

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Receiving Criticism

(Jerry Fite)

It has often been said “It seems the wise just get wiser.” This is certainly true when we examine the Scriptures regarding how one receives criticism. Criticism is the action of passing judgment upon one’s behavior and work. By common usage, criticism is pointing out what is wrong in another. Therefore, the critic is often the one who rebukes another. So, how should a wise person view, and respond to rebuke that is often initially hard to take.

In *Proverbs 17:10* we read, “A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool.” First, a man of understanding is receiving rebuke. How does it affect him? Second, a fool is receiving a hundred stripes. What is more effective in changing one for the better? One rebuke is more effective than a hundred stripes, if the one receiving the correction is a man of understanding. The numerous repetitive blows of corrective punishment cannot penetrate as deep into a fool than the pointed word of rebuke in one of understanding, making the wise even wiser.

Is this not what the Book of Proverbs teaches in pointing

out how the wise should view rebuke: “*Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.*” (*Proverbs 19:20*)? The Hebrew word translated “instruction” conveys the concept of “discipline” and “chastisement.” If you are truly wise, you will receive corrective discipline, and be wise in your latter end. “*Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning*” (*Proverbs 9:9*).

Therefore, the wise person should view rebuke as “a positive.” While the mocking scorners will probably hate you for offering him or her corrective criticism; “*reprove a wise man, and he will love thee*” (*Proverbs 9:8*). David had this character of heart: “*Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be as oil upon the head; let not my head refuse: for even in their wickedness shall by prayer continue*” (*Psalms 141:5*).

In this passage, two words defined will help us understand the meaning of the passage. The word “smite” conveys a “hammer”-like-blow that strikes down upon David’s head. The

word translated “wickedness” does not always convey evil in a moral sense, but it can also point to evil in a physical sense, such as calamity, or misery that comes upon one due to injury. David seems to be saying that though a rebuke is painful to take, like striking down on his head with a hammer, David’s head will gladly receive it as comforting oil. He will also not hate the righteous man who brings forth the rebuke, but will even continue to pray for him when the righteous man is experiencing calamity and misery in his own life.

From James, we learn wisdom that is from above is “easily entreated” (*James 3:17*). This word in the Greek combines the prefix, “eu – well” with the root “peithomai – to obey.” No, God’s wisdom is not describing one who has no personal conviction, and will easily obey error, but this person will be approachable, and compliant to rebuke offered from the Scriptures. While the initial response from many will be anger that resists with self-justification, the wise person will be “slow to speak, swift to hear, slow to wrath” (*James 1:19*). Following God’s wisdom, the wise will become even wiser through criticism.