

Before We Criticize...

There are times when mistakes are made and things need to be pointed out. And, unfortunately, we all know that offering criticism can sometimes make a bad situation even worse. Serious thought needs to go into what we will say. Maybe it would help if we would ask the following questions before offering criticism:

1. Why am I doing this?

Do I really want to help this person, or am I just doing this to make myself feel better? Am I trying to improve the situation, or do I just want to say, "I told you so!"? What is my motive?

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Regardless of what the world believes, we don't have the right to let off some steam at the expense of another. Criticism that is only going to make us feel better needs to be kept to ourselves.

2. Do I have a right to criticize?

Was I available when this person could have used some help before? Can I sympathize with what they are going through? Can I offer some positive suggestions to go along with the criticism? Some people like to just sit on the sidelines and criticize the labors of others. Such people really have no right to criticize.

3. Have I examined myself?

It is not right for me to give criticism that I am not willing to take. Jesus says that I must make sure that the log is out of my eye first, then I can offer to help my brother get the speck out of his eye (Matt. 7:3-5). Criticism is respected when it comes from a respectable person, but no one appreciates a hypocrite.

4. What will I say, and how will I say it?

This is very important. I must choose my words very carefully. They have the power to build up or to destroy (Proverbs 12:18, 16:24). As Paul said, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). What we say, and the way we say it, will make all the difference in the world.

5. Will it glorify God?

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Who's glory am I seeking? Am I saying something to help the cause of Christ or just to be heard? If it is just to be seen and heard by men, then truly I have my reward (Matt. 6:1-6).

- by Heath Rogers

All Talk, No Action

Why is it that we talk about things for so long before doing them, at times to the exclusion of doing them?

To the extent that discussion is part of planning, it is good to talk before doing. Several proverbs commend thinking ahead. "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory" (11:14). "...the prudent man considers his steps" (14:15). "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advancement, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty" (21:5). Much time and effort are wasted by failure to adequately plan. However, not all talk is planning.

Sometimes we talk but don't do because the thing we are talking about is really beyond reach. It is but a dream.

Fear may be the problem. One might talk about a thing for a while as a means of rousing his courage. Or, his conversation may amount to nothing more than an acknowledgment of what should be done - all the while he knows he is too fearful of failure or opposition to ever try.

Extended conversation may reflect indecision. Have you ever been in a group where a decision was reached, yet long after that, people were still discussing its merits rather than working toward its implementation? The culprit is indecision; we really aren't committed to the task. Indecision means that nothing is done. It can be as debilitating as poor decisions.

Talk may be idle boasting. It may stand alone because of laziness or other priorities. Yet somehow, talking about things, especially things we know we ought to do, makes us feel better about them. And therein lies the danger. We can confuse talking about a subject with genuine interest or even progress in that area.

The Remedy

Talk is no substitute for action. Elders can plan the best possible program of work or study, but if we never get around to doing it, no good will be done. Saying we need to visit the sick does nothing to comfort them. Does merely talking about brethren overtaken in a trespass restore them? Likewise, discussing the importance of spreading the gospel does not save souls.

Parents, simply threatening unruly children - "If you do that one more time..." - accomplishes nothing. No, punishment for bad behavior is what establishes the boundary.

Some folks talk about making their lives right with God. And talk. And talk. "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16).

-by Frank Himmel

What Would They Say?

The Bible tells us about the intense persecution that was endured by early Christians. We know that many were imprisoned, and a large number were put to death (Acts 26:9-11). Uninspired historical accounts give us additional information about the terrible trials and sufferings of those first disciples.

We are told that Christians in the city of Rome faced great danger when they assembled together for worship. Because of this they were often forced to hold their meetings in secret places. We know that they sometimes met in the catacombs (underground cemeteries). Evidence from those secret meetings can still be seen today. It is said that at the height of this persecution members of a family would leave for worship at different times so that they would not generate suspicion from neighbors. They changed their meeting place and the time of the assemblies each week to avoid being discovered.

Did you ever wonder how these early saints would react if they were able to comment about the practice of their modern day brothers and sisters? Don't you imagine that they would be shocked to learn about the things that keep some Christians from attending all the worship assemblies and Bible studies?

What was it that kept you from the assemblies last week? Too tired? Too busy? A school function? A ballgame? A band concert? A vacation trip? Relatives from out of town visiting? A fishing trip? A round of golf? A minor snuffle or headache? Too sick to worship (but not to sick to go to work)? Just didn't feel like coming? Stop for a minute to think what those persecuted Christians of the first century would say if they heard YOUR excuses.

Why did those people take such risks? Why did they suffer so much? The answer is obvious: they loved the Lord and were committed to His service. What about YOU?

- by Greg Gwin