

“BE MERCIFUL, NOT CRITICAL” By Pastor YAU
Matthew 7:1-6 December 6, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

1) It's bad to be judgmental: “Do not judge” here isn't about defending biblical doctrine or protecting moral values, but about what people criticize, condemn and censure and how people fault-find others. When a person or a group of persons set themselves as the standard of right and wrong, good and bad, as the scribes and the Pharisees did, they tend to criticize those who do not do things that conform to their standards. This is particularly evil when someone has fallen, sinned or violated the law of God, because criticism and condemnation will already be piling up on him. Such acts of cruelty don't reflect the loving nature of God in the lives of His children.

2) It's better to be merciful: When someone has slipped and fallen, it is time to show compassion and love, not criticism, judgment or censure. What he needs is not being pushed away or beaten down, but the offering of a helping hand to pull him up and help him to stand. That is the best time to show mercy, speak kindly to him and lend him a helping hand so he can stand up again. There shouldn't be a spirit of criticism and judgment in the humble and loving heart of God's children, but only loving compassion and forgiveness to those who have

come short. Paul encouraged us: “Brothers if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:1-2)

WHY PEOPLE LOVE TO CRITICIZE: Evil nature:

1) Criticism boosts our false self-image: Pointing out someone else's failures or tearing down his dignity and value makes us seem a little better about our own failures, at least on our own eyes. It fosters our own pride, ego and self-image.

2) Criticism is a source of sinful joy: Human nature has a tendency to take joy and pleasure in hearing about and sharing failures that happen to other people. That is why mean-spirited gossiping is such a favorite thing among many people.

3) Criticism justifies our own life: When we criticize the failures of others, we justify, or in secret celebrate, our decisions and actions. We tend to self-congratulate our own life, the decisions we made and actions we took. We tend to believe that we did all those things right, and that's why we didn't fail.

4) Criticism serves as an outlet of revenge: When we criticize the failures in others, we often feel that they deserve it. This is particularly true if and when there isn't anything else about which we may feel “I am better than they are.” At least, in their failure and fall, we feel

“justice is done” to them.

WE SHOULD NOT CRITICIZE: That's because. . .

1) We don't know all the details: When we don't know all the reasons, back-ground, or circumstances and start to criticize or just give opinions, it is never accurate or appropriate. Things happen for reasons and behind-the-scene facts we just don't know. When people talk, usually they only tell us the good side and not all the facts. When we hear words of rumors, usually it is only the bad side of the story. The spirit of criticism is judgmental and self-righteous. The spirit of silence is the spirit of wisdom, compassion and caring.

2) We all have our own failures: When we criticize someone about something that fails, there are failures in our own life we don't want to remember. We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) When we criticize the sins of others, we are hypocrites in overlooking our own sins. If you didn't fail in the sins of your friend, you certainly sinned in other things. To God they all are sins and need forgiveness, not criticism. Yes, we can and need to give friendly advice or warning before someone falls. But that isn't the same as criticism after he has fallen.

3) We never know enough to criticize: Many of us think we know our spouse well enough to marry him or her. But we all realized how little we truly knew him or her a

few weeks after we married. There is a limit to what we can know about another person; there is so much we can never know about him: his childhood life, his family, parents and siblings; his school years, including his teachers, classmates and events that happened in those years; then his genes, temperament, his mental and emotional capacity and other factors. It's easy to criticize someone about his failure in marriage, but it isn't easy to understand his experience and his relationship with his spouse day in and day out. There is so much that goes into influencing a person's life that only God knows. So, for us to criticize is not fair.

4) We usurp authority we never have: Judging others usurps God's authority and holiness that we never have. When we judge or criticize another person, be it rightly or wrongly, we assume that we are worthy and have the right to be the judge over the life of another person. That is the same as claiming the right as God, because only God is holy enough and just enough to judge anyone. This kind of attitude is exactly the one thing Jesus condemned the scribes and the Pharisees for. The Bible has words to curb us from doing that: “Who are you to criticize the servant of another household? Before his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand. For the Lord is able to make him stand.” (Romans 14:4)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES ON CRITICISM: (7:1-6)

1) We shall be judged the same way: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (7:1-2) The irony is that we all are tempted to judge others, but none of us likes to be judged by anyone. But God wants us to know that we will be judged, both by people and God, the same way we judge others. We should be very careful when we are tempted to judge others. This is a stern warning to all of us not to judge or we will be judged. God also wants us to know that we shall be judged with exactly the same attitude or severity that we judge others. When we judge others with little or no mercy, we shall be judged the same way. This has nothing to do with whether our judgment on others is fair or not. It has everything to do with the consequences if we judge others. Whether one fails or not, or how bad his failure may be, it isn't our job to criticize. We risk being judged the same way if we criticize them. Read James 3:1-2, “Not many of you shall presume to be judges (teachers), my brothers, because you know that we who judge will be judged more strictly.”

2) We shouldn't find fault with others: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye.” (7:3a) “Look”, *blepeis* in Greek, means continued action of seeking or searching. A speck of sawdust is a tiny

thing that you won't see without intentional acts of searching. That is mostly the way we judge others: We will continue to seek and search to find fault with others, even a very little thing, to justify our criticism. On Nov. 5, *Politico* dug out one very small thing they claimed Ben Carson did when he was 12 or 13 years old, living in a very poor black neighborhood, as they tried to discredit his character. When we try to use a magnifying glass to keep finding faults in a brother, but we forget about many of our own terrible offenses and failures, this is not just plain hypocritical, it is outright injustice. We should not embark on looking and searching to find faults in others, but search our own hearts before God as King David did: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

3) We shouldn't deceive ourselves: "(But) pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (7:3b NIV) A plank, *dokon* in Greek, is a large thick piece of wood, like planks of a fence. The KJV puts it as a beam, which is a very large and long square piece of timber usually used for house or ship building. Be it a plank or a beam, this is millions of times larger than a speck of sawdust. People who want to find fault in others will always see those tiny specks of sawdust in the eyes of others, but they are blind to see the plank or beam in their own

eyes. They are deceived by their own blindness that overlooks the huge failures in their own lives, so they feel free to criticize or judge others. They are worse than just being hypocritical, they are indeed unjust, so their judgments on others will be rendered worthless and useless. Most of us don't see or don't care about our own failures and sins when we are so eager to criticize others. But Jesus says that we need to look at our own sins before we point our fingers at others.

4) We need to stop being hypocrites: “You hypocrites, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” (7:5) There are two important steps in this verse we all need to take before we think we can criticize others. First, we need to deal with our own sins, which might be much more serious than those in our brother's life. This is a must-take step to right our life of the wrongs we have done. And if we can't do that, we should not dare to criticize anyone. Second, after asking God to take care of our sins, then we can see clearly what is wrong in our brother's life. With all the humongous sins in our own lives, how can we have the right perspective to see things clearly to help our brother remove his speck? While sins occupy our own life and heart, we are unable to see things right or give any correct judgment on anyone.

CHOOSE A BETTER WAY:

1) Know what doesn't work: As we live through life, we learn that there are ways of doing things that work, as well as other ways that don't. One of the don'ts is criticism. Very rarely, if ever, has criticism worked well. Usually criticism doesn't work either for the criticizer or the criticized. We talked about the negative effects of criticism on the criticizer early in this message. We also know that very few times criticism works to bring positive results. Most people react to criticism in negative ways and become defensive and antagonistic to the criticizer. On November 9, Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister met with President Obama for the first time in over a year since he came earlier this year to speak to the U.S. Congress against the nuclear deal with Iran. Of course his open criticism of the U.S. president had created a huge political storm between the two countries. On a personal level, criticism has destroyed countless marriages, collapsed friendships, broken relationships at work, in school, even in churches. Criticism can only harden hearts on both sides, making change very difficult, if not impossible.

Criticism is not the same as suggestion or advice. Suggestion and advice can serve good purposes when they are sought by others as they see need, and they respect you. Criticism is an unsolicited act of negative comments. It is good to give suggestions and advice if

people ask for your help. But when people are not ready to listen to you, or they don't have much respect for you, your voluntary giving of suggestions or advice usually will be seen as criticism and will seldom work, and it could create hard feelings or even animosity between the parties.

2) Know what had worked: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32) In KJV, it is rendered “kind and tenderhearted.” *Krestoi* also means merciful. I think “kind and tenderhearted” is easier to understand than merciful. This is how God acts to all of us. He portrayed this character best in the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, where God was the father who was kind and tenderhearted to his wayward son. The result of being tenderhearted is forgiving all the sins of his son. This is what we need to learn, to do to each other when we see sins in a brother. Instead of pointing fingers at a brother who failed in his walk of Christian life, we are to be compassionate to one another and to forgive one another. The Bible reminds us of the fact that we have been forgiven by God of our own sin and