

A Godly Response to Criticism: Listen, Learn, and Love

I. THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION

- A. The goal of receiving biblical instruction is to abound in love for Jesus and people. This is meant to be the life goal to which individuals, families, ministries, and churches regularly realign their heart.

⁵***The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Tim. 1:5, NASB)***

⁹***I pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense. (Phil. 1:9-10)***

- B. Everyone faces much criticism throughout their life from many sources—including family, friends, colleagues, ministry teams, authority figures, neighbors, strangers, adversaries, etc. Criticism is an optimum context in which believers can continually realign their heart to grow in love.
- C. God promised to use His sovereign power and wisdom to overrule all the difficulties in a believer’s life by causing “all things” to work together for good for all who are committed to walk in love for God. God’s priority is that we be conformed to Jesus by abounding in love. “All things” include our failures and bad decisions, the injustice done to us by others, and Satan’s attacks against us.

⁸***We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose... ²⁹to be conformed to the image of His Son. (Rom. 8:28-29)***

- D. The Bible exhorts us to respond in humility when people speak negatively about us. Thus, when criticized, we are to set our heart to ***listen, learn, and love*** (respond with loving actions).

1. ***Listen***: We are to carefully listen to those who criticize us instead of having preconceived conclusions about the issues involved. We must be careful not to interrupt or cut off those who are sharing, but to listen and discern their *unspoken* words, disappointments, and pain. We love people by listening to their view of a conflict, even if it is not 100% accurate.

¹⁹***But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. (Jas. 1:19, NASB)***

2. ***Learn***: We are to have a teachable spirit that seeks to gain insight into how we can grow in love and wisdom even when a criticism is inaccurate and presented in a wrong way and spirit. We must be intentional about resisting the temptation to be defensive. See those who criticize you as a “free research team” who will give you some valuable insight into your blind spots.

3. ***Love***: We are to respond in love, with blessing, instead of making those who criticize us “pay,” by shutting them out of our lives or speaking negatively about them. We are called to bless those who curse us and love our adversaries with our words, deeds, and prayers.

⁴⁴***“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” (Mt. 5:44)***

- E. We respond in love by confessing our faults and humbling ourselves to see how our failures or deficiencies contributed to the pain of others. To be reconciled to others, we must genuinely confess and repent of our sin and insensitivity. Do not say, “I’m sorry *if* I offended you.” Rather say, “Forgive me *because* I failed you” (by coming up short in love or by being insensitive to you).

¹⁶***Confess your trespasses to one another...that you may be healed. (Jas. 5:16)***

- F. In the process of listening to, learning from, and loving people who criticize us, we are to entrust the situation to God by trusting His leadership to intervene in His way and in His timing.

²³***...when He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23)***

II. MAKING GODLY APPEALS TO ANOTHER

- A. Jesus taught us to go to our brother to make a loving appeal in person, both when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24) and when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15-16). When someone sins or mistreats us, Jesus commanded us to go to them privately to share our concern. In the appeal, seek to *win your brother* in private rather than *win an argument* publicly.

²³***“If you bring your gift to the altar, and remember that your brother has something against you...”*** ²⁴***First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Mt. 5:23-24)***

¹⁵***“If your brother sins...tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained [won] your brother. ¹⁶If he will not hear, take with you one or two.” (Mt. 18:15-16)***

- B. We are to appeal in the right *tone, timing, process, spirit, and ratio* of affirmation to correction. We are to make our appeals in a spirit of gentleness, aware of our own failure and deficiency.

¹***If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)***

- C. If people accuse one another in seeking to win an argument, they will devour each other (Gal. 5:15). If we respond wrongly, the conflict escalates to consume our time, energy, emotions, and money.

¹⁵***If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! (Gal. 5:15)***

- D. We all are both *victims* and *agents* of offense and wounding. We are victims when we are mistreated, and we are agents when we respond wrongly and allow an injustice against us to become a festering wound in us. The injustice done against us does not produce bitterness, but rather it is *our wrong response to the injustice* that produces bitterness in us and defiles our heart.

¹⁵***...looking carefully...lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; ¹⁶lest there be any fornicator...like Esau. (Heb. 12:15-16)***

IHOPKC has an *Appeals Process and Committee* for any who feel they have been mistreated by a peer or leader in our spiritual family—all staff, students/interns, and members of FCF (past or present). The purpose of this process is to pursue healing and reconciliation of relationships. The committee comprises twelve members. To see the process and the committee members, go to ihopkc.org/appealsprocess. The leadership of IHOPKC will be subject to and abide by final decisions made by this committee. To comment on this process, email appeals@ihopkc.org.