

# MESSAGE

## Criti c i s e Me...

Find fault, when you must find fault, in private if possible, and sometime after the offense, rather than at the time. — Sydney Smith

### REFLECTION

How do you go dealing with criticism? I don't mean when you first hear it, I presume you've got the maturity to face it with grace and love, and not fly off the handle at the messenger. But how does your spirit cope?

Criticism can be difficult regardless of who it comes from, however the way it's delivered and by whom can make all the difference. If I have done something that causes another to disagree with what I've done or how I've done it, then I'd expect and hope:

1. For that person to tell me straight away, before speaking to anyone else, what I had done wrong.
2. For that person to break it to me as gently as possible, using an "I" statement. E.g. "I struggled with the way you..."
3. That the person telling me would never compromise the values of complete honesty and unconditional love.

If you come to me like this then the problem is solved because we can communicate about the issue, I can explain things that may not of previously been known or realised and if no way can be seen through, we can agree to disagree. When this occurs criticism although very uncomfortable is not as painful, if I am seeking the truth in what is being said, owning my part in it and knowing that it is being done in love.

Often this is not the procedure by which criticism gets back to me though. In fact rarely does this happen. Often what occurs is someone will come to me and say "I was speaking with someone the other day and they are really upset (or angry or don't agree or aren't happy) with the way you did this, or with what you are doing there..." My response is to ask who said that, hoping that I can engage this mystery person in conversation about their struggle.

The response I almost always receive is "I can't tell you because that person didn't want to be named!"

"Why not", I ask.

And more often than not I'm told "because they don't want to hurt you." And you guessed it, that hurts far deeper than whatever the complaint was that they may have had.

I have found that *anonymity* is one of the great enemies of the Kingdom of God. It renders me powerless to resolve conflict. It distracts me from my goal and ministry. It breeds gossip and slander. It takes away any opportunity to reconcile brokenness. All of which are traits of the enemy. I tell you this today because in the next few issues we're going to look at many different aspects of criticism. But NEVER should our criticism of others be detached from our name or our hearts or conversation with the person whom we are struggling with.

Matthew recalls Jesus giving us a model of how to approach a situation where we feel hurt by another. Read Matthew 18:15-17 and then continue reading here. Did you see the pattern? Go to that person who wronged you, just between the two of you. Don't speak with any others about it, don't let it fester and grow bigger than it is, but go with love and talk it out. If your plea is not listened to then the whole thing goes to a new level! Now read on until you hit chapter 19.

In the account Peter picks up on where Jesus is going and asks in effect, 'How many chances do I give the person who hurt me, who I have to speak with alone, straight away in order to deal with it.' Jesus response is to say that forgiveness has no limit!

Then Jesus tells a story which at the end we can conclude: *Conflict resolution should occur with a desire to forgive, reconcile and release the other of their debt to you!* This is a real uncovering of what our hearts should be like even when we've been unfairly hurt!