



“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

A Critical Spirit

Central Truth: Unwarranted criticism hurts the critic and his victim.

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Topic: Criticism; Judgment: Of Others.

You are a critic! And it is not an insult to say you are. You can be a good critic or a bad critic. A critic is a person who forms and expresses judgments on persons or things. But one who indulges in faultfinding and censure in his judgments is a bad critic.

The term critic means “one who expresses a reasoned opinion on any matter involving a judgment of its value, truth, or righteousness, an appreciation of its beauty or technique, or an interpretation.” To be critical in the good sense means “to make a careful analysis; to attempt objective judging to determine both merits and faults.” We engage in that exercise every day.

Many words are used to describe one who criticizes to hurt and condemn rather than to help and improve. A *hypercritical* person places the emphasis on faults or shortcomings. *Faultfinding* is a habitual or unreasonable emphasis on defects. Being *captious* involves having a tendency to find fault with, or argue about, even the pettiest details. *Carping* is the peevish or perverse finding of faults, with the implication that they are deserving of blame. *Caviling* is the raising of quibbling objections on the most trivial points. Criticism must be quite a problem to have such a large vocabulary attached to it.

Our study about “A Critical Spirit” concerns one who finds faults and expresses a censorious spirit. Such a spirit hurts everyone involved.

I. RETRIBUTION TO THE CRITIC (Matthew 7:1, 2)

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7:1, 2). Read that verse again thoughtfully. It suggests a wrong done and a retaliation received.

A. It is wrong to judge with a critical spirit. Jesus was not speaking of discerning between right and wrong when He said, *“Judge not.”* He meant to pass a critical condemnation on a person.

The word *“judge”* (Greek, *krinete*) which Jesus used means to condemn (John 3:17), to pronounce guilty (Romans 2:1-3; 14:22), to accuse or arraign (John 12:48; Acts 23:6), or to pass a sentence of condemnation (John 7:51). No wonder He forbade it.

The idea of judging which Jesus forbids is that of expressing an unfavorable opinion of others in a censorious spirit. Jesus did not forbid that type of judging which approves right and rejects wrong. He warned about forming opinions or evaluating actions in an unkind, bitter spirit — the spirit of animosity. Those who are moved by such a spirit will make a mistake in their judging, as when Jewish leaders attributed Jesus' power to Beelzebub, the prince of demons (Matthew 12:24). Be careful that your attitude does not influence your interpretation of facts.

B. It is certain that you will be judged as you judge. Jesus said that twice in Matthew 7:2. It is taught in other scriptures also. We call that the principle of retaliation. *“He shall fall himself in his own pit”* is the warning of Proverbs 28:10. God said of Ishmael, *“His hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him”* (Genesis 16:12). The book of Esther tells how Haman built a scaffold on which he intended to execute Mordecai, but was hanged on that scaffold himself.

God's law of retribution is that the evil that people intend to do to others is often returned upon their own heads in increased intensity. Be aware of that law before you criticize another.

II. REPROBATION OF THE CRITIC (Matthew 7:3~5)

Why do people judge one another with a critical spirit? What is the reason for their being content in that sin? Matthew 7:3-5 sets out three principles which answer those questions.

A. The critic ignores the need for self-examination (verse 3). Jesus uses an exaggerated illustration to show the absurdity of our critical spirits. Here is a person who wants to get a speck out of his brother's eye when he has a whole log sticking out of his own eye. He sees clearly the tiny speck in

the other person's eye, but he cannot see the beam in his. He needs to heed Paul's admonitions: *"Examine yourselves . . . : prove your own selves"* (II Corinthians 13:5); *"If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged"* (1 Corinthians 11:31); *"If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work"* (Galatians 6:3, 4).

The person who looks at others with a microscope and at himself through the wrong end of a telescope is headed for a surprise when God judges him. The critic typically sees blame in others but none in himself. How tragic!

B. The critic shows a spirit of pride. He is always ready to correct the other brother's fault, saying, *"Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye"* (Matthew 7:4). He is able to correct the other's defect, he thinks. What sinful pride! *"He is proud, knowing nothing . . . : from such withdraw thyself"* (I Timothy 6:4, 5). That is opposite to the humble spirit which seeks to restore the fallen brother and is willing to bear the burden of the other (Galatians 6:1, 2). The first of the seven things that God hates is *"a proud look"* (Proverbs 6:17). The critic had better be aware of God's attitude toward him. He may find himself fighting against God in his pride.

C. The critic fails to seek personal improvement. He needs the beam removed from his own eye before he offers to help another. He needs to be helped before he becomes a helper (Matthew 7:5). Only one with clean hands and a pure heart can discern according to the will of God and truly help a brother in need. *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (II Corinthians 7:1). *"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work"* (II Timothy 2:21).

III. RESPONSE TO THE CRITIC (Matthew 7:6)

What did Jesus mean when He said, *"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine"* (Matthew 7:6)? He spoke in the context of dealing with a bitter, critical person. Here are three things suggested in the verse.

A. Do not expose yourself to the critic. It would be like giving sacred things to dogs. He will not appreciate your good intentions or high resolves. He will not value your high motives or lofty ambitions. He can find fault in almost any statement you make and will attribute meanings you never

dreamed. His purpose, like that of his master, is “*to steal, to kill, and to destroy*” (John 10:10). You will suffer if you expose yourself unduly to him.

B. Do not be disturbed by the rejection of the critic. Your best intentions and most sincere efforts will be trampled under the foot of the critic. What you have prayed over and carefully thought through will be rejected for the opportunity to attack you personally. Remember that the world hated Jesus and hates you because you belong to Him (John 15:18-21). You are “*blessed*” when the world reviles, persecutes, and speaks all manner of evil against you falsely; therefore rejoice and be very glad that you have a reward in heaven of which they know not (Matthew 5:11, 12).

Jesus said he who would receive Him will receive you, and he who would reject Him will reject you. You are in good company when the critical person rejects you. Rejoice!

C. Do not be surprised at the attack of the critic. He will attempt to “*turn again and rend you*” (Matthew 7:6). His master, the devil, goes about as a raging lion seeking whom he may destroy (I Peter 5:8). It is no surprise that his agents do the same. You can be defeated by those attacks if you are not prepared for them. Have your defenses set. Some lie awake at night planning attacks they can make (Proverbs 4:16). They plan evil and then hasten to do it (Proverbs 6:18). Why should you expect anything other than an attack?

The great tragedy is that not all critics are non-Christians. Sometimes a Christian will attack his Christian brother or sister. He becomes the devil's agent in doing so, but he does it. The Bible warns, “*If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*” (Galatians 5:15).

IV. REBUKE OF THE CRITIC (Matthew 7:12)

There is but one way to deal with a person who has a critical spirit: apply the Golden Rule. Jesus said, “*All thing whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*” (Matthew 7:12). That is what Jesus did, and He is our example.

A. Desire the best for everyone. A preacher was told that another preacher was saying bad things about him. He said, “*Let him curse me and call me a devil a thousand times. I will love him and call him a brother in the Lord.*” That is the Christian spirit. “*Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not*” (Romans 12:14).

Suppose there is a person who does not like you and speaks critically of you. Suppose that angers you and you speak critically of him. Then he has

more ammunition to use against you and you against him, and it never stops. But suppose you love him and are kind to him in spite of the criticism. That is the Christian spirit.

B. Do your duty to everyone. If you treat everyone the way you want him to treat you, you will fulfill the law of love toward all. Ephesians 4:17-32 is a fine summary of our duty toward our fellowman. We deal truthfully, lovingly, unselfishly, benevolently, honestly, kindly, tenderly, and forgivingly, if we obey that passage. What a way to live!

Paul said we are to pay in full every debt except that of loving one another (Romans 13:8). That is one debt we pay each day and yet it remains unpaid. Why? Because we need to love one another more and more, even the bitter and critical person.

C. Meet God's demand for everyone. All the ethical teachings of all the Old Testament prophets could be summarized in this one statement: *"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."* All the ethical demands of the 613 laws in the Old Testament and all the ethical demands of the law of grace could be summarized in the same sentence. Jesus himself said, *"This is the law and the prophets."*

To love God with all the heart, understanding, soul, and strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is more important to God than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:33). That is God's demand for everyone.

In dealing with a bitter and critical person, *"Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21). Do not allow the lower standard of the critic to bring you down to his level by making you critical. Show by attitude and action that you are above that. *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"* (Romans 12:18).

Questions

1. When is criticism "constructive"?
2. Why is it wrong to have a critical spirit?
3. Why does God forbid us to condemn one another?
4. What does Jesus' illustration about the *"mote"* and the *"beam"* teach you?
5. How is criticism related to sinful pride?
6. What does Matthew 7:6 say about dealing with a critical person?
7. How does the Golden Rule apply to dealings with a critical person?
8. How is Christian love the answer to criticism?
9. How can you obey the command of Romans 12:18?
10. How has this study helped you in dealing with criticism?

