



Judgmentalism

## DEALING WITH A CRITICAL SPIRIT

ED HINDSON

(Luke 6:37, 38)

**S**ome people seem to be experts at evaluating others. They think they have an uncanny ability to read others' minds, evaluate their actions, and judge their motives. The danger in assessing others' behavior in such a way is that people become judgmental. Such people have critical spirits that can be cruel and divisive. Setting themselves up as prosecutor, judge, and jury, they proceed to tear everyone apart who does not see things their way. We all know people like this.

The Bible is filled with examples of judgmentalism—the Jews in the wilderness (Num. 16:1–35), the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15–46), the prodigal son's elder brother (Luke 15:25–32), the immature Christians in the early church (1 Cor. 3:1–7). One of the most serious biblical examples was Miriam's criticism of Moses' wife (Num. 12:1–16). God severely judged Miriam's judgmental spirit.

Just for the record, there is a difference between *judging* and *being judgmental*, however. Christians need to be able to judge between what is good and what is evil so they can discern God's will for their lives. Believers are also called upon to judge disputes among believers, as well as to judge sin and deal accordingly with it (1 Cor. 5:1–12). Sometimes believers need to discern sin in their fellow believers and point it out in a loving manner. The Bible says, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17).

Many wonder, then, what Jesus meant when He said: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matt. 7:1, 2). In this same passage, He also said that people cannot remove the "speck" from someone else's eye when they have a "plank" in their own eye (Matt. 7:4, 5).

Jesus was not against believers "sharpening" each other, as the Proverbs verse indicates. Indeed, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). Instead, Jesus spoke against people having a judgmental (critical) spirit.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF JUDGMENTAL PEOPLE

Judgmental people are critical, condescending, unloving, and unforgiving. They are more concerned with pointing out others' mistakes than helping them with their problems. Their attitudes create anxiety in others whom they attempt to manipulate by demanding compliance with their opinions.

Critical people are not likely to get close or connect emotionally with others. They have few, if any, intimate relationships. They keep most people at arm's length. Since they never share their inner feelings, they tend to be critical of those who do. Critical people tend to make others feel that they are all alone in the world. When the critic is a marriage partner, the spouse can be made to feel lonely and disconnected—leaving both of them vulnerable.

Another characteristic of judgmental people is their self-centered view of life. They are far more concerned about themselves than anyone else. They lack empa-

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thy and resist opening up enough to let others talk freely about deeply emotional issues. It is easier for them to condemn than forgive. They lock themselves into a parental-style role and refuse to change. The greatest problem with this pattern is that they also refuse to let others change.

They may try to shame people as a means of controlling them. While some judgmental people may think that they are helping others do the right thing (according to them), they are really hurting them in the long run. Forced behavior, controlled by guilt manipulation, often leaves people wanting to break free. In many cases, this leads to worse behavior patterns, not better ones.

People's reactions to judgmental people can include feelings of detachment (being emotionally inaccessible) and abandonment (connecting, then leaving), and can result in criticism (unloving responses) and even abuse (emotional violation).

#### **CAUSES OF JUDGMENTALISM**

One of the major causes of judgmentalism is *guilt*. People tend to criticize others for problems with which they themselves struggle. For example, a gossip will be quick to spot and judge another gossip.

Another cause of judgmentalism is *fear*. People fear others whom they do not understand. Before being saved, Saul (Paul) placed judgment on the Christians because he disagreed with them and feared their growth and popularity (Acts 8:1-4; 9:1, 2). Nehemiah's critics judged and condemned his work on Jerusalem's wall because they were afraid that the city might return to its former power and glory (Neh. 2:19; 4:1-3). A legalistic person who cannot understand other believers' freedom in Christ will be quick to judge their behavior. That person fears freedom, preferring to stay confined within a set of rules so there won't be too many choices.

#### **CURES FOR JUDGMENTALISM**

Judgmentalism is a heart attitude that often blinds people to their own problems. It is quick to point the finger but slow to bend the knee. To be set free of a critical spirit, believers can begin by praying for others and working to genuinely reach out to others in love. They can get into an accountability relationship to learn to discern the difference between appropriate judgment and judgmentalism.

A critical spirit can often be discerned by identifying people's motives. If their words are meant to tear others down in order to build themselves up, then they are being judgmental. If they are minimizing and excusing their own faults while pointing out others' faults, then they are being judgmental.

If we find ourselves being critical of others, we need to ask God for forgiveness. Ultimate judgment, of course, belongs to God (Rev. 20:11-15). We dare not attempt to put ourselves in His place!

#### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issue of judgmentalism include:

- > 1 Kings 3:9
- > Psalms 19:9; 119:66
- > Matthew 22:37-40
- > Romans 14:10-13
- > Ephesians 4:31, 32
- > Colossians 3:12-14
- > 1 John 2:10, 11

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Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on judgmentalism at Luke 6:37 on page 1326. See also the personality profile of Aaron and Miriam on page 185.

<sup>38</sup>Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

<sup>39</sup>And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? <sup>40</sup>A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. <sup>41</sup>And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? <sup>42</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

#### A TREE IS KNOWN BY ITS FRUIT

<sup>43</sup>"For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>44</sup>For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup>A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart<sup>a</sup> brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

#### BUILD ON THE ROCK

<sup>46</sup>"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? <sup>47</sup>Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: <sup>48</sup>He is

**6:45** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *treasure of his heart*.

#### KEY PASSAGE



Judgmentalism

### PASSING JUDGMENT

(6:37)

There's a paper-thin line between making right judgments and judgmentalism. We face it in our lives all the time: When others are critical of us, we may feel that they are being judgmental; when we are critical of others, however, we feel that we are engaging in right judgment.

Jesus told His followers not to judge others. These commands do not mean that believers are not to use discernment in making decisions or evaluating what people do. Rather, He is urging us not to pass sentence on the actions and attitudes of others without first looking at ourselves. A person with a judgmental and condemning spirit constantly looks down on others—even other believers. That harms and hinders the entire church.

Believers and churches must make strong judgments when dealing with sin and false doctrine. But regarding minor disagreements, Jesus urges love and forgiveness so that His work on earth will not be hindered.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about judgmentalism on pages 1324, 1325. See also the personality profile of Aaron and Miriam on page 185.

#### SOUL NOTE



**Overflowing (6:38)** The words "give, and it will be given to you" follow Jesus' words urging His followers not to judge or condemn others, but rather to forgive. People who have gracious and compassionate spirits, refusing to judge and condemn, will find gracious attitudes and compassion returned toward them. People who forgive easily will find that they are forgiven their own offenses. The measure with which we give determines the measure with which we receive. **Topic: Attitudes**

people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. <sup>33</sup>But while the meat *was* still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. <sup>34</sup>So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah,<sup>a</sup> because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

<sup>35</sup>From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth.

#### DISSENSION OF AARON AND MIRIAM

**12** Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. <sup>2</sup>So they said, "Has the

LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard *it*. <sup>3</sup>(Now the man Moses *was* very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth.)

<sup>4</sup>Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. <sup>6</sup>Then He said,

"Hear now My words:  
If there is a prophet among you,  
I, the LORD, make Myself known to him  
in a vision;

**11:34** <sup>a</sup>Literally *Graves of Craving*

### PERSONALITY PROFILE

## AARON AND MIRIAM: A CASE STUDY IN JUDGMENTALISM

(NUMBERS 12)



Judgmentalism

While he was living in Midian, Moses had married Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, a Midianite priest (Ex. 2:21). It is likely that she is the "Ethiopian woman" referred to in Numbers 12:1, of whom Aaron and Miriam disapproved. Their expression leaves it unclear whether their resentment was because Moses' wife was dark-skinned or simply not a Hebrew. In either case, their underlying problem had to do with jealousy toward Moses. They expressed it by treating his wife with disrespect. They also questioned Moses' authority as the spokesman for God, implying that Moses had grown proud. But they actually revealed their own self-centeredness.

Aaron and Miriam had been chosen for influential roles among the leaders of Israel. But they directly challenged Moses by telling the people that their word was just as godly and important as their brother's. God came directly to Moses' defense, chastising both Aaron and Miriam for their ungodly judgments and striking Miriam with leprosy. Moses did not retaliate, but "cried out to the LORD, saying, 'Please heal her, O God, I pray!'" (Num. 12:13). Miriam was indeed healed, but was sent out of the camp for seven days. When she returned, she seems to have been healed not only of leprosy, but also of her judgmental attitudes.

A "leprosy of the spirit" often infects judgmental Christians today as it did Aaron and Miriam. They cannot distinguish between right judgments and judgmental attitudes. This pattern eats away at the soul, filling it with jealousy, envy, fear, pride, and self-righteousness. Prejudice and racism flow from this same infection. Judgmental Christians are not only rejected by unbelievers, but eventually are avoided like lepers were. Fellow Christians feel betrayed by those who project such a negative image of believers before the watching world. Repentance and godly humility are the only effective treatments against the path of judgmentalism.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about judgmentalism on pages 1324, 1325. See also the key passage note at Luke 6:37 on page 1326.

weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

#### DO NOT JUDGE A BROTHER

<sup>11</sup>Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

<sup>12</sup>There is one Lawgiver,<sup>a</sup> who is able to save and to destroy. Who<sup>b</sup> are you to judge another?<sup>c</sup>

#### DO NOT BOAST ABOUT TOMORROW

<sup>13</sup>Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will<sup>a</sup> go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; <sup>14</sup>whereas you do not know what *will* happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup>Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup>But now you

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

JAMES 4:8

4:12 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text adds *and Judge*. <sup>b</sup>NU-Text and M-Text read *But who*. <sup>c</sup>NU-Text reads *a neighbor*.  
4:13 <sup>a</sup>M-Text reads *let us*.

### KEY PASSAGE



Pride

## BEFORE A FALL

(4:6-10)

The Bible consistently warns against pride. "God resists the proud," writes James. Pride brings shame, strife, and foolishness (Prov. 11:2; 13:10; 14:3). Proud people are "an abomination" for "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:5, 18).

Pride hurts one's relationship with God because proud people think they don't need Him. Pride hurts one's relationships with others because proud people are self-centered and feel superior. Pride makes people blind to their own sinfulness. God opposes the proud, for their pride is sinful and He knows their danger to themselves and to others.

The antidote to pride is a good dose of humility. Sometimes proud people are humbled through circumstances or even tragedy. When God gets their attention, He offers them grace. Humility is not weakness; instead, it is the willingness to "submit to God." When we humble ourselves before Him, He promises to lift us up.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about pride on pages 572, 573. See also the personality profile of the king of Tyre on page 1076.

### SOUL NOTE



**Rush to Judgment** (4:11, 12) Discipline is necessary for those in the fellowship who are involved in destructive sin. But when believers judge one another, they act against God's law. This passage refers to individuals who readily take God's judgment into their own hands, often over minor issues. When believers are too zealous to judge others, they cause hurt and division. Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). Instead of a critical spirit, we should show understanding, compassion, and love. **Topic: Judgmentalism**

does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

#### SEEING GOD THROUGH LOVE

<sup>12</sup>No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. <sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we

have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup>And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

#### THE CONSUMMATION OF LOVE

<sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made

#### SOUL NOTE



**Love Story (4:7)** God authored the concept of love. When people become believers, they learn how to "love one another" because the Spirit within shows them how as they yield to His leading. Christian relationships ought to be the most loving in the world. Christians who meet each other for the first time experience a bond of love that transcends understanding. The love that binds Christians makes for solid and eternal relationships. The love in our relationships reveals God in us.

**Topic: Relationships**

#### SOUL NOTE



**Through Us (4:12)** No one has ever seen God, but God reveals Himself to the world through His frail and imperfect people by perfecting His love in them. As believers go into the world living their faith, they reveal God to everyone they meet. Their love reveals God's presence in their lives. When believers show love toward one another and to the unbelieving world, God makes Himself known and His love is "perfected" in them. God often shows His love through His people. What does our love for others say on God's behalf? **Topic: Love**

#### SOUL NOTE



**Too Many Critics (4:19-21)** When believers hate one another, they certainly are not showing love. At times, a critical spirit will cause believers' relationships to become strained as they judge each other. Believers will always disagree on some matters, but they should still be able to celebrate their unity in Christ.

Those with critical spirits, however, will be unable to love others. If they cannot love their fellow believers whom they can see, how can they possibly love the invisible God? Believers who claim to love God but hate others are lying to themselves, God, and everyone else.

**Topic: Judgmentalism**