

3 Ways to Kill a Relationship

Being unduly critical of others is a behavior pattern that not only destroys our relationships but also blinds us to our own weaknesses.

Much torment comes to people's lives because of judgmental attitudes, criticism and suspicion. Multitudes of relationships are destroyed by these enemies.

In the area of judgment, the mind is the battlefield. Thoughts—just “I think”—can be the tool the devil uses to keep a person lonely. People do not enjoy being around someone who needs to voice an opinion about everything.

Being judgmental, opinionated and critical are three sure ways to see relationships dissolve. Satan, of course, wants you and me to be lonely and rejected, so he attacks our minds in these areas.

“Judging” Defined

According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, one of the Greek words translated *judge* is partially defined as “to form an opinion” and is cross-referenced to the word *sentence*. God is the only one who has the right to condemn or sentence; therefore, when we pass judgment on another, we are, in a certain sense, setting ourselves up as God in his life. That puts a little “godly fear” in me. I have a lot of nerve, but I am not interested in trying to be God!

These areas were once a major problem in my personality. I was critical because I always seemed to see what was wrong instead of what was right.

Some personalities are more given to this fault than others. Some of the more jovial personality types do not want to see anything but the “happy” or “fun” things in life, so they

really don't pay much attention to the things that could spoil their enjoyment.

The more melancholy personality or the controlling personality often sees what is wrong first; generally, people with this type of personality are generous in sharing their negative opinions and outlook with others.

Thousands of things we encounter every day are neither right nor wrong but are simply personal choices—choices people have a right to make on their own without outside interference.

My husband and I are extremely different in our approach to many things. How to decorate a house would be one of those things. If we go out to shop for household things together, it seems Dave always likes one thing, and I like something else. His opinion is just as good as mine, and mine is just as good as his; they are simply different.

It took me years to understand that there wasn't something wrong with Dave just because he did not agree with me. Of course, I usually let him know that I thought there was something wrong with him. Obviously, my attitude caused much friction between us and hurt our relationship.

The Problem Is Pride

Judgment and criticism are actually the fruit of a deeper problem—pride. The Bible repeatedly warns us about being high-minded (see, for example, Romans 12:3).

Whenever we excel in an area, it is only because God has given us a gift of grace for it. If we have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves, it causes us to look down on others and value them as “less than” we are.

This type of attitude or thinking is detestable to the Lord, and it opens many doors for the enemy in our lives. We must have a holy fear of pride and be very careful of judging

others or of being critical of them (Gal. 6:1-3).

Each of us belongs to God, and even if we have weaknesses, He is able to make us stand and to justify us. We answer to God, not to each other; therefore, we are not to judge one another in a critical way (Rom. 14:4).

The devil stays very busy assigning demons to place judgmental, critical thoughts in people's minds. I can remember when it was entertaining for me to sit in the park or the shopping mall and simply watch all the people go by as I formed a mental opinion of each of them—their clothing, hairstyles, companions and so on.

We cannot always prevent ourselves from having opinions, but we do not have to express them. I believe we can even grow to the point where we do not have so many opinions, and those we do have are not of a critical nature.

I frequently tell myself, "Joyce, it's none of your business." A major problem is brewing in your mind when you ponder your opinion until it becomes a judgment.

The problem grows bigger the more you think about it until you begin to express it to others or even to the one you're judging. It has then become explosive and has the ability to do a great deal of harm in the realm of relationship as well as in the spiritual realm. You may be able to save yourself future problems by simply learning to say, "This is none of my business."

Judgment and criticism were rampant in my family, so I "grew up with them," so to speak. I wanted to do things God's way, but I couldn't. It took many years of misery before I learned about the strongholds in my mind that had to be dealt with before my behavior could change.

Matthew 7:1-5 are some of the classic Scriptures on the

subject of judgment and criticism. When you are having trouble with your mind in this area, use these Scriptures and others as weapons against the devil who is attempting to build a stronghold in your mind. He may be operating out of a stronghold that has already been there for many years.

Sowing and Reaping

The Scriptures plainly tell us that we will reap what we sow (Matt. 7:1-2; Gal. 6:7). This also applies to the mental realm.

We can sow and reap an attitude as well as a crop or an investment. Many times we are reaping in our lives what we have previously sown into the life of another.

The devil loves to keep us busy, mentally judging the faults of others. That way, we never see or deal with what is wrong with us!

We cannot change others; only God can. We cannot change ourselves either, but we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to do the work.

When we have our thoughts and conversation on what is wrong with everyone else, we are usually being deceived about our own conduct. Therefore, Jesus commanded that we not concern ourselves with what is wrong with others when we have so much wrong with ourselves (Matt. 7:3-5). Allow God to deal with you first, and then you will learn the scriptural way of helping your brother grow in his Christian walk.

Besides reaping judgment ourselves when we criticize others, the Scriptures tell us that we ourselves do the same things for which we criticize others (Rom. 2:1). The Lord gave me a good example once to help me understand this principle.

I was pondering why we would do something ourselves and think it was perfectly all right but judge someone else who does it.

The Lord said, "Joyce, you look at yourself through rose-colored glasses, but you look at everyone else through a magnifying glass."

We make excuses for our own behavior, but when someone else does the same thing we do, we are often merciless. Doing unto others as we want them to do to us (Matt. 7:12) is a good life principle that will prevent a lot of judgment and criticism, if followed.

A judgmental mind is an offshoot of a negative mind—thinking about what is wrong with an individual instead of what is right. Being positive and not negative will benefit others, but you will benefit more than anyone.

Be Suspicious of Suspicion

First Corinthians 13:7 reads, "Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person" (AMP).

I can honestly say that obedience to this Scripture has always been a challenge for me. I was brought up to be suspicious and to distrust everyone. In addition, I had several very disappointing experiences with people, not only before I became an active Christian but afterward as well. Meditating on the components of love and realizing that love always believes the best has helped me greatly to develop a new mind-set.

When your mind has been poisoned or when Satan has gained strongholds in your mind, it has to be renewed according to God's Word. You renew it by learning the Word and meditating on it—pondering, muttering to yourself and thinking on it.

We have the wonderful Holy Spirit in us to remind us when our thoughts are going in the wrong direction. God does this for me when I am having suspicious thoughts instead of loving thoughts.

The natural man thinks, "If I trust people, I'll be taken advantage of." Perhaps, but the benefits will far outweigh any negative experiences.

Trust and faith bring joy to life and help relationships grow to their maximum potential. Suspicion cripples a relationship and usually destroys it.

God condemns judgment, criticism and suspicion, and so should we. Love what God loves, and hate what He hates. Allow what He allows, and disallow what He disallows.

A balanced attitude is always the best policy. That doesn't mean we are not to use wisdom and discernment in our dealings with others. We don't have to throw open our lives to everyone we meet, giving every person we encounter a chance to crush us. On the other hand, we don't have to look at everyone with a negative, suspicious eye, always expecting to be taken advantage of by others.

One time after I had been involved in a disappointing church situation, God brought John 2:23-25 to my attention. It speaks of Jesus' relationship with His disciples.

It plainly says that Jesus did not trust Himself to them. It does not say that He was suspicious of them or that He had no trust in them; it explains that because He understood human nature, He did not trust Himself to them in an unbalanced way.

I had been hurt badly in the situation at church because I had become too involved with a group of ladies and had gotten out of balance. I had been leaning on the ladies in this group and placing in them a trust that belongs only to God.

We can go only so far in any human relationship. If we go beyond wisdom, trouble will brew, and we will be hurt.

Some people think they have discernment when actually they are just suspicious. Suspicion comes out of the unrenewed mind;

discernment comes out of the renewed spirit.

True spiritual discernment will provoke prayer, not gossip. If a genuine problem is being discerned by a genuine gift, it will follow the scriptural pattern for dealing with it, not fleshly ways that only spread and compound the problem.

Pleasant Words Are Sweet

“The mind of the wise instructs his mouth, and adds learning and persuasiveness to his lips. Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the mind and healing to the body” (Prov. 16:23-24).

Words and thoughts are like bone and marrow—so close, it is hard to divide them (Heb. 4:12).

Our thoughts are silent words that only we and the Lord hear, but those words affect our inner man, our health, our joy and our attitude. The things we think on often come out of our mouths and sometimes make us look foolish.

Judgment, criticism and suspicion never bring joy. Jesus said that He came in order that we might have and enjoy life (John 10:10). Begin to operate in the mind of Christ, and you will step into a whole new realm of living.

Read a companion devotional.

Joyce Meyer is a Bible teacher and conference host who travels extensively conducting conferences and speaking at local churches with her ministry.