

How to Respond to Criticism

I am writing these words to someone who has been spoken against, maligned, railed on and hurt. You may think these words don't apply to you, but be patient - if you live a fully dedicated life unto God, the time will come when you will be criticized. *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (II Timothy 3:12). *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps"* (I Peter 2:21). Part of the pain of being spoken against is not knowing why. I shall not pretend to have all the answers, but let's share some thoughts and Scriptures that will hopefully give you comfort. First of all:

1. Don't jump to conclusions.

What you may have heard may not be so. It has been said, the first thing sacrificed in rumors is the truth. Many times I have had meetings for reconciliation, only to discover half-truths or complete untruths have been propagated that hurt. It would be a good idea to go straight to the supposed source of the problem. The Bible says, *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother"* (Matthew 18:15). Before you cry your heart out, throw a fit or do something in anger, first verify the truth.

2. Give thanks because a blessing is entitled to those who are criticized.

Jesus said, *"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake"* (Matthew 5:11). *"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake"* (Luke 6:22). Have you noticed that Jesus thinks differently from the world? In many cases He would have us respond just the opposite of the man's instinctive inclinations. So, set your heart with an attitude that reflects gratitude when you are criticized. *"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"* (I Thessalonians 5:18). This will immediately lift the spirit of oppression and worry that has a tendency to accompany the onslaught of unkind words. Learn to exchange the bad words spoken about you for the good words of praise! *"Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad"* (Proverbs 12:25). *"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"* (Matthew 5:12).

3. Be kind to your critics.

Determine in your heart that you will not fight this kind of fire with fire. In the matter of retaliation for wrongdoing, it only makes a brush fire rage into an uncontrollable forest fire. *"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell"* (James 3:6). If you decide to throw mud back on someone who threw mud on you, you become muddy yourself. He who throws mud loses ground! Never forget that. Hold on to your ground of peace! *"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matthew 5:9).

Not only do we become soiled in the process of retaliation, but if we take matters in our own hands, we take something that belongs exclusively to God, for He says, *"To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste"* (Deuteronomy 32:35). *"O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself"* (Psalm 94:1). Along with these Old Testament admonitions, God specifically said in the New Testament, *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will*

repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). In remaining quiet we are also exercising trust in the Lord to take care of the matters. And He can take care of them so much better than we. Our role is to bless and leave the rest in God's hand. Jesus said, *"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). Paul later said, *"Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not"* (Romans 12:14).

4. Know that criticism means you are on the winning side!

Dr. Jerry Falwell was being criticized by people he thought were his friends. He had a talk with his old mentor, Dr. B. R. Lakin who said in paraphrase: "Jerry, if they are kicking at you from behind, it is only because you are out in front of them." This is so true. If you know nothing, say nothing and do nothing, nothing happens to you. If you know something, say something, and do something, all the "know-nothings" will start saying something to bring you down. "Rotting" in the world of living organisms is the process of "going bad." When people "go bad," they say and do bad things, *"A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones"* (Proverbs 14:30).

God says, *"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice"* (Ephesians 4:31). Abraham Lincoln stood in the gap between a nation torn in half, until the breach was mended. In his second inauguration speech, in a compassionate spirit he quoted from Matthew 18:7, "The Almighty has His own purposes. Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh..." In his closing paragraph he said these magnanimous words: "...With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." In just short of forty-one days later, Lincoln died as a result of an angry vengeful man's bullet. The truth of the matter is that John Wilkes Booth did not stop the victory, he publicized the victory. To this day Lincoln is the example of one who could forgive his enemies and that characteristic above all other attributes is what ended the war. May you and I live "with malice toward none." Let wrath, evil speaking and malice according to Ephesians 4:31 be put away and may we instead put on (1) **Christ**: *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof"* (Romans 13:14); (2) **the new man**: *"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"* (Ephesians 4:24); (3) **mercy**: *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering"* (Colossians 3:12); (4) **God's love**: *"And above all these things put on charity (agape: God's great love), which is the bond of perfectness"* (Colossians 3:14).

- Pastor Pope -

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