

Am I Teachable?

Scripture Text: Proverbs 15:31-33

Introduction

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? There are many things we have learned the past couple of months about being a disciple of Christ. Being a disciple means we follow Jesus. It means we study God's Word. It means we develop an intimate prayer life with God. It also means we are loving, humble, and service oriented. At the core, however, a disciple is someone who *learns* from another. A disciple of Christ is someone who learns from Jesus by following Him and submitting to His teaching. Two weeks ago, we looked at a passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians which challenged us to be humble. We must do nothing selfishly, but in humility, we should count others more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). This is the same attitude that Jesus had when He came to earth to serve. Last week, I challenged our earthly fathers to take responsibility in teaching their children the way of the Lord.

Today, we tie those two aspects, humility and teaching, and come to being teachable. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means we must be teachable. We must have an attitude of learning. Learning is not just soaking up information like a sponge, though. It is listening and heeding the advice and instruction of others. It is having an attitude of correction. When we go off the mark, as we will often do, to be teachable means we will be open to correction and make the necessary change. We must put aside the arrogance and pride that says we know what to do, and listen to the wise counsel of others. So, are you teachable? Do you have the attitude that you can and will learn from others? Do you have the attitude that you will listen to someone else when they give you advice?

Being Teachable Means Listening to Godly Advice

A teachable person will listen when God speaks and change his or her direction accordingly. I believe God can sometimes speak through supernatural ways, but in my experience, His voice has often come through reading the Bible, His Holy Word, or from wise people. I have received correction through those who love me enough to say, "There is something you need to change." As God speaks through His Word, His Spirit, and other people, we are faced with a choice: *will we be foolish or will we be wise?* Being teachable is a sign of wisdom. Proverbs has many statements that compare a wise person to a foolish person. One such proverb is the following:

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Which are you? Are you the one who thinks your way is always right? Are you the one who rarely listens or considers what others may say? Or, are you the wise one who listens to advice of others? Are your ears open to correction? Scripture says a wise person listens to advice. A wise person is open to receiving correction. That is similar to what Proverbs 15:31 says. Look at that verse below.

Proverbs 15:31 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.

Are you open to reproof, meaning, are you open to receiving correction? How do you respond when someone gives you advice or tries to correct you? Do you get defensive? Do you get angry? Do you put your hands over your ears and refuse to listen to them? To be teachable means that we must be willing to receive instruction and correction when someone gives it. In fact, this passage tells us that if we listen to correction we will “dwell among the wise”. This means to be “at home” with wise people. How many of us want to be wise? I imagine all of us do. Whether we are wise or act wisely may be another issue, but I imagine we want to be wise. We want to make the right decisions. We want to do what is right. In order to do this, we must listen to godly advice and correction. How can you receive correction, though, if you do not first listen to it? This does not say “hear” what someone is saying. It says to listen to what they are saying. If we are to be wise, we must listen to what other people tell us and change appropriately.

Notice this verse calls it “life-giving reproof”. Advice and correction can often be good for us; however, not all correction is good. Some advice can be wrong, even detrimental to your life. Someone who tells you to not look before crossing the road is not giving you good advice. Someone who says that the speed limit is just a suggestion is not giving you wise counsel. When it is reproach, and not reproof, it does not help either. Rather, it hardens the heart or crushes the spirit. So, how do you know if something is “life-giving reproof”? One sure-fire way is to measure what you are hearing to what God has said. If what you hear disagrees with scripture, then it is not life-giving reproof. It is something you should not follow. If someone gives me advice about something, I am going to compare what they say to what God says. If it does not follow His Word, I will ignore it. If you have some advice to tell me or some counsel to give me, *back it up with scripture*. When it comes to whether we heed someone’s advice or whenever we have a decision to make, we must weigh these things with what God has told us. At the end of the day, it does not matter what other people tell us to do if it does not match what the Bible says.

Being Teachable Means You Care About Yourself

Have you ever thought about what it means to really love yourself? The second greatest commandment is to love others as you love yourself, therefore, it implies that you love yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). It means that you care about yourself, at least on some level. Do you care enough for yourself to listen to godly advice and change your ways? To listen and heed godly advice actually means you care about yourself. For many of us, to hear a rebuke from someone else means we turn on our defensive system. We put up our shields and go to red alert. While the other person is giving us advice, we are actually mounting a defense, a come back. We think we are protecting ourselves. What is really happening, though? What gets in the way of receiving wisdom, of receiving godly advice? It is pride! We care more about being wrong than learning what is right. We care more about what we *think* is right than actually being right or learning from someone else. This is foolish! Scripture tells us that when we do this, we actually do not care about ourselves. Look at the next verse.

Proverbs 15:32 Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence

To ignore instruction is to despise yourself. Did you get that — despise yourself? Do you think of rejecting wise advice like that? This is like really rejecting yourself? It is like intentionally injuring yourself. We honored our fathers last Sunday. I mentioned last week that my dad had many pearls of wisdom. I did not heed all of them. Some of them were just funny to hear him say. One such saying was this that I would argue with a fence post. I do not remember actually doing this. Maybe I thought it was a good conversation. But, I think what my dad was trying to say was that I was hard-headed. I probably still am. Being hard-headed, not being open to advice and instruction, thinking you know it all, thinking that others cannot teach you anything, that is self-defeating. According to this passage, it means you do not really love yourself. I do not think that anyone would say that they despise themselves. We really want to care about ourselves. We want to do what is best for ourselves. That is natural, and yet, we will ignore wise, godly advice which brings many rewards. One such reward of godly reproof is understanding. We learn from it so that we can make the necessary course correction and not repeat our mistakes. That is a good, caring thing to do for ourselves.

Being Teachable Includes Fear and Humility

To be teachable also means we have fear and humility. This is not any fear, though. Some fear is good, such as the fear of dangerous animals or the fear of dangerous conditions. That fear can help preserve your life. Other fear, though, may not be so good as it can be debilitating. The fear of what might happen can hold you back from doing something good. If I am afraid of a possibility, I may miss the blessing that God intends to give. One such fear that is good, though, is related to our relationship with God. For instance, the fear of God is a good thing when rightly understood. The very first proverb speaks of such fear. Look at the following verse.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Notice the connection between fearing God, being foolish, and having wisdom and instruction. It is the fear of God that is the start of having knowledge. Those who do not fear God are fools, who despise wisdom and instruction. Do you have a right understanding of who God is? Do you have a right understanding of who you are? Do you fear God? Do you honor Him as God? Those are the kinds of issues the last verse of Proverbs fifteen is concerned. This passage reveals to us the importance of fearing the Lord and being humble. Look at the following verse:

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

One translation reads, “The fear of God is a school of wisdom.” I like that! This is a fear of God that leads to wisdom. But, what exactly is the fear of the Lord? The word “fear”

often denotes dread or terror. This is part of the meaning. We should fear God in the sense that He alone has the authority and power to judge us, to punish sin, and to send us to hell (Matthew 10:28). Yes, you should fear God; however, those who have received God's love through Jesus Christ, should not fear God in this way. There is no fear in the love of God through Jesus Christ (1 John 4:18). The Christian fear of God is genuine faith in Him through reverence and awe. Those who follow Christ are aware of the awesome and majestic sovereignty of God. This fear of God is revering Him and being in awe of Him that leads you to a *total dependence* upon Him. If this reverence is absent, a different type of fear of the Lord will be experienced, namely dread. Though Christians should no longer fear men (Hebrews 13:6), death (Hebrews 2:14-15), and life in general (2 Timothy 1:6-7), they must never lose a sense of how awesome God is. This leads to true wisdom. There are several things that fearing God means for us:

Fearing God means that you recognize His *rightful place*. He is God. You are not! To fear God is to recognize who He is and who you are not. Fearing God is to recognize that He is in control, of everything, and you are not. This requires humility. We must humble ourselves before our awesome and holy God. Humility goes hand in hand with the fear of the Lord, and they are prerequisites for gaining wisdom and honor. We must humble ourselves before God and others to receive godly advice. Are you humble?

Fearing God means that you recognize God is the *Source* of all things, including wisdom. God is the greatest teacher and His Holy Word is the greatest book of learning. There is no greater source of wisdom on the planet than the Bible. The very first psalm in the Bible says that a person is blessed if "his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2). Do you delight in God's Word?

Fearing God means that you *obey* Him. Just knowing what God says is not enough. Having wisdom is more than just having knowledge. It means nothing if we know what God's Word says and then we ignore it in our lives. It means nothing if we can quote scripture from cover to cover but we do not obey what it says. We can call ourselves Christian all day long, but if we choose to disobey and to disregard what God has told us to do, then we are not following Jesus Christ. Do not be foolish and despise God's Word. Do not be foolish and despise godly wisdom.

How Can You Know If You Are Teachable?

So, are you teachable? If you are not sure, consider the following questions:

1. How do you respond to correction? Are you immediately defensive? If so, for how long? You know you are teachable when you do not have to criticize back. A classic symptom of an unteachable person is that they "appear" to listen to what you say, while at the same time they are framing their response. A foolish person is always deeply persuaded that what he or she is doing is right. A teachable person, however, will receive input. Can you keep your defenses down and your pride in check? If so, then you are probably a teachable person. A person who is teachable and willing to learn is a good listener. Are you that kind of person?

2. Do other people feel free to give you input? When people feel free to give you advice, it is a good sign that you are teachable. No one wants to risk cleaning up a mess if the person cannot receive a difficult word. I am not talking about the person who likes to meddle in other people's affairs. I am not talking about those who just have to tell you what they know, which is prideful in itself. I am talking about those who genuinely see an issue, care about you, and want to help. Can they freely come to you without fear of having their head bitten off? If so, then you may be teachable.
3. How do you respond to scripture that contradicts how you are living? Are you even reading the Bible? Do you compare your beliefs and practices with what God says? When you read something in scripture that does not match your belief or behavior, do you ignore it? Do you make excuses for why you should not follow God's Word? Do you realize that God knows what is best and He has given you instruction through His Word to live as you should? When you read the Bible, do you check your pride at the door, pray for understanding, and ask God to help you follow it? If you can do these things, then you are teachable.
4. What is the nature of your prayers? When you pray, do you pray to change God's mind, other people, or yourself? Sometimes, we ought to pray for other people to change their ways, but do you ever ask God to change your ways? Are your prayers more about seeking His will or having your will? Are your prayers about having it your way or following His way? When there is a decision to be made, do you pray for understanding and genuinely seek God's will about the matter, or is your mind already made up? If you pray for understanding and seek discernment to make a decision, then you are teachable.
5. Are you growing in the Lord? When was the last time you remember learning something new from God? What in your life changed because of it? Are you changing for the better? If people have been telling you the same things for years, then you are probably not teachable. If you have grown out of those old issues and are now on to new lessons, you are probably on the right track. You know you are teachable when you see growth in your faith, your knowledge of who you are and who God is, and development in your character. Good disciples of Christ are willing to accept what they learn and *apply* it to their lives. As James wrote, someone who is teachable is a doer of God's Word, not just a hearer (James 1:22-23). Is that you?

Even if you recognize that you have not been wise, if you realize that you have not been teachable, the good news is that you do not have to stay that way. You can change! The answer to foolishness is wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). Wisdom is available in the Bible, through God's Spirit, and it is often communicated through His people. Wisdom is applicable, as it has to do with your life right now, not just the life to come. Wisdom will help you make the right decision, stay the course, and grow your faith. Wisdom is also delightful! Correcting your course with God's help is not some awful thing. Proverbs 8:11 tells us, "Wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her." There is no good reason to remain a fool. Therefore, be wise and be teachable.

Conclusion

In closing, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ means that you need to be teachable. It means that you need to have an attitude of learning. It means that you need to be willing to accept advice and correction. Are you a teachable person? What evidences of being teachable are in your life? Where is there room for improvement? Most of the time we do not realize those areas in our lives that need improvement because of our pride. We think we are Ok. Pride gets in the way of being a true disciple of Christ and growing in our relationship with Jesus. If you suffer from a lack of being teachable, pray to God for forgiveness and then ask Him to give you a teachable spirit. Ask Him to put people in your life who will rebuke you in love and who will guide you on the right path. Ask Him to help you grow in listening to godly advice, in loving Him, in loving His Word, and in loving others, with humility, wisdom, and in the fear of the Lord. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!