

A CENSORIOUS SPIRIT

Matthew 7:1-5

A censorious person is one who is addicted to the sinful habit of criticizing others harshly and adversely. Censoriousness is one of the great blots on the social life of many Christians today. Unfortunately, some of them seemingly have nothing else to talk about except their acquaintances, so they discuss their conduct; they charge them with having unworthy motives; they repeat and enlarge upon slanderous statements about them; and they derive much pleasure from condemning them. Of course, such an uncharitable and censorious spirit hinders Christian fellowship and hampers the work of Christ. This sin of criticizing others, when God has not called upon us to do so, is so unkind and unnecessary that it behooves those of us who bear the name of Christ to see to it that we are not culprits in this inconsiderate indulgence.

It is not surprising that Christ devoted a part of the Sermon on the Mount to this besetting sin of judging and condemning others. On this important subject our Lord spoke very plainly. What He said about it was not merely a bit of good advice to be heeded, but it was a definite command to be obeyed. His command was in the form of a prohibition. He commanded us to abstain from the sinful habit of judging. He said, "Judge not." If He had said nothing more, those two words should cause the Christian who is guilty of this sin to discontinue the practice. Christ's word should be final with the Christian. Even though the Christian's critical faculty may be highly developed, he can win the victory over it through Christ.

As we ponder the meaning of the words, "Judge not," we are reminded that we are living in an age which dislikes thought and hates theology and doctrine. It is an age which is characterized by ease and compromise and appeasement. It is an age that dislikes strong men, because it says that strong men are always upsetting. The man who is praised today is the one who can be described as being in the middle of the road, a pleasant man who does not create difficulties and problems because of his views. Certainly our Lord's statement cannot be interpreted as meaning that we must never think, never arrive at conclusions and never apply them. Instead of forbidding us to make observations and mental assessments, He is very much concerned that we not become engaged in the work of passing judgment and expressing condemnation.

I. The Causes Of A Censorious Spirit.

1. Indolence.

Criticism is so easy. It does not require intelligence, character or Christianity. It is doubtful if anything is much easier. For this reason, a person who is too lazy to be engaged in doing things that are constructive and worthwhile soon finds himself meddling in the affairs of others. He is prone to give judgment when the matter is of no concern whatever to him. If any Christian is doing his duty, as he should, he is entirely too busy to be looking for the faults of others.

2. Jealousy.

You will recall that Saul was suspicious and jealous of David. Of this fact we read in I Samuel 18:12, "And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul." It is not surprising, therefore, that he was very critical of the man of whom he was jealous. If you ever know the feeling of being rather pleased when you hear something unpleasant about another, that is jealousy. If you are jealous or envious of another and then hear that the one of whom you are jealous or envious has made a mistake and immediately you have a feeling of self-satisfaction or pleasure, that is jealousy. It is this spirit which leads to criticism and censoriousness.

3. Self-righteousness.

Censoriousness is caused by the spirit of self-righteousness. Self is always behind it. Self-righteousness is a feeling of superiority, a feeling that self is all right but that others are not, a spirit of self-satisfaction. That spirit usually causes one to express himself readily and censoriously.

4. Hypocrisy.

In proportion as one is quick to discern the faults of others, he becomes less aware of his own shortcomings. The censorious person is the last to perceive his own sin. His personal sin may be as huge as a beam; yet, he is quite unable to see it because he is busy hunting for the speck of dust in his brother's eye. Men have no right to sit in judgment on others who are themselves guilty of the same or equally serious sins.

II. The Curse Of A Censorious Spirit.

1. It is absurd.

It is ridiculous for any human being to appoint himself and to assume the authority of being a critic and judge of others. Nobody in heaven or on earth has appointed you or anybody else to judge and to condemn others. You certainly do not have any right to assume that authority.

One's own condition is such that he is not capable of judging others properly. Since man is neither omniscient nor infallible, he is not entitled to judge the motives behind the actions of another. Such judgments are out of place in any life, and they are especially unbecoming in a Christian. There is so much important work which had far better be done by us than that of being self-appointed judges of others.

2. It is blinding.

A censorious spirit so blinds a person that it makes it impossible for him to estimate another correctly. A faultfinder is never a reliable factfinder. This is true because the one who seeks for the worst finds that for which he is seeking. It is true here as elsewhere that "he that seeketh findeth." To seek for the worst is to become blind to the best. Just in proportion as you center your attention and look for what is wrong you fail to see what is right. Our faults are so numerous and great that they blind and disqualify us for judging others.

3. It hinders growth.

A person with a censorious spirit is always looking for blemishes in others and is delighted when he finds them. In his search for them, he gets a malign satisfaction out of taking trivial matters and treating them as though they were of major importance. One who is seeking for the worst is never actuated by a Christian motive. People often search for flaws in others and judge them harshly in order to salve their own consciences. When their own sins make them uncomfortable, they seek to gather for themselves a bit of comfort by saying, "See, I am not the only one." These people seem to think that the larger the number of the guilty the less is their own guilt. If I am dying of some incurable disease, it certainly would not help me in the least to learn that thousands of others are dying of the same fatal disease.

Perhaps you are hoping to find something wrong in those whom you are judging. Maybe you do not think that you can afford to give them a clean bill of health. That is the very spirit of Satan himself. You remember that when God called attention to the high character of His servant Job, Satan fairly shook with laughter, implying his amazement at how easily he thought the Lord had been deceived. Satan said, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" He was not willing to admit that Job was

really a good man. While he conceded that Job was good in his outward conduct, he contended that he was evil in his motive.

It will ever be true that the keener your eyes become to the faults of others, the blinder they will become to what is wrong in your life. The more you magnify the flaws of others, the more you will minimize your own. The more you minimize the virtues of another, the more you will magnify your own.

Many indulge in judging others because they think that by tearing down other people they thereby build up themselves. But, nobody has ever built up himself by tearing down somebody else. No man can build a house by tearing down the house of his neighbor. No man ever gets right with God or becomes a better Christian by confessing the sins of his fellowman. Looking for faults in others arrests one's intellectual and spiritual development and is a sure way of ministering to his own personal wretchedness.

4. It leads to self-satisfaction.

We are prone to believe the worst about others because it helps to justify our actions or to excuse our lack of action. Was ever a man more pleased with and proud of himself than the Pharisee who went into the temple to pray? He did not see any defects in himself or his conduct. Why not? Because he was so busy picking out the flaws in a certain poor fellow who was pounding himself on the breast and saying in broken-hearted penitence, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

5. It destroys usefulness.

A censorious spirit kills one's usefulness. Few, if any, are ever helped by sharp criticism. As long as there is a beam in his own eye, the self-appointed judge cannot remove the mote from the eye of another. Beam-pulling must always precede mote-removing. Think of a man with a splinter in his eye trying to tell his friend how to get a speck of dust out of his eye! Imagine a man without a hair on his head undertaking to sell hair restorer! Picture a three hundred pound person insisting on a friend who weighs half that much reducing! One who is constantly judging others cannot make friends and influence people because he is not a close follower of Jesus Christ. It is impossible for anybody to do what Christ has forbidden and live close to Him.

6. It incurs judgment.

As a man soweth in his judgment of others, so shall he reap. Don't judge other people if you do not wish to be judged by them. The person who is always critical and censorious of others is always one who is being criticized. As you judge, you will be judged. By judging we set the standard for our own judgment by others in this life. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." If we sit as authorities in judgment upon others, we have no right to complain if we are judged by that very standard. It is only fair and right that we should be thus judged. Harsh judgments on our part will provoke others to make the same kind of judgments of us. The measure you give will be the measure you get.

There is the story of the man who was assigned the task of building a house according to the specifications of the employer who wanted to help him. Unfortunately, he took advantage of the kindness of the man and put a lot of shoddy work into the building. When the work was completed the accounts were paid and no questions were asked. Then, to the man's surprise and chagrin, the house was given to him for his own use. The story is a parable of life. Each of us is building the house in which he lives. Sooner or later, you will always be paid back in your own coin. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

"There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you."

III. The Cure For A Censorious Spirit.

1. Recognize the sinfulness of it.
It is a weapon by which one wounds himself, others and the Lord.
2. Repent of it.
3. Rely upon God's grace to help you overcome it.