

How to Give and Receive Criticism

Introduction ¹

1. Defined

- “To give a corrective evaluation of another person and their service to the Lord with the intent of helping that person grow in faithfulness to God.” ²

2. Biblical terms

a. Righteous

- Teach/instruct, Admonish, Rebuke, Edify, Warn, Etc.

b. Unrighteous (these are degrading and dehumanizing) ³

- Threats (Eph 6:9)
- Reviling (Luke 6:28; 1 Pt 2:23)
- Gossip
- Slander
- Lying (deceit) – Eph 4:25
- Manipulation
- Oppress (ungodly control) – Gen 16:6; 1 Sam 2:16; Ezra 5:12
- Etc.

3. Passages (sample, quote the ones in bold)

- **Ps 141:5**
- Prov 9:8
- **Prov 11:14**
- **Prov 12:15**

¹ I've included many helpful principles in this seminar from an article by Pastor Garrett Kell (IX Marks) - <https://www.9marks.org/article/giving-and-receiving-godly-criticism-sharpening-each-other-with-your-words/>

² Ibid, from Pastor Garrett Kell

³ Some of these terms are what often make up 'verbal abuse.' <https://abuse.biblicalcounseling.com/>

- Prov 15:31-33
- **Prov 17:3,10**
- Prov 19:25
- **Prov 27:17**
- Prov 29:1 (:1-18)
- Prov 30:32
- **Eccl 7:8-9**
- **Matt 7:1-5, 12**
- Luke 18:11-14
- Rom 15:14
- Eph 4:25-32
- Gal 5:15
- 1 Cor 3:3
- **2 Tim 2:24-26**
- Titus 1:13
- **Jas 1:19-20; 3:14-16**
- **1 Peter 2:23**
- Etc.

4. Types of Criticism

- Dr. John Piper writes, “It seems to me that there are four kinds of criticism that our German friend might get at any given time.
 - a. There is criticism that is deserved and is given in kindness and goodwill.
 - b. There is criticism that is deserved and is given in harsh and demeaning ways.
 - c. There’s criticism that is not deserved and is given in kindness and goodwill. It’s a real mistake; it’s just an honest mistake.
 - d. There is criticism that is undeserved and is given in harsh and demeaning ways and may have real ill will behind it.”⁴

5. Evaluation of the criticism

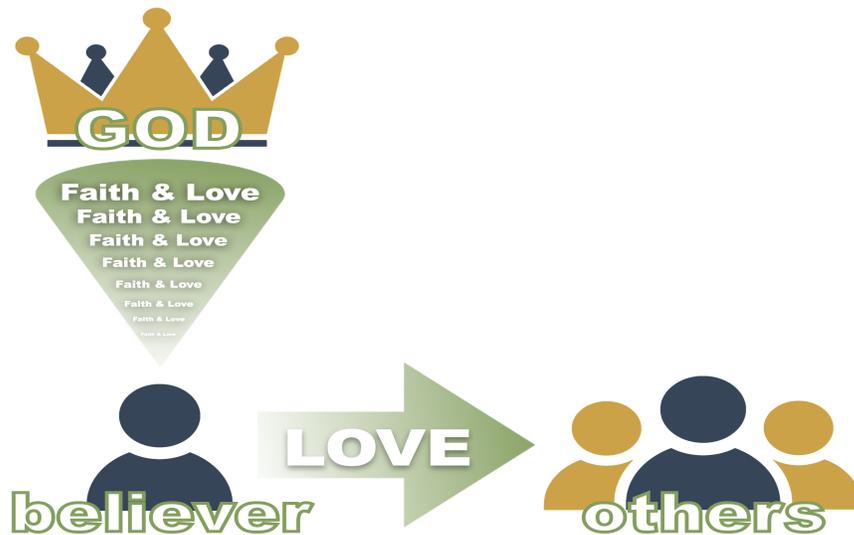
⁴ From John Piper, ‘How can I learn to receive Criticism?’ Oct 14, 2022

- a. Motivation for giving it (desire)
 - i. Sinful motives (malice)
 - a. Tradition over relationships
 - b. Rules over relationships (Mk 3:2)
 - c. Behavior over heart (external over internal)
 - ii. Righteous motives (God's glory and love for and seeking good for the other person)
 - b. Attitudes behind giving and receiving it (thoughts)
 - i. Sinful attitudes = Pride and hate (malice – Eph 4:31)
 - a. Hypocrisy
 - b. Blasphemy
 - c. Challenging authority
 - ii. Righteous attitude = Humility and love (1 Cor 13:1-5; Eph 4:1-3,15, 25)
 - a. Dialogue (healthy even if opposed)
 - b. Ponders before answering (Prv 15:28)
 - c. If one has sinned, considers, confesses and repents of their own log before another's speck (Mt 7:1-5)
 - d. Is humbled and thankful for the 'help' in their walk with Christ
6. **Jesus our example** (sinless, yet grew in wisdom and stature, favor with God and man – Luke 2:52)
- a. What type of criticism (4 of them)
 - i. Criticism deserved and given in kind way
 - ii. Criticism deserved and given in harsh way
 - iii. Criticism undeserved yet given kind way
 - iv. Criticism undeserved yet given in harsh way
 - b. Jesus' responses to these various types

- (dialogue, responded with questions, appealed to Scripture, loving admonishment, patient, respectful, returned good for evil, etc.)

7. Guidelines in **GIVING** it

- Be sure you have your facts correct and have listened well (Prv 18:13,17)
- Ponder before speaking (Ps 141:3; Prv 13:3)
- Check your motive - out of love for God and for the other person (Matt 22:37-40)



- Be known as someone who is 'Thankful'
- Be known as someone who is an 'Encourager' first not a critic (80% encouraging words to every 20% of constructive criticism, e.g. Jesus to the 7 churches – Rev 2-3)
- Start with and end with appreciation
- Consider the context of both people involved (yours and theirs)
 - Content
 - Timing
 - Wording ('full of grace and truth')
- Be genuine (sincere)
 - Not with Hypocrisy

- ii. Not with Condemnation
- iii. Not with Divisiveness
- i. Be humble (remembering the Gospel of Christ, Eph 4:1-3)
- j. Pray for courage to love others well (Prv 27:5-6)
- k. Review matters of heart and tongue (Jas 3:1-18)
- l. Review matters of heart and behavior (Jas 4:1-12)
- m. Be ready to receive feedback: defensiveness, anger, withdrawal or correction of data and appreciation

8. Guidelines in **RECEIVING** it

- a. Humility is necessary (ill of Spurgeon on people upset with you – you are worse than you think you are) ⁵
 - A result of dwelling on the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- b. Look to Jesus (secure in Him) ⁶ Heb 12:1-2
- c. Focus on God’s approval and not man’s (Gal 1:10)
- d. Forbearance with others who are imperfect and give criticism imperfectly (“put up with it”). Expect you will receive ‘truth’ minus grace (example from Spurgeon) ⁷
 - With genial temper, and an evident desire to benefit me, he marked down most relentlessly everything which he supposed me to have said incorrectly. Concerning some of his criticisms, he was himself in error, but, for the most part, he was right, and his remarks enabled me to perceive many mistakes, and to avoid them in the future. I looked for his weekly memoranda with much interest, and I trust I am all the better for them.
 - Possibly, some young men might have been discouraged, if not irritated, by such severe criticism; but they would have been very

⁵ A quote from Charles H. Spurgeon, “Brother, if any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him; for you are worse than he thinks you to be. If he charges you falsely on some point, yet be satisfied, for if he knew you better he might change the accusation, and you would be no gainer by the correction. If you have your moral portrait painted, and it is ugly, be satisfied; for it only needs a few blacker touches, and it would be still nearer the truth.”

⁶ Helpful article on Criticism by John Piper, ‘How do I process personal criticism?’ Nov 15, 2017

⁷ <https://fromthestudy.com/2015/06/30/using-criticism-for-our-benefit-a-word-from-charles-spurgeon/>

foolish, for, in resenting such correction, they would have been throwing away a valuable aid to progress.

- e. Expect to be slandered and spoken falsely against (even by professing Christians)
- f. Pray for God's grace (2 Cor 12:7-10; Heb 4:14-16)
- g. Don't respond immediately (tendency to be defensive) – Jas 1:19-20
- h. Ask clarifying questions and for concrete examples (if needed)
- i. Possibly run it by a few other godly saints if you have trouble processing the criticism
- j. Circle back with the person, thank them and share how God is using it in your life. Be careful, this may not be the time to point out errors on their part. You may want to wait a little while before letting them know of any corrections or help with their criticism.

Conclusion

Resources

- Jerry Bridges, *The Blessing of Humility*
 - *The Fruitful Life*
- Matthew Henry, *Meekness*
- Cheryl Marshall and Caroline Newheiser, *When Words Matter Most*
- David Mathis, *Humbled*
- Lou Priolo, *Judgements*
- Stuart Scott, *From Pride to Humility*