

4 Ways to Deal With Criticism From Christians

Have you ever heard the phrase, “*Christians are the only ones who shoot their wounded*”? If we were sitting down over a cup of coffee, I would love to know your thoughts about that comment.

I had a great conversation with a friend the other day about how to respond to comments said about other believers. My friend was in a spiritual conversation with a girl who was describing her experience with Christians. The girl said a pastor had told her she was “*the spawn of Satan*.” Everything in us wants to jump to the girl’s defense and bash the pastor who would say that.

It’s also common to hear Christians and non-Christians alike talk bad about “other Christians,” lumping every believer into a category of being judgmental, legalistic, cheesy, dorky ... etc. It’s easy to passively nod in agreement about those “other” Christians being so ____.

But ...

Didn’t Jesus say people would know He is God by our love for one another? He didn’t say the unbeliever would know Jesus was God by our taking their side and joining them in pointing the finger at the Christians they came in contact with.

Rather, people will know Jesus is God by our love, our unselfishly choosing for another’s highest good, of other believers, even believers we don’t know, even believers we don’t agree with or necessarily relate to all that much. How beautiful it would be to see bashing and belittling Jesus’ bride come to an end.

Here are 4 practical ways to deal with criticism from believers.

1. Pray for them. There was a time I was unjustly criticized, and I got angry. I was so angry I just stormed off and neglected my responsibilities and went to vent to God about the person. I started praying for them things like, *"God, you show them what you think!" "Show them how wrong they are ... convict them!"* But gently the Lord spoke to me to really pray for them, to pray the hardest things for me to pray and pray for their best interests. I didn't want to pray for their good; I wanted God to get 'em! But eventually I did, not because I felt like it, but out of obedience. As I kept praying for this person and for God to give them an incredible ministry someday and other super hard things for me to pray, a crazy thing happened. My heart softened. The anger subsided and I was able to forgive them, even when the person didn't ask for it. The next week this person said they were sorry—making me the first person they had ever said sorry to in their entire life.

2. Sort out good and bad. Dr. Henry Cloud wrote a great book called *Changes That Heal* that describes this really well. Basically it says we have a tendency to think in terms of all good or all bad. If we like something or someone, we lean toward thinking it (or they) is all good and can do no wrong. Or if we don't like something, we tend to think nothing good could come from it. When we receive criticism, we need to process with the Lord what's good and true about what is being said and be able to separate that from what is not true.

3. Clarify and communicate. When we (or others) are criticized, we need to communicate in a healthy way about the issue. We need to share what we heard (or think we heard), what we felt and thought about it, our desires and then also share what we'd like to see happen in the future. Here's a great tool to help with this process.

It is also very helpful to ask questions and reword what you

think someone is saying to help clarify what you think someone is saying, because the majority of conflicts are a result of miscommunication.

4. Remember what's true about you and "them." We fail, and if you're anything like me, it's easy to demand mercy for my mistakes yet justice and wrath for others, forgetting that Jesus died for their mistakes too.

When another believer messes up, our knee-jerk reaction is to point the finger and accuse. But here's the reality (*italics mine*), *"Once you [and they] were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your [and their] evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you [them] by Christ's physical body through death to present you [them] holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."* (Col. 1:21-22).

The more we understand our true identity in Christ, we should understand that same identity as given to other believers in Christ as well.

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