

GETTING THE BEST OF CRITICISM

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"... if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (I John 3:21).

"Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1).

As I was leaving a class at the Seminary the other day, a student said to me: "I need help in this matter of criticism. When I am criticized, it actually makes me sick. I must learn how to overcome it."

My conversation with this student caused me to see the necessary relationship between healing and criticism. Most of us need to be healed at the place of our reactions to criticisms. If we are to live wholesome lives and be truly healthy in every part of our personalities, we must learn to get the best of criticism.

If Christians are to learn to get the best of criticism we must have an understanding of what it is. The term "criticism" has at least two meanings. On the one hand, there is the scientific definition: the expression of a reasoned opinion concerning a person or a thing which involves a judgment of its value, truth, beauty, and rightness. On the other hand, there is the more popular use of the term "criticism" to mean a harsh judgment or a censure. In our discussion we shall center our attention mainly upon this latter meaning — the idea of criticism as harsh judgment, as fault-finding, as censoriousness.

Why do people criticize in this negative manner? Why is it seemingly so easy for so many people to be so destructively critical so much of the time? There are several aspects to an attempted answer to this inquiry. Some people are "perfectionists," and they just cannot seem to desist from expressing a critical judgment or opinion when any other individual fails to reach their own "perfectionist" standards.

Some folks are of a jealous nature. They have the mistaken notion, yet one which is psychological nourishment to their appetite of jealousy, that by criticizing the ones they hope to surpass they will actually achieve their desired position of superiority in the minds of those who hear their critical judgment.

Other folks are insecure, victimized by attitudes of inferiority. Such insecurity often is manifested in an irritability of disposition which makes it quite easy to be critical in attitude, and word and deed.

Still others have developed an extremely negative attitude toward life. Too many people are like the speaker in the famous Hyde Park of London who was against everything. He kept haranguing — "Down with this — down with that — and down with that also!" Finally a heckler called out from the audience, "Friend, you ought not to be looking 'down' all the time — you ought to 'look up'!" In reply, the speaker lashed out — "You tell me to 'look up' — I say, DOWN WITH UP!"

And then there is another group of persons, and I scarcely know how to describe them, who give the impression of having been "called" by Some Power (and you and I have the right to decide whether the "call" comes from a Higher or a Lower Power) to sit in spiritual judgment upon everybody else and to criticize others at their own will and whim. I have tried to think of such folks when they stand at the bar of Divine Judgment. The Great Judge asks: "What did you accomplish for the

Kingdom of God during your lifetime?" Then they answer: "We criticized everybody who did not think and speak and act exactly as we thought and spoke and acted. We tried to convince others that all such persons really were not 'spiritual' after all, that we were the truly 'spiritual' ones. We were willing even for our criticisms to divide and separate those who professed to be Christian believers." Reader friend, pause just a moment and try to imagine what what will be the response of the Great Judge, of the One who as a Teacher centuries before had said: "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).

We must learn to get the best of criticism. At the outset let us remember that criticism is inevitable, as long as human nature is what it is, and as long as a person is active. Someone has suggested that the only way to escape criticism is to say nothing, think nothing, do nothing, and be nothing. Another has remarked that there are only three persons who have never been criticized: the person who has not yet been born, the person who is dead, the person who does nothing.

Good people are particularly criticized when they become crusaders. Personal criticism and opposition to a crusader results from ignorance, prejudice, custom, and deep-seated opinions. Oftentimes the criticism and opposition to crusaders, becomes socially organized. Many agencies for evil, backed by almost unlimited finances, have grown up with the deliberate purpose of discrediting Christian teachers and making Christian personal and social standards impossible. Think of Jesus Christ and the tremendous opposition organized against Him by the Pharisees. From a merely worldly viewpoint, it marked the way to the Cross.

We must remember that criticism is to be expected. Therefore, we ought to discipline ourselves in the direction of a certain imperviousness to both blame and praise. Certainly we ought to "thicken our skins" so that we will not be touchy in relation to every bit of criticism that comes our way.

Here is a second practical suggestion: When the criticism comes to you, immediately ask: "Is this criticism true?" If it is true, then thank God for it. The New Testament reminds us of the spiritual opportunity of constructive criticism. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" (Heb. 12:6). "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord" (I Cor. 11:32). "Confess your faults one to another" (James 5:16). "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him" (Luke 17:3). "Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2).

If the criticism is true, immediately begin to remove the cause which justified it. "A wise son heareth his father's instruction" (Prov. 13:1). "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee" (Prov. 9:8). It has been suggested that a Christian should develop the art of self-criticism. Then one criticizes himself even before another has the occasion to criticize him constructively. Such self-criticism first tends to take some of the sting out of justifiable criticism by another, and greatly accelerates the removal of all those causes of one's being criticized.

But if the criticism hurled against you is not true — then drop it at once, forget

it immediately — for God knows the truth! The Apostle John clearly tells us this in one of his epistles: "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (I John 3:20,21). And in the forgetting of the untrue criticism, we must let our life also belie it. Another apostle exhorts us to such a refutation of an untrue criticism by our lives: "... that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (I Peter 2:12).

A final suggestion in this regard is to maintain a truly Christian attitude toward those who are critical of you. Remember, if you belong to Christ, you will react to criticisms, through His Spirit, just as He reacted. We are not to retaliate. We are to pray for our critics, even if they must be reckoned as enemies. We must be willing to perform deeds of kindness toward the critical person. We must make it a life discipline — to give out love to everybody, to both friend and foe. Let us so grow in grace that anything derogatory said about us will belong to the one who said it, and not to us about whom it is said. We must deal with the individual critic with a patience and wisdom born of Christian love and grace. At the same time we must deal with organized opposition intelligently, courageously, uncompromisingly, aggressively.

Learning to get the best of criticism, through the grace of Jesus Christ and the counsel of the Holy Spirit, is healing indeed. And when such healing takes place, criticism will no longer make us sick.

OBITUARY

The funeral service of the late Mrs. Walter Long, age 87, Sussex, was held in the United Baptist Church, Snider Mountain, December 18th. Mrs. Long is survived by two daughters and two sons: Mrs. Edgar Carson, Mrs. Arthur Copeland and Roy all of Sussex and Eslie, Snider Mountain. The funeral service was in charge of Pastor, Rev. R. S. Gregg. A. D. Cann preached the funeral sermon. Rev. H. E. Anderson, a former pastor made reference to their Christian loyalties. Bethany Bible College mixed quartet sang appropriate numbers, and Rev. Raymond Beesley assisted in the service.

DEATHS

Mrs. Clissie Josephine Peacock, age 71, died at her home on East Pleasant Street, Amherst after a brief illness.

Funeral Service was held in Campbells Funeral Home conducted by the writer, assisted by members of the choir.

To the sorrowing we extend our sympathies.

Rev. H. O. McGeorge

Mrs. Florence A. Pettigrew, age 92, died at Highland View Hospital Aug. 18th. Funeral Service was held at Furlongs Home. Rev. H. O. McGeorge officiating, assisted by members of the choir.

We wish to extend our sympathies.

Rev. H. O. McGeorge

The funeral service of the late Mrs. Harry Cook was held in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Fredericton, N. B., conducted by the pastor, Rev. N. E. Trafton. Rev. L. H. Hicks preached the sermon. Members of the local W.C.T.U. attended. Interment was in the Douglas Rural Cemetery.