

## (Faces Surrounding the Cross)

### “The Critic’s Face!”

Matthew 27:39-44

**Intro.** – One of the most obvious faces surrounding the Cross of Christ, is that of the critic. Such really doesn’t surprise us, does it? We meet this face almost every day and it would seem no one is exempt.

Illus. – Robert Redford, commonly called “environmentalist” Redford, didn’t practice what he preached. Several years ago while skinning in Utah, he landed his helicopter illegally in a Federal Area. No motorized vehicles were allowed; so, he has been cited by the Forest Service...

During the 1980 Presidential Campaign, the *Wall Street Journal* criticized then candidate Ronald Reagan for reading from cue cards. Interestingly enough, when President Carter was making this criticism, he the President was reading from cue cards.

Senator John Danforth of Missouri was a staunch advocate demanding we, the US should import far fewer cars and drive American made cars. Perhaps his demand would have had more impact if it weren’t for the fact he owned two Mercedes Benz when voiced this demand.

Yes, when it comes to critics and criticism we all are on familiar ground. This is a subject of universal interest. Why? At least two solid reasons can be given:

First, we have this interest because all of us are at times criticized. Those who suffer most from the critics are the ones who dare to differ most or put another way fail to go with the flo. A middle of the road approach is often sought. This, however is futile because no one will ever have universal appeal.

Second, we have interest in critics/criticism because all of us at times play the role of critic. Some do this with kindness and caution while others do it with recklessness and pride. Pride did I say? Yes, these are the one who think they see more with their eyes closed than most see with their eyes open.

This last point certainly illustrates our text. Christ, God in the flesh, is on the cross. His enemies file by with unmerciful criticism; yet, Jesus opens not his mouth? Does this not teach us something? Just what does our Lord expect of us when criticized or when we choose to be a critic? Is it Christian to ever be critical? How are Christians to take criticism?

*Purpose: to better understand criticism as revealed to us by the Cross*

By looking at how our Lord dealt with the criticism cast His way prior to the Cross and while He hung on the Cross, we will have the Biblical view in how we are to deal with and deal out criticism.

## I How to GIVE Criticism

- i.e. how to make our criticism Christian and how to react criticism given to us in a Christian manner
- Jesus said, “*Do not judge lest you be judged...*” (Matthew 7). In the same context, He follows this command with a second command, “*Do not give what is holy to dogs and do not cast your pearls before swine...*” This 2<sup>nd</sup> command makes the exercise of fruit inspection a necessity. When Jesus said, “*Judge not*” He was not forbidding just criticism/fruit inspection... WAS forbidding godless faultfinding and condemning.

### A. Do It Justly and Honestly

1. Without a doubt, if our criticism was done in total honesty, all criticism be reduced greatly.
2. To be honest/just = one must know and understand the facts:
  - a. knowing the facts enables a proper criticism.
    - Illus. – Reader’s Digest few yrs back told of a young woman who called the local post office on April 15<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 PM. “How late will you be open?” she asked, “Till midnight, ma’am” “O, good. What time is it now?” “11:30, ma’am” “One last question. Do you have any tax forms?”
  - b. how often do we dare to criticize when we just aren’t sure of the facts:
    - Illus. – while living in Bloomington, IN I was critical of the lack luster names of their streets... (First St etc.),.. But according to RL Polk Co. (publisher of city directories)

Park St (2), Third St (3), Fourth St. (4), Fifth St. (5), Main St. (6)... Most popular street name was?! – Second St.

3. Note, being Just and Honest were outstanding traits in the Life of Christ even in His criticism!

#### B. Do It With Good Will

1. Often criticism not given for the good; instead, used to hurt, retaliate or inflict pain.
  - note: this is the kind of criticism directed at Christ in our text.
2. But what of Christ, didn't He offer up some harsh criticism:
  - a. never criticized in anger
  - b. when slandered He never lost his temper or sought revenge...
  - c. our Lord used criticism like a skilled surgeon – cutting only that which needed cutting. = Illus. in His criticism directed to Pharisees = sought not to harm them but rather to heal them
3. Ill willed criticism endangers others AND works it worst harm on the one criticizing
  - a. those who trifle with ill willed criticism can be likened to one who trifles with drugs/alcohol.
  - b. criticism is addictive = produces an appetite for itself = more you do it more want to do it!
  - c. if criticism is to be used, must be done with justice, kindness and right motive.

#### C. Do it to be Constructive

1. Nothing is more senseless than to claim help but instead purposely tear down to harm.
2. Tearing down takes no talent/skill, but replacing evil with good takes both and more!
3. More did I say? God's grace and forgiveness:
  - a. no place for criticism unless a better alternative can be given.
  - b. Biblical alternative is replacing sin with righteousness... only possible through Christ!

## II How to RECEIVE Criticism

- as important it is to learn to criticize aright, it is no less important we learn how to receive it.
- all aware of those who seemingly can give criticism but they sure can't take it = facts are clear the more one criticizes with ill will the less likely such individual will receive just criticism.
- we must look to Jesus to learn how to receive just and unjust criticism:

#### A. Wrong Ways to Receive Criticism

1. Those who quit under criticism:
  - a. plans, goals and working away till critics come and take confidence/enthusiasm away...
  - b. such has been likened to seed sowing on stony ground – it flourishes for a bit, but dies under the hot sun of criticism.
  - c. how many times was Christ criticized... even on Cross... yet, where would we be if He quit?
2. Those who seek to please everyone
  - a. these are the ones who assume critics are always right – if 2 bands are playing tries keep step with both of them...
  - b. had Jesus sought to please everybody there would be no redemption for you and me!
3. Those who listen to nobody
  - a. there are some where every suggestion is considered an affront or insult.
  - b. these never see the fact that truth might be in just criticism – to busy looking for the ill will in any criticism and assuming that all criticism is illegitimate.

#### B. Proper Ways to Receive Criticism

1. Some we must ignore:
  - a. criticism from ill will/ignorant people needs to be ignored!
  - b. to grow hot/resentful plays into the hand of unchristian thoughts and actions
2. Some we must use:
  - a. sometimes critics speak the truth and can be of great help to each of us
  - b. often adversary can be better than a friend...
  - c. Proverbs 15:5 “...he who receives reproof is prudent.”

- Illus. – read an article concerning the accomplishments of Dr. Robert Good, doctor in the field of cancer research. Described as a hard-driving individual, with the ability to use any new/stimulating idea. Article went on giving the doctor credit for hearing/listening to good criticism which led him to recognize error and abandon it faster than anyone else in the medical field. One associate said, “Dr. Good never gets married to his hypotheses, so he doesn’t go through the pangs of divorce when one is proven wrong.”
3. Some we must contradict
    - a. Christ beautifully illus. this none better than on the Cross – crucified as an imposter... but contradicted all His critics by passing from death to life!...
    - b. Illus. – Wright brothers Wilbur (born in Indiana) Orville (born in Ohio) two preacher’s kids, were told their airship would never be built, that if one was it wouldn’t be by them. Persistence became a reality and the critics were contradicted...

Christ shows us how to receive criticism, especially while He was on the Cross!

**Conclusion:** Here is a message we all need. We who dare the delicate/dangerous role of critic, must bring all criticism into harmony with the attitude of Christ. That means we shall only criticize with justice and kindness in mind and do so only to be constructive and NOT destructive. To criticize in any other fashion is to hurt both ourselves and others....

We must also seek to face criticism as our Lord did. To do this we must refuse to quit under criticism. Some criticism we shall ignore, some we shall use and the rest we must contradict. By doing this we will find, even criticism as being one of “all things” that work together for good to them who are intent upon doing the Lord’s will!