

The Oak Grove Oracle

(Family News & Views of the Oak Grove Church of Christ)

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Judge Righteous Judgment (#4) - Avoid Hyper Criticism

All of us need a little helpful advice from time to time. A wise counselor can be a precious asset. Solomon wrote: "Where no counsel *is*, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors *there is safety*" (Prov. 11:14). Even exceedingly good writers need a trusted editor. In other words, valid criticism can be very constructive for the individual who is willing to listen to it. However, no one needs to feel like he is being picked to pieces like a corpse in the desert being shredded by ravenous vultures.

In our recent series of articles on proper spiritual judgment, another related consideration of "judging righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24), is that all of our criticism of others should be carefully evaluated to determine whether it is helpfully constructive or damningly destructive. Last week we discussed the danger zone of unfair comparisons or double standards. Similarly, we must weigh all criticism to make sure it is intended to build up the recipient, rather than tear them down.

We might all do well to remember the "*Three Gates of Gold*" test, which is attributed to the poet **Beth Day**, from the early 1800's:

If you are tempted to reveal, a tale to you someone has told about another,

Make it pass, before you speak, three gates of gold.

These narrow gates. First, "Is it true?" Then, "Is it needful?"

In your mind give truthful answer.

And the next is last and narrowest, "Is it kind?"

And if to reach your lips at last, it passes through these gateways three,

Then you may tell the tale, nor fear what the result of speech may be.

Sadly, sometimes it seems like the world is filled with people who are hypercritical. Your personality is destructively warped if you think tearing down others builds you up. That old adage about "sticks and stones breaking bones, but names not hurting" is not Biblical. The truth of the matter is stinging words of unjust criticism can destroy people -- maybe not on the outside, but surely on the inside.

Christians are taught to focus our thoughts on a higher plane than worldly folk. The Bible says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). Surely this would include our evaluations of others who are "made in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). When it comes to our speech we must remember the admonition, "a word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. 25:11). Judge righteous judgment. Be kind!

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