

The Critical Spirit

Introduction. Most marriages cannot survive with it and children will never thrive with it. Families, friendships, and churches are destroyed because of it. It is the curse of a critical spirit. Criticism can be anything from belittling, condemning, fault-finding, nagging, and sarcasm. A critical spirit is an obsessive attitude of fault-finding and judging others unfairly. This disease of criticism comes from the defiling tongue (James 3:6), so we need to see how to quench the critical spirit.

I. What Is Judging?

- A. The kind of judging that is encouraged.
 - 1. The Bible does not forbid the judgments of civil courts (Romans 13:1-7), the judgment of the church upon disorderly members (1 Corinthians 5:1-13), individual judgments of wrongdoers and evil people (Matthew 7:6, 15-20; John 7:24; Titus 3:10-11; 3 John 9), recognizing and disapproving the faults of others (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20), decisive preaching that draws the line between truth and error (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), or the identifying of false teachers (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).
 - 2. All of these types of judgments must occur by the world and by God's children in order to appreciate and uphold the truth.
- B. The kind of judging that is forbidden.
 - 1. In looking at the context of Matthew 7:1-5, the kind of judging forbidden by the Lord is harsh, hasty, unfounded, hypercritical, uncharitable, malicious, and slanderous judgment.
 - 2. Often we look at people and put the worst possible interpretations on their actions. All hypercritical judgments exercised without sufficient information with the intent of tearing people down is wrong.

II. What Causes Judging?

- A. Some have an inferiority complex. They cannot feel good about themselves until they tear down someone else (Luke 18:9-14).
- B. Some try to justify their own sinful life and console their conscience. Feigning concern for the poor, Judas accused Mary of wastefulness when he himself had been stealing money (John 12:5-6).

III. The Harsh Judge Is Worse Than His Victim

- A. The critic has a "beam," whereas his victim has a "mote."
 - 1. "Beam" is a piece of timber like would be used as a floor joist or ceiling rafter. "Mote" is a speck or splinter.

2. Jesus' picture is that of the harsh critic having a log protruding from his eye (greater faults) while trying to remove a speck of sawdust (lesser faults) from his neighbor's eye.
 3. The Pharisees condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath while they failed to render proper assistance to their parents (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 3:1-6; 2 Corinthians 10:12).
- B. The harsh judge is called a hypocrite.
1. Seeing a fault in the life a person he envies or dislikes, he will condemn it; whereas, he will let the same offense go unheeded or uncondemned in one whom he loves (Matthew 7:5).
 2. The mote hunter pretends to abhor evil while, in reality, this is not the case; otherwise, why the tolerance in one and condemnation in another? Along with being guilty of greater sin, he pretends to be what he is not (Romans 2:1).

IV. Why Is It Wrong To Judge Others?

- A. We cannot see the inward man.
1. Experts say that you can only see the top 10% of an iceberg.
 2. What a difference it would make in our judgments of others if we could only see beneath the surface, seeing their motives, intents, and inner battles.
- B. We never fully know the circumstances of others.
1. Sometimes we make snap judgments when we run across situations that aggravate us.
 2. Not having all the facts can cause us to make some judgments that we could really regret.
- C. It is difficult to be impartial in our judgments.
1. The Greeks used to hold court in the blackness of night, not even being able to see the man being tried, so the judge and jury could pass sentence only on the factual evidence heard.
 2. A Persian king had an unjust judge flayed, with the skin being used to cover the seat of a chair. The king then had the judges set in the chair as a grim reminder to hand down impartial and unprejudicial verdicts.
- D. Not everything we condemn in others is actually sin.
1. Hannah was accused of being drunken, but she was not (1 Samuel 1:12-18).
 2. Jesus was accused of blasphemy, but He was innocent (Mark 2:7).
- E. The right to judge is not ours but the Lord's.
1. Judging is an infringement on the prerogative of God (Romans 14:4, 10-13; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5; James 4:11-12).

2. Since Christ's law prohibits judging, when we critically judge others we call in question the law itself. We become judges of the law rather than doers.

V. The Remedy For Judging

A. Love.

1. Love is always eager to believe the best (1 Corinthians 13:7).
2. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

B. Practice the golden rule.

1. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus tells us that we should act toward others in the way we would have them act toward us.
2. If you think it is unfair to be judged critically, then you should not judge others in the same way.

C. Examine yourself.

1. If we examine ourselves, we will see that there is a lot of good in the worst of us, and a lot of bad in the best of us.
2. If we are critical of ourselves, we will be charitable toward others. When looking for faults, use a mirror instead of a telescope.

D. Look for the good in others.

1. Although Paul was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious, God saw in him the possibility of being a chosen vessel and minister (1 Timothy 1:13).
2. It is easy to concentrate on the one small black dot on the white sheet of paper, and fail to appreciate all the white surface that remains unmarred.

E. Consider the fact that the victim is your brother or sister.

1. Judging is contrary to the very spirit of brotherhood. We are doing our best to fight against the world; we do not need to fight against each other.
2. Being members of the same family, and having the same Father, should make a difference in our demeanor.

F. Put yourself in the other person's place.

1. Ezekiel sat where the people in captivity sat for seven days (Ezekiel 3:15-17).
2. Understanding is one of the biggest preventatives to harsh judging.

G. Remember that our judgments are often wrong.

1. Eliab misjudged the motives of David (1 Samuel 17:28-29).
2. Lysias misjudged Paul (Acts 21:37-38).
3. Nathanael was wrong in his judgment about Nazareth (John 1:46).

H. Consider what judging will do to you.

1. It will blind you to your own faults and to the beauty and virtue in others.
2. It will destroy your friends as you pick them to pieces.

3. It will rob you of happiness, for you will constantly bask in the negative.

Conclusion. Criticism is contagious. Are we aggressively and verbally beating others down or are we gently leading them, admonishing them to pursue righteousness? We are setting the pace for everyone else. Guard your tongue. Guard your brethren. Guard your home. These are the battlefields of spiritual warfare.