to quote Psalm 141, let a righteous man strike me and let him rebuke me. It's easier to quote it than to actually agree with it when you're in the moment of criticism.

But brothers and sisters, that's where we need to go. That's where we can go. So, we aren't stuck where we are.

You aren't stuck in your present place because you have the Spirit of Christ in you. You have the Spirit of God in you to change you, to help you, to help you to rise above yourself and above your petty concern for yourself and to embrace wisdom.

Now, so how can we move? This is the all-important question. How can we move from our natural reaction to criticism, which is self-defensiveness and self-righteousness and I have to justify myself and all the sins that come out of that?

[18 : 40] How do we move from there to where David is in Psalm 141? Where's the path? Well, the answer lies in the cross.

The answer lies in the cross. It comes from us understanding and believing everything that God says about us in the cross.

It comes from understanding and believing all that God says about us in the cross, at the cross.

Now, I don't remember. It's about a year ago. Remember we talked about the whole Christian life is cruciform.

It takes upon itself the shape of the cross. It's cross-shaped. All sanctification, all growth and godliness passes through the cross.

And this area is no different. This movement from being self-defensive to learning to take criticism and gaining from it is a path that travels through the cross.

[19 : 48] This area is no different. And so, we come to the cross and criticism. How does believing the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ work itself out in me taking criticism?

Well, first, it has two points, two sides. First, this first side, in Christ's cross, I agree with God's judgment of me. When I stand in the light of the cross and I believe what it says about me, I agree with God's judgment of me.

Now, let me ask you, I want you to think about this. What does the cross say about me as a sinner? What does the cross say about you?

Steve? I am so much worse than I think I am. Okay. What do you mean by that? I'm so much worse than I think I am. The problem. So, it shows us the depth of our problem.

My situation is a lot worse than what I think. What else can we say about that? What else does the cross tell us about ourselves? I deserve God's wrath.

[21 : 07] I deserve God's wrath. I deserve what happened to Jesus on the cross because he died as my substitute. And if my substitute is getting that, that means that I deserve God's wrath.

What else? I think these ideas need flushed out. What else could we say simply? You can't do it yourself.

That's Paul's argument in one place. I don't remember exactly where, but he says if it was of worse than the cross is of no use. If we could actually do it ourselves, then Christ died for nothing.

What else could we say? I can't do it myself? Yes. I'm nothing. What do you mean by that? So, at the end of the day, if I've given my righteous deeds to God and he's killed his son in my place, that just shows you how much my righteous deeds are worth.

Filthy rags. they don't add up to anything in myself. Now, do you see then that the cross, the death of Jesus on the cross, criticizes you far more than anyone ever could?

[22 : 34] The cross and God himself at the cross criticizes you far more than anyone else ever could. The cross criticizes you more intensely, more completely, deeper, more honestly than anyone else ever could.

So, think about what the word of God says. Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law, and cursed is the one who is hanged on a tree.

So, Jesus died for me on the tree. He died as a cursed one. Why was he cursed? Because I was cursed for my disobedience.

So, people can say all sorts of bad things about me, but how about this for criticism? God says, you're cursed.

You're cursed because of your disobedience. The cross says that I'm not worthy of life. I'm not worthy of life. I'm not worthy to wake up tomorrow.

[23 : 45] For we know that the old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with it. We should no longer be slaves to sin. So, our death with Christ was a deserved death.

We deserved to die. The old man was so bad that he deserved to die. It was a just death, and it was just because I was a slave to sin and a willing slave at that. So, as a sinner, I deserve to die.

That's what the cross says about me. Now, how will that help me receive criticism? How will that help me receive criticism? Well, I've received criticism in my day, and I'm sure you have too, but no one has ever criticized me and said, you don't deserve to live.

You deserve to live. But that's what the cross says about me. I'm in myself, just without God's grace, I would be enslaved to sin and I deserve death.

So, if you're thinking about that, let me ask you, if you're thinking about it like that, that you're believing what God says about you in judgment on the cross, how will that help you receive criticism?

[25 : 02] when they say something bad about you, how could you respond then? It's kind of like when you're being criticized and somebody's saying, you owe me an apology.

Well, when we think of the cross, the greatest debt that we have ever owed anybody has already been paid by Jesus Christ. And so, no matter what you owe anybody, the greatest debt, far surpasses any debt that you would ever owe anybody when it comes to being criticized for something.

So it puts a certain perspective on what they're saying. How else does this help us to handle criticism? So someone says something, you fail in this area, how do we respond in ourselves or to them?

Though we may not understand what they're saying, we realize we are totally capable of doing what they're accusing us or criticizing us. Yeah, we're totally capable.

That's the kind of people we are. Yes, Jackie. So that's how you can see it as gain, is when you put it in this perspective of, remember we saw this last week, if God's working all things together for our good and that good is to be conformed to Christ, then this is part of that making us becoming righteous.

[26 : 33] And we're going to get to that, where listening to all that the cross says about us, it doesn't leave us here in this place of judgment and despair. It doesn't.

It takes us to a different place. How about this? No matter how bad they're talking about me, whether it's right or wrong or whatever, they don't have the full picture, do they?

They truly don't know really how bad I am. Because they... If God says I deserve to die, then they're not...

they haven't exhausted their criticism of me. They don't really know the full picture. I don't even know the full picture of how bad I am. So, that will humble me.

It will humble me so that I can hear. Because I am totally capable of that. And, you know what, they don't really know the full picture of how bad I am.

[27 : 48] So, in Christ's cross, I agree with his judgment of me. But, secondly, and this is what Jackie was talking about, in Christ's cross, I agree with God's justification of me.

I agree with God's justification of me. So, I don't only believe his judgment, but I believe his justification of me as a sinner. But, now, a righteousness from God, apart from the law, apart from my actions and what I've done, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. the righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. So, when I am living in light of the cross, when I am believing all that God says about me at the cross, I not only see myself as a sinner, but I see myself as justified, as dressed in the righteousness that comes through Christ's redemption, through his sacrifice of atonement.

So, who is it that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died more than that, was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us. So, how does this help us receive criticism?

[29:21] Well, first, we remind ourselves, yes, their criticism of me might be true, it might be false, it might be valid, I might be misunderstood, but living in the shadow of the cross, preaching the gospel to myself, believing all that it says about me, reminds me that whatever the case might be, that criticism has not touched the most important thing.

It hasn't reached the most important thing. It has not reached my righteous standing before God in Christ. See, if my own sins and failures can't destroy Christ's righteousness, if it's not of the law, then their pointing out my failures can't destroy my righteousness in Christ.

So do I have to defend my life? Do I have to defend my righteousness? No, my life is safe in Christ. My righteousness is safe in Christ.

So, do I have to win the argument? Do I have to defend my righteousness? No, my righteousness is at the right hand of God. That's where my righteousness is.

And so, nothing they can say, whether it's true or false, nothing they can say can change that. And so, now I don't practice self-justification.

[30:57] I practice boasting. Boasting in Jesus Christ and his righteousness. And so, I turn from, yep, I'm a failure. I am completely capable of that. I have fallen short or my reputation is not what I really want it to be.

I turn away from all of that and I turn to thanking the Lord that I have Jesus as my righteousness in my life and that I am safe and secure in him.

And so, whatever I counted as profit, your opinion of me, my righteous standing with you, you being impressed with me, me being right in your eyes, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

Not just loss, but rubbish that I might gain Christ and have a righteousness that's not my own, but a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. So here's where the rubber meets the road.

Do you want to deal with criticism in a God-honoring way? Do you want to receive correction like a wise man? Then go to the cross, remember the cross, and remember all that God says about you.

[32:08] So what do I mean by that? Practically. I mean, read the gospel accounts of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and see yourself in that story because you were there.

You were united to him. You were crucified with him. What do I mean? I mean, tell yourself the whole gospel story.

The whole gospel story is, yes, you are a sinner, but it doesn't leave us there. It tells us that, yes, I am a sinner, and I do deserve this, but Christ in his love sacrificed himself for me.

so in the moment of trial, talk to yourself, look to yourself in light of the cross, look at yourself in light of the cross and say, you know, I am so bad that the Son of God had to die for me.

And so now I can receive their criticism and hear them out, because they haven't discovered a fraction of my guilt. They haven't. Charles Spurgeon said it like this, if you have your moral portrait painted and it is ugly, be satisfied, for it only needs a few blacker touches, and then it will be more accurate.

[33:37] it. So if someone paints your picture and it doesn't look pretty, be glad they don't see the full depth of your sin. But, on the other hand, we don't stay in despair.

We don't stay there. That doesn't lead me to despair either, because my standing with God and my righteousness with Him is not what I've done, but what Christ has done.

And so I was so bad that Jesus had to die for me, but I was so loved that Jesus willingly died for me. And so with that perspective, I can say with David, I can say, let a righteous man strike me, it's a kindness.

Let him rebuke me, it's oil on my head. I won't refuse it. The pathway from self righteousness and defensiveness and confrontational fighting back and attacking and lying and all that, to receiving criticism and receiving correction and advice like a wise man, it goes to the cross.

And at the cross, we listen to all that God says about us. We've ran out of time. We're dismissed.