

Criticism: Giver of Life or Death

Lesson Text: Matthew 7:1-5

- A. "Judge" - carries a variety of meanings from discernment to condemnation. But judicious discrimination and proper is not forbidden - John 7:24; Matt. 7:15f
- B. Jesus warns against certain type of judging - harsh faultfinding; being overly-critical; where one is completely blinded to his own faults and always looking at the faults of others (Large beam or log > small speck of sawdust) Luke 18:9-14
- C. This doesn't forbid reproof, rebuke, and correction of those in sin. Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20 - but the correction is offered in love, not out of pride and anger. A love for truth and righteousness warns, rebukes, but never attacks!
- D. Criticism can be proper or improper; constructive or destructive; a tool or a weapon; it can help or hurt (like an ax or a knife). Proverbs 18:21; Gal. 5:15

I. Why People Criticize: (destructive fault-finding)

A. Many criticize to cover up their own faults.

1. It gives them the opportunity to make excuses for their own spiritual shortcomings: The reason why they get nothing from the sermon is because the preacher is boring, not their attitude. The reason why they find it difficult to live a righteous life is because of all the hypocrites around them, not their own indifference. The reason why the congregation is not growing like it should, is because the failure of others, not because of their own lack of activity.
2. Matthew 7:2-5 - I must first examine myself. James 1:23-24; II Cor. 13:5

B. The chronic fault-finder criticizes because he/she has a poor -image.

1. Pulling others down makes them feel important. They suffer from a low self-esteem, so berating and *self* criticizing others makes them feel bigger and better about themselves. Rom. 12:9-10; Phil. 2:3-5

C. Others criticize because of a self-righteous attitude.

1. They feel that because they have been a Christian longer and have more knowledge and experience, they have a right to judge others. (Arm chair QBs)
2. Notice the characteristics of the wisdom from above - James 3:13-18
3. Someone has said, "Before criticizing your brother's faults, count to ten; that is ten faults of your own."
4. Remember when we point our finger at others there are three fingers pointing back at us.

D. Another reason is because of jealousy or holding a grudge against another.

1. If this is the problem, instead of criticizing, we should go to that person, settle the matter, and make peace with our brother. (Matt. 5:23-24)
2. Being overly critical only causes jealousy, grudges and hard feelings to grow and fester. We should learn to forgive (I Peter 4:8).

E. Criticizing becomes a Habit.

1. We can become so negative in our thinking. Many criticize or complain without thinking.
2. James 4:11-12 - the Greek translated "speak evil against" means literally to "talk somebody down".

3. James 1:19 - be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. (Doesn't mean "quick to listen to gossip")
4. A gossip is defined as "a person who chatters or repeats idle talk and rumors about others." Proverbs 26:20; 17:9; 16:29 - gossip destroys relationships.
5. Rotary International has a four way test: 1. Is it the truth? 2. Is it fair to all concerned? 3. Will it bring good will and better friendship? 4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

II. Exercise Caution in Giving Criticism

A. *At best our knowledge of the facts in a case may be only partial. We need to get all the information and the facts, not just hearsay.*

B. *The facts we know may not be "understood" or properly interpreted.*

A child and his dog wandered away from the house. Several hours of searching turned up nothing. The dog then appeared but covered with blood. The distraught father thinking the dog had turned savage and attacked the boy, shot the dog to death. Later, the child was found in a nearby wooded area safe and unharmed. And nearby was a dead panther the dog had killed in protecting the child. Then the father knew he had made a serious mistake.

C. *It is next to impossible to be impartial in our judgments.*

A mother had a son and a daughter to get married within a month. When asked what kind of mates they got she said, "The daughter got such a wonderful husband. He lets her sleep late, insists on her going to the beauty parlor, will not let her cook, and takes out to dinner every night. But I'm not so happy for my son. He married a girl who is lazy, sleeps late every morning, spends her time in the beauty parlor, will not cook, and makes him take her out all the time."

1. We're so partial, esp. towards those that we love, that we are closest to.

2. James 3:17 - "without partiality" - without favoritism. We should be as quick to criticize that brother who gives \$500 a week as the one who gives just \$5...or that best friend as you are the one you might not like too well. Fairness!

D. *We can only judge what we see externally, only God can see the heart.*

1. I Samuel 16:7 - Our criticism for certain ones might be different if we knew the inner struggles and the daily problems they have to struggle.

2. Poem - A Thought For Today

”Don't find fault with the man who limps
Or stumbles along life's road
Unless you have worn the shoes he wears,
Or struggled beneath his load.
There may be tacks in his shoes that hurt,
Though hidden away from our view.
The burden he bears, if placed on your back
Might cause you to stumble too.
Don't be too hard on the man who errs,
Or pelt him with wood or stone,
Unless you are sure - yea, double sure,
That you have no fault of your own.”

3. Our criticism of others might be different if we understood their circumstances and knew of their inner battles and personal problems.

4. Old Indian proverb - "Don't judge a man until you walk a mile in his moccasins."

III. We Should Be "Charitable" With Others in our Criticism

A. I Corinthians 13:4-8 – notice the characteristics of love:

1. **Longsuffering** – practices forbearance and patience. Eph. 4:3; Col.3:12,13
2. **Does not envy** (not jealous) – just because someone else has more ability or has the opportunity that I wanted (preachers even attack one another).
3. **Is not puffed up** – proud, thinking I am better than others – Phil. 2:3-5
4. **Does not behave in a rude manner** – but in kindness – Col. 3:12
5. **Does not seek its own** – does not act out of self motives – James 3:14-16
6. **Thinks no evil** – in the Greek this is an accounting term that literally means "to keep a ledger" – does not hold grudges; does not keep a record! Col. 3:13-14
7. **Does not rejoice in iniquity** – does not rejoice to see the downfall of others. This is not the goal of love!
8. **Vs.7** – *"Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything."* (Amplified Bible)

B. There is a place for constructive criticism, that can build up and exhort and even rebuke, but this is must be characterized by the proper motive and attitude of heart.

1. The purpose of this type criticism is to redirect and help the recipient, not to tear down and discourage them.
2. Constructive criticism is based on the correct information and facts and is done evenhandedly without partiality and in an effort to obtain the desired goal – the salvation of its recipient.

Conclusion

Let us exercise caution and proper attitudes in using constructive criticism and avoid the kind of criticism that can destroy our relationship with our brother. *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"* Gal. 5:14-15