

Job 31: Living With Integrity

Adapted from a series of studies by Brian Haines



Job 31:13-15

Being Open to Criticism

"If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant when they complained against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When He punishes, how shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?" Job 31:13-15

One of the most important characteristics of the people of God is that they are introspective. Paul tells us to *"test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves"* in 2 Corinthians 13:5. We are supposed to examine ourselves and put ourselves to the test constantly (Romans 12:1-2) in order to ascertain if we are right with God. But for most people, it is very difficult to be honest with ourselves; we are either too strict or too lenient.

Job was a man who understood that he needed to listen to others when they complained against him. Later the proverb writer would say *"the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel"* (Proverb 12:15). This important skill must be learned by anyone who seeks integrity.

Common Problems with Criticism

Sometimes it is easier to see when someone is failing at this skill than when they are succeeding. We see that sometimes people become "defensive", as though it is necessary to make a defense for their actions. Sometimes people react by pointing out the flaws of others. Many times when someone is criticized in the church, they get upset and leave. These are examples of failing to handle criticism in a Godly way.

Criticism by God

We ought to first and foremost view Scriptures in the light of being a tool of self-evaluation. Too many look at the Bible and have the pre-determined mindset that they are already right, and that whatever is written is for self-gratification. But instead we need the mindset that Scriptures are the first critique of our lives. We need to read the Word with that mindset, not one of self-justification.

Criticism by Brethren

It is a commandment of God that we admonish one another (Rom.15:14, 1 Cor. 4:14, 1 Thes. 5:14, 2 Thes. 3:15, Col. 3:16). This idea is not that we are fault finders (Jude 16), but that when we have opportunity and ability to encourage each other. When we receive that admonishment, we need to do so with grace. We need to consider seriously that even when we think we are in the right, we may be in the wrong.

Criticism by the World

It might seem unusual, but we need to realize that sometimes we need to listen even to what the world says. Clearly, the world often and usually lacks spiritual discernment to know how to properly admonish (1 Cor. 2:14). But on occasion, the world sees things that we do not, and it would be wise to listen when that comes (Luke 16:1-9).

Learn To Accept Criticism

We need to realize that accepting criticism does not come naturally and that it takes discernment. We already pointed out that most of the things the world admonishes us for are not legitimate, and we probably understand that many things we are criticized for by brethren may not be legitimate. We need to first of all receive such statement and consider them all, then with spiritual discernment rightly divide it (1 Thes. 5:21-22).

Again, what might be important in growing this ability is putting out the things that fail to accept admonishment. We need to know that pointing other people's faults in return (even if they are legitimate) is not being wise. We need to accept that we can be wrong.

Learn What Criticism to Reject

We have made it clear that more often than not, admonishment is not warranted. How should we handle it if it is not? First, we need to exercise caution in making that decision. Second, we need to ascertain that even if the admonishment is not accurate, it may be that it reflects a weakness in another that we must be careful not to violate, per Romans 14.

An Example in David

One of the most notable examples of a man who could accept criticism was David. When he was confronted by Nathan in 2 Samuel 12, he readily admitted his fault. When he was found in error by Gad in 1 Chronicles 21, he quickly confessed his sins. David was humble, and was always ready to see his sins. This is the heart that is likened to God's own heart.

In contrast, when Adam, Saul, or Aaron were accused of error, they blamed others, or the person confronting them. Such men are examples of failure in this matter.

Questions to consider:

1. How did Job's reception of complaint reflect he was a man of integrity?
2. What is the difference between being a fault finder admonishing in the Lord?
3. What are some mindsets that enable us to be more accepting of admonishment?
4. If a weaker brother admonishes us improperly or for poor reasons, how should we behave?