

Proverbs 9:7-12 (The Wisdom of Teachability)
(24 of 112)

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Proverbs

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Please turn with me in God's word this morning to Proverbs, the ninth chapter, and we'll take as our reading verses 7 to 12 and learn about the wisdom of teachability. Proverbs 9:7-12. Here now God's word.

7 He that correcteth a scoffer getteth to himself reviling; And he that reproveth a wicked man getteth himself insult. 8 Reprove not a scoffer, lest he hate thee: Reprove a wise man, and he will love thee. 9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. 10 The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 11 For by me thy days shall be multiplied, And the years of thy life shall be increased. 12 If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; And if thou scoffest, thou alone shalt bear it.

And thus far the reading of God's word.

This is a touch message to deliver and I can't get into it without telling you in advance that it's the sort of thing that the preacher has to preach a number of times to himself before he dares stand in the pulpit and preaches it to others, and yet it's an unfaithful preacher who won't let the word of God speak even when it steps on toes. All of us tend to be far too unteachable. Do you know what the difference is? The only thing that really brings people under church discipline to take an illustration here, do you know what it is that distinguishes between two backbiters, one of whom is censured publicly in the church and the other one who is not? Do you know what the difference is between those two? Do you know what the difference is, the key difference between someone who is theologically mistaken and someone who must be deemed a heretic? Do you know what it all comes down to when all is said and done? Every case of discipline in the church and I think in one way or another by analogy, every case elsewhere in the family, at work, at school, whatever it may be, every case of discipline comes down to this one final trait: unteachability. The difference between a backbiter who is censured and a backbiter who is not is that one is teachable, the other isn't. The difference between someone who teaches mistakenly in the church and yet is not corrected or is not disciplined, thrown out as a heretic, and one who must be deemed a heretic is that the heretic will not learn. The heretic is too proud to be taught and corrected. Unteachability becomes, then, the focal

point of wisdom in our lives, determining whether we are those that need to be broken by God or those who have been broken and are now learning and growing.

The reason why all of us tend to be so unteachable is because we have too high an estimate of ourselves and I realize that that may come as a difficult thing for many of you because I know you and I know that in all sincerity you would say, "I don't have that high an estimate of myself. I know that I am mistaken often." But let me give you a situation. If someone comes to you and suggests that your walk is somewhat inconsistent and that greater fidelity to Jesus Christ in this particular area is called for, though you may in general be willing to say, "I know I make mistakes," it's when the pinch comes to recognize a particular error, a particular need for change, and when someone else is bringing that to my attention, that that high estimate of myself comes to expression. It comes to expression in my inability to let someone else search me out, to have someone else see what I am, and to have to admit in all humility not the general sinfulness in my life but the very painful, particular and embarrassing sinfulness of that moment, and I say the reason we're so unteachable is because we have too high an estimate of ourselves. But I want you to see what the book of Proverbs tells us that our response to correction reveals. What is it that our response to someone's correction reveals about us? The contrast is made very clear in verses 7 to 9 and this is a beautiful piece of Hebrew poetry. You have three lines that run together, unfortunately whoever did the versification at this point didn't catch that, you have in verses 7 to 8a, as we will call it, the description of the scoffer, the wicked man who does not receive correction, and then you have three lines set antithetically over against this by contrast to show what the righteous wise man does.

So let's look at these three lines. "He that correcteth a scoffer getteth to himself reviling; And he that reproveth a wicked man gets an insult. Don't reprove a scoffer, lest he hate thee." And now three lines corresponding and it works backwards, you see. You have an A, B, C, C, B, A pattern. Now if you reprove a wise man, you don't have hatred as the response, he loves you. "Give instruction to a wise man and he'll get wiser. Teach a righteous man, he'll increase in learning." You see, the contrast is laid out very clearly. The way you respond to correction tells you whether you're a scoffer or whether you're a wise man or woman. Verse 12, "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; if thou scoffest, thou alone shalt bear it." Wisdom and scoffing stand over against one another and the book of Proverbs would teach us, then, that we are either wise or a scoffer depending upon the way we respond to correction.

Proverbs 13:1, "A wise son accepts his father's discipline but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke." There it is categorically put. Do you want to know who the fool is? You want to know who the scoffer is? Look for someone who can't hear a rebuke and you'll put your finger on it.

Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days." Or Proverbs 13:18, this tells us that all the difference in the world between shame and honor in our lives rests upon our ability to accept discipline. "Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline but he who regards reproof will be honored." Isn't that incredible? There's an irony there. He who regards reproof will be

honored. The man to whom you must take a criticism, you think, now what a minute, you can't honor someone who is criticizable. If he's done something wrong, then you don't honor him but Proverbs had got it right. If you know anything about human psychology, if you've seen people work together that really do trust and love each other and are able to exchange criticism, you'll see that's true. If go to you and I have something that has to be corrected in your life, I believe, and you receive it well and take the reproof and change your life, that actually increases your honor. It doesn't bring you down, it brings you up not only in the sight of God but in the sight of men. Proverbs is right. So are you stupid? Are you set for shame and dishonor? Or are you a wise person who says, "Thank you. I needed that."

Proverbs, the ninth chapter in verses 7 to 9, also indicates by the parallelism used that the wise man is the righteous man and the scoffer, the fool, is the wicked man. We mustn't look upon this just a personality traits or, if you will, a failure to do what is best in life. It's also a reflection of one's moral standing in the sight of God. And so it's clear, first of all from this passage, that our attitude toward criticism and our attitude toward those who voice the criticism is an index of our attitude toward God and our standing in his sight. Boy, if you want a tough lesson, I want a tough lesson, there is one to swallow. What's the index of your standing before God? How well do you take criticism? Well, what are some of the ways in which we resist reproof? I'd like to kind of catalog these this morning using the word of God as our guide and then kind of fill it out with some illustrations, ways in which we resist reproof and show that we aren't wise and we aren't righteous people, and I'm going to give you four and then elaborate on each of them. First, avoidance of criticism. Secondly, rationalization in the face of criticism. Thirdly, recrimination in reaction to criticism. And fourthly, incorrigibility to criticism. Avoidance, rationalization, recrimination, and incorrigibility.

First of all, avoidance. How can a person resist reproof? Well, listen to Proverbs 15:12, "A scoffer does not love one who reproves him. He will not go to the wise." To put it very simply, the scoffer, the fool, avoids being criticized. He doesn't love the person who does it and so he avoids being around wise people who might tell him what he needs to hear. I think of three ways in which that principle of avoidance operates in people's lives as I've seen them. In the first place, we avoid criticism and therefore show we're unteachable when we refuse to put ourselves under the authority of another person. Just stop and think about that. Often our resistance to coming into institutional structures where we're under someone else's authority. It could be a family situation, a school situation, a job situation, a church situation, any number of ways in which God puts us under authority in our lives and what we do is we resist making commitments to that because and I have to be honest, this is my attitude, I'm sure it's yours too, we resist that because the minute we put ourselves under someone else's authority, then the potential is there which we wouldn't otherwise have to face, the potential is there that we're going to be criticized, we're going to have to be told what to do, and we're going to have to submit and we don't like that.

Now there are people who will put themselves formally under someone else's authority but then you see the submission that they show is submission with a pout, let's call it, the

kind of submission that says, "Okay, I know that I'm formally obligated but, boy, I really don't like it. And yeah, I'll do what you tell me but you're going to be miserable when I do it. I just want you to know that you're really in control but I'm going to really show you." I mean, I see that in students all the time. Students, especially with Dr. Bahsen in school, they can't get away with much. They can't even transfer out of my classes because they can't graduate if they don't have my classes. And so sometimes you've go to work and work and work and I can get someone to finally fall into place and do the work because they want to walk through graduation, they want to get out of school, but, boy, I know that they hate me for what I've done. You see, there's a formal submission but that's not submission. That's submission with a pout. That's submission that says, "I want to tell you I'm not submitting while I'm submitting." Avoidance of criticism. Either don't put yourself under someone's authority or put yourself under it but make it very clear that you don't really submit.

Or another way in which people avoid criticism, it seems to me, is they quit and they go elsewhere when they're in trouble. We have discussions from time to time in Presbyterian circles about efficiency and counseling, pastoral oversight, church discipline, even in formal matters like charges, trials, censures in the church, and often there's an air of futility about these discussions because we all admit that the biggest problem we have, especially in this country, is that when someone doesn't like the criticism of the church, for the most part, I'm taking a figure out of the air, I have not researched it but I'm sure it's close to accurate, I know that in over 9 out of 10 cases of church discipline, when the person who is disciplined isn't vindicated, then what they do is they just leave the church. You know, and so what happens is you get someone who is engaging in some kind of marital situation that isn't appropriate, either adultery or desertion or maybe there's quibbling in the home that the Session has to come in and say, "Come on, let's knock this off." Whatever it may be, if that finally comes to the place where the church has to say something, almost invariably in this country the people say, "We don't want to go to a church that does that." Now what does that tell you, though, about the people? The book of Proverbs tells us. It's not easy for me, especially if I'm the pastor or the elder in that case to have to say this because it's so pointed, but let's read it. God says it to us. When we avoid criticism, we are fools, we are scoffers, our hearts are hard.

A third way in which we avoid trouble, it seems to me, is we stay away when there's a potential for criticism. I hate to use the church as the illustration because, really, all the different areas of life that this could be true at work too, in fact, I mean, just think about this, why do you avoid seeing your supervisor sometimes? Is it because your work is not done? Is it because you know that if he looks at it, it's going to be a little sloppy and there's going to be something wrong here? We know that we avoid seeing people who could legitimately tell us we're wrong but it happens in the church too. If I were to plot what I've seen over the years that God's given me experience in the church both as a pastor and when I wasn't functioning as a pastor, I see this repeatedly. When people do not want the Session to come around, you can almost count on the fact there's something wrong and count on the fact they're about ready to leave the church. I don't want to say that's an invariable rule but, boy, it's very high, very high in predictability. I have people who sometimes say, "Well, we don't think the Session should call on us." I say, "The

sheep don't think the shepherd should be around? The shepherd shouldn't be taking and praying with the people?" Why is that? If a guilty consciences isn't screaming out at that point, I don't know when it is.

So the first way in which we resist reproof is that we avoid it. We don't go around the wise as Proverbs 15:12 says. Another way in which we avoid reproof is through rationalization. Proverbs 12:15, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel." And this one is going to kill all of us. I know that. You know, I say, why don't I sit down, I can't stand up here and tell you this because when I look at this, isn't that true, we are right in our own eyes? The wise man says, "No, I need to listen. I need to be directed. Show me the way." And how do we rationalize? Well, there are lots of ways but here are some common ones. We use a double standard and we criticize others on one basis and then when that comes home to roost and we legitimately should be criticized for the same thing, then there are exceptions, right? Then there's another principle that must be applied. We have two different ways of weighing and measuring which the Bible calls an abomination in the eyes of God, by the way. Rationalization is a really really deep sin. But when someone brings something to our attention, we rationalize by using a different set of rules for us than the same set of rules we would use for others.

Another way we rationalize is we apply arbitrary exceptions. Isn't that amazing? You know, one wouldn't have thought that this rule needs an exception or one wouldn't see any good reason why this rule is to be accepted, and yet we have come up with something arbitrary, just as we say, ad hoc, on the spur of the moment to say, "Yeah, but here's an exception for me." Or we resort to flimsy excuses. What's a flimsy excuse? It's a sort of one which if you heard you'd probably say the person is leaning on a broken reed. This is not going to support any kind of exception or excuse for you.

Then another way we do it, and maybe this is the most common of all, is we place unrealistic emphasis upon the various factors of the situation. You know, there's something to be said for being bold in a certain situation, something to be said for being kind in a certain situation. Now if we're being criticized because we were so bold as to step on somebody's toes, then when we evaluate the situation, we see the need for boldness in real big terms and the need for kindness small terms. But now if the same thing applies to us and our feelings are getting hurt, then we evaluate the situation for the need for kindness is real big and the need for boldness is like this, it's kind of smaller and you say all these things are legitimate. There is kindness, there is boldness, and you know, half a dozen other things that could be taken into account, but our distribution of weight and emphasis depends upon where we want to come out at the end of the evaluation. We all tend to rationalize. We all tend to look for ways to be right in our own eyes.

This happens sometimes in marital counseling. I have people who will come and, let's say one partner to the marriage says, "I just don't want to be married anymore." And I say, "Well, why is that?" Well, I'm just not really sure. There's nothing specific but we just don't love each other. I say, "Well, that's too bad. You're supposed to. You need to learn

to do that." No, it's beyond hope. "Well, can you give me some reasons for that? What's the substance? Why do you want to leave the home here?" I don't know but I just can't live with him anymore, which must translated if we take our counseling seriously as, I won't live with him anymore. You can but until you come up with some reasons. I'll tell you why people do that. I don't know that they think it through necessarily but the advantage of saying I have no substance to my criticism is, well, then I can't be shown wrong, and what I can do is I can do what I want and I won't have to ever answer for it. It's rationalization when all is said and done.

A third way in which we resist reproof is by recrimination. This is very sad. It's very ugly. Proverbs says in 13:10, "Through presumption comes nothing but strife, but with those who receive counsel is wisdom." The presumptuous man runs to strife when he's criticized. The wise man, of course, will increase in wisdom when he's counseled. We recriminate against those who criticize us and three ways in which I see that. First of all, we can attack the critic himself, especially his motives. Boy, we love to do that. We say, "I don't have to hear this criticism because, after all, you're not so good either. Or even if you are so good, you're not doing this because you love me. Or you didn't say it just right." And we like to attack the motives or the integrity of the person who's bringing this criticism to our attention.

I want you to stop and think about it. Let's say I've embezzled office funds and one of the fellow Christians in the office comes to me and he says, "Listen, Dr. Bahsen, Christ wouldn't have us live this way. It's not right for you. You must restore that and make restitution. You need to correct yourself lest this become a pattern that's going to lean you right to hell." Okay, now as a matter of fact, I did embezzle office funds but I know of this person who said this, I once caught him using a swear word, okay? And so I say to him, "Hey, listen, I don't need to listen to you. You don't even use language properly." Now does that change the fact that I took the money out of the cash drawer? That has nothing to do with it. It's irrelevant. It's a way of getting around the issue. Or what if this guy has a very nice vocabulary, what if he approached me, you know, with all integrity and I have nothing I can criticize but then I think to myself, "He must think he's pretty good. He must think he's big stuff. He's found me doing this wrong. And so I don't have to listen to this because I'm sure that in his heart of hearts, he's not thinking the right thoughts either. Again, it's totally irrelevant but it's a recriminatory way of dealing with criticism, that is to say, you slap me, I'll slap you back.

Another way in which we do this is we harbor grudges, looking to get even. Even when we can't say, "I don't have to listen to you, or I dismiss you because of your motives," we may say, "Okay, I've got to be corrected but, boy, I'm going to watch that guy and I'm going to watch that guy and I'm going to get even with him because I know he's going to slip up one of these days too and I'll show that he's no better than me." What an ugly, terrible, unconverted attitude when we say we've got to harbor grudges, or even worse, we don't harbor the grudge, we just go right out and backbite to make the critic look bad to others. Mind you, we don't say it to the critic. Oh now, there's, you see, he's already got us put in our place but what we will do having been criticized is we'll go around and we'll

tell other people little stories about that person so they won't think he's such hot stuff either.

And do you know why you're all so quiet and hanging on every word? It's because you know this is what you do. I know it's what I do and we all stand condemned. The fact is we resist reproof, we recriminate in the face of it, and then, finally and most tragically, we show incorrigibility. Proverbs 19:25, very similar, by the way, to Proverbs 21:11 but in 19:25 we read, "Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, but simply reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge." You have to understand I've inserted the word "simply reprove" there to get the thrust of the Proverb out. If you want a fool to finally be changed, sometimes you've got to take it to him physically. You've got to actually strike him and then finally the naive might become shrewd. Proverbs has just a word of reproof to the wise and he's ready to change.

And how is our incorrigibility shown? Well, in the first and most obvious way, we refuse to admit error. Have you ever know anybody like that? Have you ever known somebody that no matter how nice you are about it, how logical you are about it, how biblically-based you are about it, no matter how much preparation you make, no matter how consistent you are in your approach, no matter how persuasive is the evidence, they will not admit they did something wrong. Oh, and it's a tragic situation. I've been in situations as a pastoral counselor to people where I have gone so far as to almost outline every sentence and say, "Okay, now look, this word refers to this. You know this happened. You know the Bible says..." I mean, just go as slow as can be and still have someone who says, "No, I wasn't wrong. I wasn't wrong."

Then there are those, of course, who will hypocritically admit their error but they don't have any intention of changing. Now here's the person who says, "Okay, the best way to get rid of this is to say, okay, I was wrong. Of course, I don't intend to do anything different as a result of this." It's just the hypocritical admission of error, and then finally, there are those and this is perhaps not as malicious as the other mistakes but there are those who will admit their error and will at the moment intend to reform themselves but will not then later discipline themselves to remember the need for that change. That is, they tend to ignore it, to let it pass out of their minds. I've known people who would not apologize for something they've said even to their friends when the friend says, "That really hurt. I know you meant it in a kidding way but it was hurtful." I've known people who will not back down even for the sake of their friendship. I've known people who have gone to trials in the church and it doesn't make any difference how many people. You know, it usually works out this way. First, you have an elder or a pastor go and say, "You know, this needs correction." The person won't hear you. Then you go with witnesses, you know, two or three witnesses are saying, "Come on, brother, it's not right. Let's run together here. Let's get it corrected. We're pulling for you but you've just got to change it." Still won't hear you. Then you bring it up before the whole Session with your witnesses. They won't hear you. Then what you do is you have to have a trial and you bring in all the evidence and they won't hear you. Then it goes to Presbytery, and even Presbytery confirms the judgment and it won't be heard. I mean, there are people who have hearts that are so hard, you see, that no matter how much evidence, no matter how

many sincere Christians will tell them, they will not say they were wrong. My friends, if it weren't such a desperate spiritual situation, I wouldn't dare to tell you these things but the Bible says you're carving out a place in hell when you act like that.

Of course, this passage from God's word also indicates there's a very high price to giving reproof. That's one of the occupational hazards of being an elder or a boss at work, or a father, or a husband, or whatever it may be, but there is a high price to giving reproof to people. The text says that if you give a reproof or correct someone, you will receive dishonor, insult, and of all things, hatred. That's what will happen. That's not a very pleasant prospect, is it? The Bible says correcting a fool can be a futile affair and in some cases can be a dangerous affair. If you want an illustration of that, just think about this, when you honk at someone who does something wrong in traffic, just remember the prospect is there the guy is going to come and punch you out for it. In some cases, and this is not an exaggeration, people have been shot over traffic disputes. I'm telling you that you reprove somebody, it can prove to you to be a very detrimental thing.

So let's ask ourselves: should we give reproof to others at all? The tendency might be to hear this and say, "Boy, I'm not going to say anything to anybody. I want to be everybody's friend. I'm not going to step on any toes. Forget that." Well, I'm going to answer in three ways. Should you give a reproof when it has such a high cost? First of all, you should do so cautiously and winsomely when you do, realizing that there is such a potential for recrimination, insult, and hatred even. If you give a reproof, boy, I hope you don't shoot from the hip. I hope you don't do this without preparation and prayer. I hope that your reproof comes cautiously and winsomely.

Secondly, we have to remember that according to the Bible silence is sometimes a sin. Silence can be a sin. In Psalm 50, we read that a person's silence when he knows who the thief is, is a blot on him and in the eyes of God he is guilty of consenting with the thief when he refuses to speak a word. You students, you remember that when you're at school. You see someone cheating and you say, "Boy, I'm not going to be rat fink. I'm not going to be a tattletale. I'm not going to have that reputation." But you remember what the Bible says. Silence is a sin when that sort of thing takes place. Sometimes a reproof does have to be given.

And thirdly, Romans 15:14 says of Christians in particular, that they are able to admonish. That's one of the gifts that comes with regeneration. That's one of the positions of privilege and ability that we move into when we become Christians, you become able to admonish others and, yes, we are to exercise that.

But then fourthly, the circumstances will in some situations be such that it is not right to cast pearls before swine, Matthew, the seventh chapter. Jesus says, "If the swine are going to turn and rend you and it's so obvious from the situation that that's all that's going to come from it, then keep quiet."

So there's a high price of giving reproof. It shouldn't make you completely silent but this should make you very cautious about it. Let's ask ourselves before we end this morning,

how does a wise person respond to correction? In one word: teachably. How does a wise person take it when he's reprov'd? Teachably. Are you willing to take suggestions from others or do you have a closed mind? Does a reprimand make you defensive? Does a reprimand tend to make you have feelings of retaliation? Look, admit it, doesn't it? The first time someone comes to us and says, "You know, I think there's something wrong here." We tend to stand back and put up the wall, or if anything, to look over the wall with a gun and say, "I'm going to get you." Isn't that our first response? There's something wrong with us if it is.

God's word wants us to get into the habit of accepting criticism because according to Scripture, that attitude will ripen into our character, it will become our course of life, our bent in life over against people, to take the extreme example, who are incorrigible criminals. You know, there are people in our society that it doesn't make any difference at a certain point in their life, it doesn't make any difference what you do to correct them, they are not going to be corrected. You know, you can put a man in prison for 20 years and the first thing he does when he gets out is to find a way to go back and repeat his crime. And for those of you who are Christians, that that's far enough away from your personality you just have to say, "How can that be? These people aren't even human beings, are they? They're just animals." We tend to want to depreciate them because of our moral criticism but there are people like that.

There are children who because they are not disciplined by their parents, grow up to be that way. They won't listen to the rebuke of a teacher. They won't listen to the rebuke of an employer. They won't listen to the rebuke of a policeman or a judge. They don't care who tells them they're wrong, they're going to show they'll do whatever they want and what I'm suggesting is not that all of you are on the road to being incorrigible criminals, it's a possibility but that's not my point, my point is just as the incorrigible criminal began at some place in his or her life to not listen to reproof, so the person who is the moral opposite of the incorrigible criminal begins at some place to say, "I'm going to change. I'm going to welcome it when people come and want to show me how I should improve." That is a person who is going to develop a character that's just the opposite of that and the Bible tells us that this will develop our destiny as well.

Revelation 22:11 is a very fascinating verse in that regard. I think we should read it together this morning. It indicates that the time comes when we have set our character forever. Revelation 22:11 says, "He that is unrighteous let him do unrighteousness still. He that is filthy let him be made filthy still. He that is righteous let him do righteousness still. He that is holy let him be made holy still." The point is going to come in your life or in the history of this world where God's going to say, "It's set in concrete. That character that you've been developing either a teachable or unteachable character, a righteous or an unrighteous character is set. No more changes at this point. The direction has become permanent and eternal." That's why I say if you have an unteachable character, you need to realize you may very well be carving out a place in hell for yourself.

So how will the person that's wise and righteous respond when criticism is brought to his attention? In Proverbs the ninth chapter, you'll notice in verse 8 we read, "He will love

you." In verse 9, "He will increase in wisdom and learning." And in verse 10 you see this is rooted in a proper attitude toward God himself. Let's look at each of those very briefly. How does the wise man respond if he is reproved? "Reprove a wise man," verse 8 says, "and he will love you." A wise person takes the critic and sees his motive in the best possible light. That's so hard to do. Since we're defensive, we want to find something wrong in the motivation of the person. Change that, friends. When someone comes to criticize you, read their motives in the best possible light. Say, "I know he means well." And even if you think there's a snotty attitude about it, say, "That's just an inconsistency in performance on their part. What is it that they want to tell me? I know they mean me well." And overlook the flaws in the presentation, and until we become a congregation full of Christians who have practiced criticism and receiving criticism and lovingly dealing with those situations, there are going to be lots of flaws in our performance but would you please overlook the flaws? Would you say they are coming for a good reason, they mean well. I'm not going to worry about the fact they could have said it nicer. I'm not going to worry about the fact that they got a few of the peripheral details mistaken. There's a substance to this that I need to hear.

And the wise man shows humility and openness. Not only is he humble and open, not only does he say, "I think it's very likely that you have something to criticize as I don't look upon myself as someone who is above reproach," not only is he humble and open but this is the real zinger, isn't it? He has a personal appreciation for the help. Now that's touch. I can overlook the flaws, I can do my best to say, "I know they mean well," I can leave myself open to the criticism but when that person leaves my home having laid me low, can I say, "Thank you. I love you for that."

Proverbs 27:9, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend." Isn't that the heart of it? Are we friends? Do we love each other? Do we trust each other? Are we looking out for each other's good? When my friend comes to me and does his best to put it to me charitably, patiently, kindly but persuasively and shows me I'm wrong, I should say, "Friend, I love you. Thank you for not letting me get away with that. I needed to be changed."

The wise man loves you for reproof. Secondly, he increases in wisdom and learning, verse 9 says. "Give instruction to a wise man, he'll be yet wiser. Teach a righteous man, he will increase in learning." Proverbs 12:1 says, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge but he who hates reproof is stupid." Proverbs 19:27, "Cease listening, my son, to discipline and you will stray from the words of knowledge." An unteachable man is not a smart man. We make a real mistake in our society I think often when we evaluate smarts on the basis of academic degrees. You know, I've got plenty of academic degrees if we wanted to boast about academic degrees but, you know, I can be one of the dumbest people on earth when I don't listen to criticism. You stray from knowledge, the Bible says, when you're not open to discipline and criticism.

The wise man knows there's constant need for growth. The wise man never thinks he's arrived and he let's reproof be a constructive thing in his life. Listen to Proverbs 17:10, "A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than 100 blows into a fool." You

got a wise man, just one word and say, "You know that wasn't right," and boy, you're going to see a change. You take a fool and you can beat him 100 times and this is an exaggeration you have to understand, this literary device, but beat him 100 times and it doesn't get anywhere. But a simple word to a wise man will change him.

The wise man seeks more and more understanding in life and he gets better at practical application. That's the great thing. The wise man is the one who is always saying, "I've got to learn more. I need to hear more. I need to find out how to make the Bible work better in my life in this and that area." Which is to say he's the very sort of person that you'd want advice from, right? Because he's always learning, he's always finding more practical ways to be holy and obedient to God. He's the one who's seeing wise connections and he knows what to do in circumstances in life. The man who receives a correction correctly is ironically the man that you want to correct you.

Then finally, the Bible tells us in verse 10 that this attitude is rooted fundamentally, first and foremost in one's attitude toward God. The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy one is understanding. You see, I've been talking this morning for the most part about how do you respond to criticism, how do you respond to the critic? The Bible says in the end that all depends on how you respond to God.

Verse 10, of course, repeats the motto of the book and uses that theologically significant title for God the holy one, and thereby indicates how indispensable and how fundamental the issue is to true wisdom and godly living, the issue of how we respond to criticism and it works like this, brothers and sisters, if we truly fear Jehovah, if we really stand naked and ashamed for our sins before God, if we truly stand as finite and puny creatures in the presence of an almighty God, if we truly have the fear of God before our eyes, it's not going to bring us down when someone comes and criticizes us because when we know where we stand before God, we're not going to be defensive in how we stand before others.

You know that works both negatively and positively. My guess is you're thinking of it this way, when you know you're so wrong before God, then it's a minor matter when someone else on earth shows you you're wrong and that's true. The fear of God will make you humble before me, but you know it's something else. When you know in true reverence and submission before God that you are acceptable to him not because you are good, not because you've attained perfection, not because everything is just so wonderful and sweet about you in your personality but you stand before him only because of the merits of Jesus Christ, and when you have confidence that God says righteous because of my Son, then you don't have to worry when any man comes to you fearing that maybe he'll criticize you unjustly because, after all, if Jesus has justified you, who is any man to condemn? If I know my standing before God, both my sin and my acceptance, then I can take anything from men, can't I? Because if they're right, I'm not surprised. And if they're wrong, I'm still justified in the sight of God.

Don't you see that the reason why wisdom is really at a crux at this point is because everything has to do with our relationship to God? This is not a text that tells us just about being good citizens and good husbands and wives and good friends, this is a text that tells us what is at the heart of our relationship to God and if you can't take criticism, I must tell you for your eternal well-being it's very likely then that your heart is not right before God. Verse 11 promises that the wise course in life will also be the prudent one. Deuteronomy 32 had told God's people that, "Obey my commandments and you shall live long upon the land." But you see, it goes beyond that. The increase in the years of our life, the Bible says, will lengthen out into eternity for us actually. If you are wise, if you are teachable, if you are amenable to the will of God, then of course you're going to live with him forever.

Verse 12 is kind of tough. It's enigmatic because the Hebrew idiom that is behind it, it's rather cryptic, but very simply the paraphrase would be, "It is good for you to be wise but harmful to you to be wicked." Ultimately the one who will gain and the one who will lose due to your behavior or your attitudes will be no one else but you. You will bear it. Galatians 6:4-5 tells us the same thing. Each person bears the weight of the consequences of his work.

So now, you see, if you turn into an unapproachable person, if you turn into an incorrigible person who cannot receive correction, the Bible says you're only cutting off your own nose because in the end you cannot escape your character. Your character is who you are and you need to see that you are making yourself something when you act this way. Three passages in Proverbs to drive that home and then I'll stop. Proverbs 1:25, verses 30 and 31 as well, "But you have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof. They would none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof." Now listen, "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices." Look at Proverbs 15:31-32, "The ear that hearkeneth to the reproof of life shall abide among the wise. He that refuseth correction despises his own soul but he that hearkeneth to reproof getteth understanding." And Proverbs 29:1, "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy."

My final appeal is for your own good, friends. If you will not be teachable, realize that you are hardening into a character and carving out a place in eternity which will eventually be your undoing. You shall eat of the fruit of your own way, you will learn to despise yourself, and you will be broken beyond remedy. So let Proverbs 15:10 put it to you bluntly, "Stern discipline is for him who forsakes the way because he who hates reproof will die."

There are some people who are going to resent hearing this message, I know that. There are some people who may hate or revile the preacher for what he has said this morning but if so, what does this tell us about you? And when will you realize what a miserable life and eternity that you're carving out for yourself? Oh, there's tremendous wisdom in that one crucial characteristic of being teachable.

Let's pray.

God, we wish this morning to say first and foremost we're glad that you're the teacher and our only hope is in your mercy and in your grace to us who have been such a stubborn stiffnecked and rebellious people. We cry out, God, we don't know why you put up with us, oh, but we cry out all the more in gladness that you do. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for bearing with us. Thank you for kindly and patiently working day by day to mold our characters to make us wise and godly righteous people. We ask this morning that you would turn this worship service into an occasion for a great leap of righteousness in our lives, that we would all be humbled and all learn how not to despise reproof but to lovingly and patiently receive it and be corrected, and to do so not just because we want to put on a good outward show to men but because above all we respect and love and fear you. We stand before you and know who we are, undone by our sins and yet standing strong because of our Savior, and with that confidence in our heart, willing to hear the reproof of others. God, make us teachable so that we are more appropriate members of your kingdom, that you would receive the glory and that, indeed, your people and your kingdom would be strengthened on earth that we would then be in a position to teach others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.