

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE CRITICIZED

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Matthew 5:44.

When man, through Adam, fell into sin, his interior life became jumbled and confused, with little ability to see himself as God sees him. And yet he continues to look out upon the world with considerable skill in noting its imperfections.

We are trained to be critical. Our cultural advancement and the educational process tend only to sharpen our critical faculties. The study of the sciences and various other subjects require us to tear apart for minute examination, in order that we may understand the structure. This is all right in its place. We could not make the proper advancement without it. But when this highly developed critical faculty is applied in our human relationships, untempered with love, it becomes very damaging both to ourselves and to our fellow men. More harm is probably done to the propagation of the gospel and to the progress of the work of the kingdom of God by the critical faculties of professing Christians than by any other one besetting sin.

Nearly everybody gets criticized. One way to determine whether or not you have any force is by the extent to which you are criticized. The only people who never get criticized are those who never do anything. When a person does things and gets his head above the masses, there will always be people who will try to knock him down to their level. That is part of human experience. If we do anything worthwhile, we cannot escape from criticism, but we can rise above it.

How can we rise above criticism? By how we think about it. The secret of being victorious over criticism lies in the mental attitude. God gave us minds, and it is by using our minds that we may rise above life's trials and adversities.

An ancient philosopher once said, "The mind is the master of all fortune. In it is the cause of either misery or happiness." Whether you and I have misery or happiness depends on how we think, how we handle our experiences, first in the mind and secondly in action. By our thinking we pre-condition our lives.

A man got on a train one night grumbling. He said to the porter, "You've got me right over the wheels. I can't sleep over the wheels. Besides, I don't like the looks of this bed, and I never could sleep on a sleeping car anyway. I know I'm going to have a terrible night's sleep." When that man got up the next morning he grumbled about having a bad night. No wonder he had a bad night. He got what he asked for and expected. It was exactly as the porter said, "That man pre-conditioned his night's sleep." Even so, you mentally pre-condition what life is going to do with you.

You are perpetually running the gauntlet of somebody's scrutiny, judgment and criticism. You cannot go far in life and accomplish much without being criticized. However, if you pre-condition your mind in the knowledge that this is the way life is, then you are not going to be surprised or taken aback when criticism comes. You can meet it with the shock-absorber of peace at the center. It will be as though you had inside you a great, big, quiet pond. If somebody throws a stone into the pond, there is a little ripple for a moment, but the pond receives the stone and loses it in the depths of its peacefulness.

There are two kinds of criticism. Much criticism is just predicated on unreasoning ill will or hate. Such criticism comes from people who don't like you because they do not like you. These people can make you stronger if you are willing to say, "All right, so here is ill will; I will not return it; I will not pay any attention to it." Then, there is that other kind of criticism we get when people see in you or in me something with which they disagree. So, we must have the grace to look and see if this criticism

is justified. If it is justified, profit by it; if it is not, ignore it.

If you can take criticism with equanimity, and if you can benefit from it, you have learned one of the major lessons of effective living. Just endeavor to see how much of truth, if any, there is in it, and then be governed accordingly.

The closing paragraph in Matthew five is a remarkable passage. It is my privilege to explain and expound it. It is your privilege to apprehend and appreciate it. Then it is your and my responsibility to practice it. God grant that we may have sufficient grace for these high tasks!

Our Lord stated, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." He was not quoting the Old Testament, for that teaching was not found therein, but He was repeating the current teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. That was actually what they taught. Believing that a "neighbour" meant only an Israelite, they taught the Jews to love the Jews, but they told them at the same time to regard everybody else as an enemy. In contrast with their perverted teaching Christ said, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies." Thus our Lord specified what the attitude of Christians toward others should be.

To love their neighbors was simple, easy and expected, but to love their enemies was something at which their hearts rebelled. Their love was limited to the circle of friends and neighbors, but Christ spoke to them about a love that embraces enemies as well as friends. The Jews found this revolutionary teaching on love extremely difficult to accept and practice, but they are not alone in this respect. Many people, who call themselves followers of Christ, find it easy to love their friends and neighbors, but extremely difficult to love their enemies. Yet this is the explicit teaching of Christ in our text.

God loves His enemies, and does good to them that hate Him. There are people who are evil and unjust; nevertheless, God sends rain upon them and causes the sun to shine upon them. Their crops grow like those of godly men. God does not bless only the labors of the Christian farmer, but at the same time He blesses the efforts of the unrighteous and unjust farmer. God does not deal with them according to what they are or according to what they do. This reminds us of what Augustine said: "Good for good, evil for evil: that is natural. Evil for good: that is devilish. Good for evil: that is divine."

When Christ was here in the flesh He loved His enemies. He did not render evil for evil. He did not take vengeance on His enemies. He manifested His good-will towards His enemies in His labors for them, in His preaching to all who would listen to Him, in His warning, instructing and entreating them, in His praying for them, and in His forgiving them when they repented of their sins. In the midst of His agonies on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." If we do not love and pray for our enemies, we are not like God the Father or Christ the Saviour. God's Word says, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

During the Revolutionary War there lived in Pennsylvania the pastor of a little Baptist Church by the name of Peter Miller. Near this church lived a man who secured an unenviable notoriety by his abuse of Miller and the Baptists. He was also guilty of treason, and was for this sentenced to death. No sooner was the sentence pronounced than Peter Miller set out on foot to visit General Washington, at Philadelphia, to intercede for the man's life. He was told that his request could not be granted. Miller replied, "I have not a worse enemy living than that man." "What," rejoined Washington, "you have walked sixty miles to save the life of your enemy? That in my judgment puts the matter in a different light. I will grant you his pardon." The pardon was written and Miller proceeded at once to the place where the execution was to take place. He arrived just as the man was being taken to the scaffold, who, seeing Miller in the crowd, remarked, "There is old Peter Miller. He has walked all the way from Ephrata to have his revenge grati-

fied today by seeing me hung." These words were scarcely spoken before Miller gave him his pardon, and his life was spared.

One end of the Post Office in Washington, D. C., carried these lines:

"Messenger of Sympathy and Love
Servant of Parted Friends
Consoler of the Lonely
Bond of the Scattered Family
Enlarger of the Common Life"

At the corresponding spot on the other end of the same building there are these words:

"Carrier of News and Knowledge
Instrument of Trade and Industry
Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance
Of Peace and Goodwill
Among Men and Nations?"

These are unusual inscriptions. They glorify the everyday matter of mailing a letter. They put a halo around such hardworking people as postmen. They make of the common postage stamp a thing of beauty and power. They point up the importance of good human relations that disregard all boundaries and deal with all men alike. They suggest some qualities of the obedient Christian.

Our Saviour, Christ Jesus, was a specialist in human relations. He, too, was interested in the communications that took place among people. He was concerned with bringing people together and with bridging the barriers that separated them. His tool was love. This kind of love, said Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, makes for a distinctive kind of human relations. It not only ties friends and families together, but it reaches out to the hated and the unloved. It includes enemies in its scope. This was a brand new idea. Christians were to do more than others at this point. They were called upon to demonstrate patient understanding, sympathetic concern and friendly love toward their enemies.

Why should we love our enemies? First, in order to follow the example and reflect the spirit and attitude of God. God loves all people, even those who despise Him, so why shouldn't we? Do we not want to be like God? Our failure to love our enemies proves that we are not like God. Secondly, loving our enemies will bring rich rewards from God. If we love only those who love us, we will not have any reward. Thirdly, if, in being Christians, we are not different from those who are not, then why be Christians at all? Even unsaved friends will love their friends, but only those who know Christ in personal experience will love their enemies. Every Christian should have the desire to show the world that he has something which it does not have. If you do not love your enemies also, you are no different from millions of others who do not claim to be Christians. By your love for your enemies you prove your spiritual resemblance to God.

Why is a critical attitude wrong? First, criticism is unfair to the one being criticized, in that it does him an injury. Second, criticism is unfair to the one doing the criticizing, in that sitting in judgment acts like a boomerang. Criticizing another sets the standard of God's judgment of the one who does it. The Bible says, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Romans 2:1). Christ 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). Third, criticism is a sin against God.

Who are your enemies? Your enemies are "them that curse you," them that wish you ill or evil; "them that hate you," detest you; "them that despitefully use you," threaten and insult you; and "them that persecute you," speak against you and try to do you an injury.

How shall we treat those who criticize us, and seek to hurt us? The natural and normal reaction is that of retaliation, that is, giving them as much as they send, paying them back in their own coin and more of it. Why hit back? The critic has already done himself more harm than you can possibly do him by retaliating. After all, your reputation does not depend on the words of others, but upon the heart condition out of which your deeds issue and the things you do. You can trust your reputation in the hands of the Lord. It is sometimes desirable to correct misinformation, but that is different from retaliation, and does not violate the law of love. A true Christian will abstain from retaliation.

Whereas nature says, "Use all your powers of body and mind to repel injuries, and to punish those who are against you"; Christ says, "Use none of them, but to forgive, love, bless, help and pray for your critical enemies." No Christian can afford to stoop to the level of his critic in retaliation. If we refrain from doing so, the Lord will bless us in unexpected ways. Illustration: tract on the Holy Spirit. Christ wants us to live happily and victoriously, and for this reason has told us what to do when we are criticized. He said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you," This is the most elevated, the most practical and the most wonderful philosophy that has ever been propounded. It is a philosophy that leads to great peace, great understanding and great effectiveness in living. Are you willing with the help of the Lord, to put these great principles into operation in your life?