**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**How Should I Receive Reproof?**

It is not an easy thing to receive criticism, rebuke, or reproof from another person. Being critiqued at work, or being criticized by your spouse, or being reproved by a preacher, are all hard to take. It is difficult to admit that we have failed, or we did wrong. The tendency is for us to find some way to defend ourselves. We are tempted to retaliate and find fault in the one who criticized us. But we need to understand that when we are criticized or rebuked there is a right way to receive it, and there is a wrong way to receive it. The Bible gives us instruction about how to receive reproof, rebuke and correction. And so on the program today I want to talk about what the Bible says about how we should respond when someone comes and reproves and rebukes us.

Now, I want to emphasize I am not talking today about how one should give reproof and correction. That is important, and a lesson within itself. But today I am talking today about how one should receive reproof and correction. I may not like the way someone criticized me, I may think he should have approached me in a different way and needs some reproof himself, and that may be true. But that is beside the point for our lesson today. What I want to talk about is when someone approaches me with criticism, reproof, rebuke or correction, how should I receive it? What does the Bible say?

First of all, the Bible teaches that reproof and correction are necessary if we are to be wise and to grow in understanding and wisdom, and if we are to be what God wants us to be. Proverbs 15:31-32 says, *“The ear that hears the rebukes of life Will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.”* (NKJV) Proverbs 13:18, *“Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, But he who regards a rebuke will be honored.”* Psalm 141:5, the Psalmist says, *“Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it.”* Notice also, in these passages, we read that the one who rejects instruction and correction “despises his own soul,” and to him “poverty and shame will come.” When someone comes to us with legitimate reproof and correction, it is a good thing. Reproof and correction are what we need if we are to be wise, and to be what God wants us to be. It is important that we receive them properly.

Let us look at some individuals, mentioned in scripture, who were reproved or rebuked, and consider how they responded, and look at some lessons we can learn from these instances.

First, let us consider Cain, and how he received God’s rebuke. The story of Cain and Abel is recorded in Genesis 4. Beginning with the latter part of verse 2 it says, *“Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.* Notice, God was pleased with Abel and his offering, but He was not pleased with Cain and his offering. God made it known to Cain that He was not pleased with his offering. How did Cain respond? The text says, “And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” It goes on to say, *“So the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’”*  God is the One who reproves Cain. God is basically saying to Cain, “If you do wrong, and do not respond to reproof and correction in the right way, if you do not make the proper changes, sin is ready to pounce on you and rule over you. Don’t let that happen. “You should rule over it,” God says. But Cain does not properly receive God’s instruction. He later murdered his brother. Sin took dominion over Cain, because he did not properly receive God’s rebuke.

Cain had the perfect Critic. God is always right. God’s word is the perfect critic. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* Notice, two reasons the scriptures were written were for reproof and correction. The scriptures were given to reprove us, that it to bring to light our sins, and to correct us. And so when someone comes to you with the word of God and reproves you for what you have done, it is God that is reproving you. It is God who is correcting you. How I respond to that reproof and correction will determine whether or not sin will take dominion over me or not. The example of Cain teaches us that legitimate rebuke unheeded leads to the dominion of sin.

Secondly, let us look at the rich, young, ruler and how he responded to reproof. This man came to Jesus and Mark records in Mark 10 that the man *“knelt before Him, and asked Him, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?’ So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'’ And he answered and said to Him, ‘Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.’ Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’ But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”* (Mark 10:17-22). All indications are this man genuinely wanted to know what to do to have eternal life, and he, evidently, was a good moral man. But there was one aspect of his life that needed changing. And Jesus brings this fault in his life to his attention. Jesus is his critic. Jesus is essentially saying to him, “your material possessions are too important to you, and you’ve got to give them up.” His priorities being misplaced made him unfit for the kingdom of God, and for eternal life. And so Jesus tells him, “*One thing you lack:* *Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”* The young man did not receive it well. He went away sorrowful.

What do we learn? We learn that we need to be open to look at ourselves in every aspect of our lives. We may be doing what is right in many areas of our lives, like this rich young ruler, but wrong in others. We may be blind to our faults in these areas. We need someone to reprove us.Because we want to change where we need to change, because we want to be right with God, and since we may be blind to those areas where we need to change, we need someone who has the courage to come to us and bring to light the fault in our lives. In other words, we should be willing to receive reproof and correction in those areas in which we are lacking. Am I willing to receive reproof concerning how I am disciplining my children? How I treat my wife? How I spend my money? I may not like someone correcting me in these areas, but if that is an area of my life in which I am lacking, not only should I be willing to receive correction, but I should yearn for it.

Thirdly, let us look at David and how he responded to rebuke. David committed the sins of adultery and murder. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, she became pregnant, and to cover up his sin, he had Bathsheba’s husband murdered, and then he took her to be his wife. Nathan the prophet came to David and rebuked him. Nathan began by telling him a story of *“two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”*  When David heard this, he was very angry and said, *"As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.’ Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’”* (2 Sam. 12:1-7)

David easily saw the sin in another man, and was ready to render judgment on him, but he had refused to own up to a similar sin in his own life. This is often true with us. We can easily see the “speck” in our brother’s eye, but refuse to acknowledge the log in our own eye (Matt. 7:3-4). Why is that? It may be because we let our own selfish interest confuse the plain distinction between right and wrong. For example, one may condemn the practicing homosexual, acknowledging that is sinful, but at the same time refuse to acknowledge his sin of sleeping with his girlfriend. One may condemn the bank robber, but at the same time steal from a company by filing a false insurance claim. When we do these things we need someone to reprove and rebuke.

When Nathan rebuked David, David repented. He said, *“I have sinned against the Lord.”* (2 Sam. 12:13). David does not get angry with Nathan who rebuked him. David could have had Nathan killed. He was the king. David does not harden his heart and rationalize his behavior. He does not try to put the blame on Bathsheba, or on God for giving him his sexual desires. He takes personal responsibility for his own actions. With a humble, contrite heart he repents of his sins and seeks God’s forgiveness. Read Psalm 51.

This is how we should respond when someone comes to us and reproves us of our sins.

The next time someone comes to you with criticism or rebuke, do these things:

1. Ask yourself whether the criticism or rebuke contains any truth, and be honest.

2. Ask God to help you to remove any pride that would cause resentment toward the one who criticized.

3. Remember that the one who has criticized you does not begin to know the worst about you.

4. If you have done wrong, humbly and frankly confess it, and seek God’s forgiveness in the way he has commanded, and also confess it to anyone you may have injured and seek their forgiveness.

5. Remember you are not infallible and that you need God’s grace and wisdom. God has given you His wisdom in His word the Bible, and He has also give you others to help bring this wisdom to your attention. Be willing to listen.

Our time is gone for today.

But before we close we want to invite you to check out our website. On this website you are able to hear sermons on a variety of Bible topics, and you also are able to hear previous Bible Talk radio broadcasts. The web address is sjchurchofchrist.com, that’s sjchurchofchrist.com.