

5 Signs That It's Time to Answer Your Critics

When I released this embedded op-ed and posted a picture with Francis Chan on my Facebook page, I was branded by some as heretical, ecumenical, and part of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), none of which are true.

While I understand that preachers and pastors cannot always give people an answer—I myself don't have time to read nor answer all the comments on my media feeds—there are times when we should explain our actions. It may not change the minds of those who are hell-bent on critiquing us, but it may clear up confusion for those in the middle.

As I've stated before, I tend to be "safely" conservative when considering the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm open but cautious. I think we have too many prophecies and not enough humility; too much self-centered worship and not enough waiting on God. We need both sound doctrine and the power of the Holy Spirit. It's possible to be "Bible-taught" but not "Spirit-led"—straight as a gun barrel theologically but just as empty. "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

I think it's time for many prominent charismatic leaders to answer their critics to help those in the middle better understand their theology. Avoiding questions isn't always good. Sincere people raise valid issues deserving of a response, such as lovingly challenging those who say that Jesus was not God while on earth, that all people should be healed, or taking way too much liberty when it comes to exegeting a passage of Scripture.

Folks, it's time to solidify our positions. If you've said confusing things, explain where you're coming from. Are you

open to re-evaluating your theology in light of Scripture? Sadly, most charismatics are not known for their theology; they must change that. Granted there are a few such as John Piper, Sam Storm, Dr. Michael Brown, and so on, but overall, there is a great need in this area. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "We are to interpret our experiences in the light of Scripture," not the other way around.

That being said, I do have concerns about the attitude behind some of the judgmental websites, vindictive videos and Pharisee-blogs. Critics often forget that "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Arrogance and haughtiness are not positive character traits. The way many condemn others is disheartening. It appears that they actually take pleasure in it. Where is the burden for them? Why don't they weep before they whip? Why don't they season their words with grace? I'm all for contending for truth, but it must come from a broken heart that's been humbled by God. Sadly, this is what many are lacking.

How do I know that they are arrogant and condescending? Because they show little desire to really interact with the folks they throw under the bus. They not only enjoy throwing them under the bus, they enjoy driving the bus. Be careful—history has taught us that arrogant critics often fall via a moral failure or some other silent sin.

For the rest of us, here are some indicators that we should answer our critics:

1. When they are genuinely seeking answers. Most of us are not "out to get you." We simply want answers. Yes, Jesus remained silent at times, but other times, He spoke out, clarified and lovingly fought back. When He was slapped, He didn't turn the other cheek. He called the person out for his actions (John 18:22–23).

2. When your influence warrants it. If you are influencing

others, you need to be careful. There is a stricter judgment for us. Silence is not always the best option. Sometimes it can be a smokescreen for cowardliness or passivity. Again, it's impossible to answer all our critics, but if a constant theme arises against the ministry the Lord has given us, we need to address it. That's why I appreciate Mike Bickle, the prominent leader of the International House of Prayer (IHOPKC), taking the time to talk with me on this podcast.

3. When the truth of the gospel is at stake. This is a no-brainer. When essential truths are being questioned, we must respond.

4. When a lot of confusion surrounds our ministry. The devil loves confusion and wants us to avoid bringing light and clarity to questions surrounding our beliefs and actions. This is one reason I'm glad Sam Storms released this article about IHOPKC. Sadly, the type of people I described above will probably take no interest in Sam's article. They'll still hold to their opinion because they are proud, unteachable and eager to dispute. When we're so busy calling everyone else to repentance, we often fail to look in the mirror.

5. When godly counsel encourages us to do so. When it comes to answering your critics, ask other solid believers who will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. We all have friends and family who will confirm our desire to remain silent. Instead, ask those who will look through an unbiased lens.

My heart is for unity in the true body of Christ, but many statements that have been made demand answers. Remaining silent actually gives those caught in the middle pause for concern. For example, I appreciate the heart for revival and healing that some prominent leaders have, but their statements about Catholics and Christians coming together need to be lovingly challenged and clarified, as do some of their doctrinal positions. Moreover, clips are available that show

(what appear to be) fake healings by manipulating a person's foot.

Again, I'm all for genuine healings, but many onlookers need clarification. Leaders, would you consider answering some of your critics so we can better understand where you're coming from? It's not sending the right message to the vast majority of us. If so, contact me at Shane Idleman.

True humility recognizes that we are not perfect. We need iron to sharpen iron to ultimately sharpen our theology. We must move out of the ivory tower of the "touch not God's anointed" superstar mentality, humble ourselves, and be open to constructive criticism. "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold" (Proverbs 22:1).