

“Christians Dealing With Critics!”

2 Corinthians 10:1-11

Intro. – Salesman getting haircut when he mentioned upcoming trip to Rome. Barber of Italian descent was most critical. “You’ll be disappointed,” he said. “Rome is overrated. The hotels are horrible; airlines lose your luggage and the people aren’t that friendly. Better stay home.” Salesman persisted that he was going and that he would close a big deal and probably see the Pope. Barber shook his head, “You’ll be disappointed taking your business to Italy. Nobody buys there – and you’ll never see the Pope. He only sees important people.”

Month later, the salesman returned to the barber’s shop. “How was your trip?” asked the barber.

“It was great,” said salesman. “Flight was smooth, service at hotel was great. I closed a big deal and even got to see the Pope.” Barber was astounded. “What happened when you saw the Pope?” Salesman said, “I knelt down, kissed his ring, and he patted me on the head and said, ‘My son, who gave you such a lousy haircut?’”

I use the above to illus. fact we all are criticized on occasion. Our society is a critical lot. We even pay people to be critics: e.g. movies, music, politics and sports. If you’re not critical today, you’re considered naïve or unsophisticated. Someone has suggested that if American people had been present at the feeding of the 5000, they would have criticized Jesus for not providing lemon for the fish or butter for the bread. Let’s face it, Bible believing/practicing people are going to be criticized more and more as our pagan society becomes worse. We need to know how to respond to criticism in an appropriate manner. Our text deals with Paul and how he dealt with his critics. There is much for each of us to learn from this:

Purpose: to learn Biblical principles in how we are to deal with critics.

I CRITICISM WILL COME (vv 1-2)

A. Jesus Was Criticized

1. Paul knew Christ under constant criticism and most of these attacks were from *religious leaders*...
2. These were the ones who accused Jesus of blasphemy, demon possession, being illegitimate child, being drunk, an excessive eater (glutton) AND a friend of those who were...
3. Illus. – Bible School teacher quizzing her students after lesson on the power of God. She asked, “Is there anything God can’t do?” One little boy raised his hand and said, “I know. He can’t please everybody.”

B. Paul Was Criticized

1. Paul was under attack from the people in the church at Corinth – chaps 10-13 deal with issue...
2. He was criticized for his past – persecuted the church before his becoming a Christian
3. He was criticized for his dubious authority – how could he prove he was a genuine apostle?
4. He was accused of having materialistic motives – taking offerings for the poor in Jerusalem, but how could people be sure that Paul wasn’t pocketing some of the money himself?
5. Challenged for inconsistent personality – (v 1) “*I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent.*” (v 10) “*His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible.*”
 - a. Paul not impressive in his appearance. Tradition = short, bald, and had a hooked nose.
 - b. in person I believe it fair to say Paul was gentle, compassionate, understanding man... But those who were shallow would interpret such as weakness... So they sneered “He sounds tough in his letters, but in reality he’s nothing. Don’t respect Paul. Don’t listen to Him!”

C. We Must Expect Criticism

1. John 15:20 “*No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also...*”
2. 2 Timothy 3:12 “*...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*”
3. History is replete with illus. of those who were “ahead of their time” but were criticized for it:
Illus. – Ben Franklin’s prospective mother-in-law hesitated permitting her daughter to marry a printer. Already 2 print shops in US, she was dubious about country being able to sustain a 3rd... Charles Goodyear “boomed” by everyone but his wife as he worked for 11 yrs. on vulcanizing rubber. Now, the name Goodyear is synonymous with the word tires and other rubber products.
4. The more one grows *in Christ* the more criticism they can expect to receive. Why? Because the world is *threatened* and *resentful* of being reminded of the void in their lives apart from Christ.

- a. 1 Peter 4:12-14 “*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ...*”
- b. Illus. – preacher received really nasty letter had lunch with a friend. Referred to the letter. Friend said, “That’s good. That gets the woe off your back.” Preacher asked, “What do you mean?” “Gets the woe off your back. X said (Lk 6:26), ‘Woe to you when all men speak well of you,’ – all men aren’t speaking well of you, so you have that woe off your back.”

Be assured, if you are a Christian criticism is inevitable. Jesus was criticized, Paul was and so will you!

II DON’T USE WEAPONS OF THE WORLD (vv 3-4)

A. Weapons of the World Defined

1. One word describes weapons of the world = *RETALIATION*
 - a. Illus. – WW I aerial warfare 1st began the planes had no guns/bombs. Pilots would fly by and make faces at each other. One day one of them took a load of bricks... After which they would salute each other... Then one day brought on board a hand gun... today atomic bombs!
 - b. “The world fights injury with violence; arrest with hostages; criticism and sarcasm; deception with trickery.”
2. Retaliation is so worldly, it is a means of defending one’s self-centeredness/self-righteousness...
 - a. Illus. – Churchill/Lady Astor running feud: “Sir Winston,” Lady Astor once said, “I believe you are drunk!” Churchill responded, “Lady Astor, I believe you are ugly. Tomorrow I will be sober but you will still be ugly.”
 - b. Illus. – Following another Churchill comment, Lady Astor sneered, “Winston, if you were my husband, I’d put poison in your tea.” He responded, “If you were my wife, I’d drink it!”
3. We retaliate because it *feels* so good – i.e. it appeals to our carnal nature:
 - Illus. – Terri Smith... 6’2” great sense of humor... Asked once while standing in line at McDonald’s, “How does it feel to be up there above the rest of us?” She responded, “I don’t know, how’s it feel to be down there?”

B. Weapons of Grace

1. The weapons we are to fight with are not weapons of this world; instead, they are God’s Word, the H.S. and fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, and self control...
2. 10:1 “*By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...*”
 - a. meekness is NOT weakness = “strength under control”
 - b. gentleness is not cowardice = “restrained power”
3. Paul had authority as an apostle to bring these people to their knees. The world’s solution would be along these lines, “If you have the authority, simply pull rank.” Paul refused to fight like world!
4. Takes self-control (control comes only with HS reigning one’s life) not to retaliate!
5. Matthew 5:39 “*If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also.*” Does this mean be pacifists and never fight? No! But it does mean we are not to retaliate or seek revenge. Why?
 - Romans 12:9 “*It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.*” – we’re to trust the Lord... after all He’s far better equipped to retaliate than you or I!

III BE ASSURED TRUTH WILL PREVAIL (vv 5-11)

A. This is a Spiritual War

1. Satan has strongholds/fortresses: e.g. pornography, drugs, abortions, humanism etc.
2. The temptation when identifying these evil strongholds is to deal with them by human power.
 - a. “Let’s bomb abortion clinics... pornography shops... run a smear campaign...”
 - b. problem is with such an approach – we’ll never win. Why? Ephesians 6:12 “*...our wrestle is not against flesh and blood, but against ruler, authorities... powers darkness... spiritual forces...*”
3. Only way break Satan’s strongholds – consistently defend/promote TRUTH – God’s Word!
4. Paul is saying, “Don’t wage war on the world’s terms. You’ll lose.”

B. Heaven and Earth Will Pass Away

1. Jesus made clear – all idols, ideas and monuments worshiped in the here and now *will* pass away, but “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.*” (Matthew 24:35 etc.)

2. Some people want the local church to always be marching, demonstrating, always signing petitions, always exerting some kind of political pressure WHEN the most powerful tool at our disposal is the teaching and preaching of Biblical truth! It's so powerful it shatters false ideas, transforms lives, and utterly crumbles Satan's strongholds.
3. What's true on spiritual level is true on personal level. The *TRUTH* has power to endure/persevere
 - a. when criticized falsely, tempted to say "I have to defend myself... But the best response to false criticism is to stand consistently for truth and believe it will prevail!
 - b. Illus. – Abe Lincoln was constantly criticized but seldom responded. One advisor asked why. Lincoln responded, "I try to live in such a way as to prove such accusations are a lie."
4. Illus. – while living in Sciotoville, OH was accused by neighborhood lady of cussing her out... Dad asked if I had anything to say about that... Assured the truth would come out...

Be confident, the truth always comes to surface and will bury criticism and demolish Satan's strongholds

Conclusion: Like to conclude and summarize with two practical points Paul makes in this text:

1) *Only Respond to Criticism When Necessary:* My belief is that 95% of time, criticism ought to be ignored. Nehemiah was rebuilding wall of Jerusalem when Sanballat and Tobiah began their cutting remarks ("even if fox climbed on it, the wall would break...") 5 times said to Nehemiah, "Come down and let's talk about this project we don't approve..." Nehemiah simply sent word back saying, "I'm doing a great work. I don't have time to come down." Point: when you respond to critics it gives them unwarranted credibility and it takes time and energy away from what ought to be addressed. By not responding, communicated, "We're doing a great work. Don't have time to mess around with anything else."

Now when criticism does need to be addressed because of its attacks on character of leadership or the credibility of the work... a simple/direct response is all that is necessary. Illus. – reporter saw a preacher disembark from the Queen Mary. Sarcastically this reporter said to this preacher, "When Jesus was on the earth, He rode into town on a lowly donkey. I can't imagine Jesus arriving from England on the Queen Mary!" Preacher responded, "Find me a donkey that can swim the Atlantic Ocean and I'll buy it." Point: sometimes criticism needs to be addressed but most the time it's better ignored.

2) *Keep Your Eye on the Goal* – When criticized we're tempted to get involved because our self-esteem is involved. We need to remember our ultimate objective is (10:8) "*building you up rather than pulling you down.*" Illus. – if a fight breaks out basketball game, good coach already instructed players not to get involved in the fight even if their manhood is at stake. "Goal is to win the game... Can't do that when thrown out game!"

Our goal in this church is NOT to make everybody happy... BUT to win as many as possible to Christ or take as many as possible with us to heaven! To do so effectively you and I must know how to deal with criticism in a Christian manner!