

# **A walk with Mr O (54)**

## **Criticising others**

***Mr O, I would like to talk to you about some of the members of my church, but I'm afraid that you will tell me off for being critical.***

I understand. But you do realise, don't you, that there is a difference between a critical faculty and a critical spirit?

***No, not really. Since becoming a Christian, I've heard a lot about avoiding a critical spirit, but I've never even heard of a critical faculty. What is it?***

We are men and women who have been made in the image of God, and one evidence of this is that we each have a conscience. We have a sense of right and wrong. Among the things which are right, some things are better than others. Among the things which are wrong, some things are worse than others. God has given us the ability to weigh things up and to rank them in value, and he expects us to use it. This is what we call our critical faculty.

***So, what is the difference between that critical faculty and a critical spirit?***

Our critical faculty is given to us by God. That is why every New Testament book, at some point, passes judgment on someone. Some people are commended. Why? Because they are good examples. Other people are condemned. Why? Because they are dangerous. They are people who will lead us astray, either doctrinally or morally. A critical faculty always sets out to be helpful to the person being spoken to, and it does this out of love for Christ.

***So, what about a critical spirit?***

A critical spirit comes from the devil and its fruit is always evil. Unfortunately, it is now part of our fallen nature. Its chief characteristic is that it is censorious.

***Censorious? It's not often that I hear you use an unusual word, Mr O! I've heard the word 'censorious', but I'm not at all sure what it means.***

To be censorious means to be strongly critical of someone's behaviour.

In a way which is unloving, and to express that criticism without any thought of pleasing Christ. It means to put down, to belittle them, and to get a certain satisfaction in doing so. It means to speak negatively about others without a thought for the welfare of the person you are speaking to.

***So, as long as I'm trying to please Christ, and I have love for the person I'm speaking to, it's okay to speak negatively about others?***

I can't give a straight 'yes' or 'no' to that question. Before we speak negatively about others there are some more questions we must ask ourselves. Am I reluctant to speak about people in this way? Am I doing it in a way which is measured and fair? Am I acutely aware of my own sins and faults? Am I really speaking like a follower of a crucified and risen Saviour who loves people deeply?

***That's all very challenging, Mr O. But , to be honest, I just wanted some help in evaluating what these church members are saying and doing. I'm very troubled by it all and I don't know what to think. It's not wrong to seek your advice, is it ? Surely not***

Well, let me be blunt. Is it advice that you are after, or is it ammunition?

***I don't quite know what you mean,***

Do you want help in seeing things as God sees them, or do you simply want help in winning an argument?

***I genuinely want to be more discerning, but it's surely not wrong to want to win an argument, is it? After all, there is such a thing as honest and vigorous debate.***

Yes. there is but people must not leave the debate with the impression that we see them as enemies. Our Saviour is very clear on this point. The way that we speak to others, and about others, is the way that they will soon be speaking to and about us.

And he goes further than that. At the last Judgment he will recite back to us every word that we have ever spoken, and he will ask us to explain ourselves, As long as all this is clear, I will gladly hear what you have to say about these church members.

***Thanks, Mr O.***

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