

The Measure of a Man
II Corinthians 10:7-18

INTRODUCTION

Criticism can be devastating. It can devastate a person's own sense of self-worth and leave them in despair. Every person will be faced with it at some time in life. Unfortunately, some people hear little else in life. How do you respond to criticism? As a Christian, your response can mean the difference between defeat and victory.

Our text gives us some insight into facing criticism. Paul had his critics in the church at Corinth. They had been leveling some stinging criticisms at him. This chapter is a part of his response to these charges. The first tendency when you are criticized is to respond in self-defense. You want to set forth your case in defense. Paul does some of this in our text, but he does it with a special understanding. Paul understood the nature of criticism by others and the dangers that they bring with them. In our text, we can find something then about the measure of a man by others, by self and by God. So we may better understand ourselves and our relationship to others, let us consider these one at a time.

I. THE MEASUREMENT BY OTHERS

Criticism is in itself a statement of measurement by another. They have applied to you some personal standard of measurement and have given you the benefit of their judgement. Usually, this kind of measurement is totally uninvited. From Paul's experience with the Corinthians, we can learn some important things about the measurement by others.

The measure of others is based on outward appearance. Since no human being can know for sure what is in the heart of another human being, this must be true. In the case of Paul they seemed to have centered on some rather obvious outward things. Paul says to them, "You are looking only on the surface of things." One of the things being said is quoted by Paul, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." They were basing their judgement of Paul upon the outward things. He evidently did not possess those natural gifts that immediately impress others. Some early writers have given us some hints about his physical appearance that may explain this reference. He is pictured as being short, bow-legged, bald headed, with small eyes and a hooked nose. Surely not the tall handsome man who looks like he just stepped out of Hollywood. We know very little about his speaking ability --- we do know that he put one fellow to sleep in one of his sermons. Do you measure the man on-just what your eye can see? If you do, you will make some tragic mistakes.

Some years ago, I was on my way to speak to the State Evangelism Conference in Illinois. I was waiting on my plane in Chicago; I had to make a change there. I noticed a short, burly black man standing nearby. His neck looked like that of a professional weight lifter. When I saw him, for some reason, the thought went through my mind, "I sure would hate to meet that fellow on a back street at

night." I speculated in my mind what he might be in life. To my surprise, he got aboard the same plane that I boarded. When we arrived in Marion, Illinois, he got off too. To my utter surprise, this stranger turned out to be the guest musician for the conference in which I was speaking. He was the director of music for the National Baptist Convention and had sung before royalty all around the world. I learned a lesson from that. Human measurement based on outward appearance is surely to be wrong.

The measure of others is colored by our experiences and prejudices. These critics of Paul were probably Jewish. They were steeped in the tradition of their fathers. They measured every act of Paul as he ministered to the Gentiles through these Jewish eyes. But this is true of all of us. We cannot totally separate ourselves from our past experiences and our past teaching. What we have experienced and what we have been taught will influence how we measure each other. I know a person whose measurement of every pastor is colored by a bitter experience in the past. No pastor has ever really been given a chance to prove himself differently in the eyes of this person. I know a pastor who measures every deacon through the coloring of a bitter experience in the past. You will never get a fair measurement of a deacon from him.

This should say something to us. We ought never count the measurement of someone else as infallible, nor should we count our own measurements of others as infallible. They could be wrong and we could be wrong. The measurement by others is always of limited value.

II. THE MEASUREMENT BY SELF

This is something we all have to deal with. There is an inclination toward self-judgement in each of us. When used correctly this can be helpful, but it too should not be treated as infallible. There are certain inclinations in each of us that limits the value of self measurement. These Corinthian critics of Paul had evidently given themselves pretty good marks when they measured themselves.

One mark of self -measurement is the inclination to use others as a standard of measurement. Paul refers to this in our text. "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. " All of us have done this at times. We feel good about ourselves because we are doing better than someone else. However we usually pick out some of the worst cases around to use as a standard of measurement. We will say, "I am a better husband than Jim." But is just so happens that Jim is that character who stays drunk half of the time and is bent toward violence. Why do we not pick out the man who has just won the husband of the year award?

The proper standard of measurement is not someone else, but the Lord Jesus Himself. He is the revelation of God's standard of measurement. How do you measure up to him morally and spiritually? How close do you come to his level of achievement before God? Even the best man we know does not measure up to

this standard. So it is never wise to compare yourself with others. It can only lead to wrong judgment on your part.

There is another fact we must keep in mind about self measurement. We all have an inbuilt inclination toward pride. It is just a part of the human makeup. This pride will cause us to be dishonest with ourselves when we measure ourselves. We will cheat to make ourselves look better. We will even deceive ourselves. This is one of the purposes of the Holy Scriptures. They provide us a revelation of an objective standard from the Lord by which we may measure ourselves. The Apostle warns us, "For it is not the man who commends himself who is approved." What you say about yourself may be true or it may not be true. You may be over-estimating yourself or you may be in fact under-estimating yourself. Both are equally harmful.

III. THE MEASUREMENT BY GOD

Ultimately this is the only measurement that counts. Our ultimate accountability is to Him alone. "For it is not the man who commends himself who is approved, but the man whom the Lord commends." This divine commendation is the thing that we should pursue with all of our being.

The measurement of God is based on opportunity. Paul has this in the background of his defense in our text. "We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boast to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you." Paul's conduct and his ministry had been limited to the assignment he had received from the Lord. It had been his divinely bestowed lot to minister to the Gentile cities and to reach outside of Israel with the Gospel. God knew this. God knows fully the opportunities that he has set before a certain individual. His measurement is always in light of these opportunities.

We are not equal at this point. No two persons in this room have the same opportunities. Those we do have, have come to us out of the gracious provisions of our God. But every opportunity will become a part of the consideration taken by the Lord in determining whether or not you are to receive a commendation. Jesus illustrated this in several of his parables. You will recall the parable of the talents that demonstrates this. Each man was measured by his returning Lord by what he had done with the talents he had received. If he had been faithful with his assignment, whether it was large or small, he received a commendation from the Lord.

The other insight that we need about the measurement by God is that it includes motivation. God looks into the heart to see why you are doing what you are doing before He speaks a word of commendation. Paul points to this, "But, let him who boasts boast in the Lord." Paul recognized certain dangers in boasting about what one has done. He was afraid of self-commendation and recommendations. He knew that this could be a reflection of a motivation that was nothing more than the desire to gain the praise of men. It could be very self directed. He knew that the only motivation that gains the approval of God is that

of doing it for His glory. God has spoken to this several times. He will allow no flesh to glory in His presence.

God will commend and reward the man who does what he does for the glory of God, who is motivated by devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. This can be very disturbing, however. In my more honest moments, I am very aware that most of the time my motives are mixed. It is only-as the Holy Spirit works in me that I can break- free from the desire to please men and to bring praise to myself. Yet this I must do if I am to measure tall by God's standard and his measurement is the only one that counts.

Conclusion:

This gives you some insight about how to respond to criticism. 'First, recognize its limitation. You should never treat the word of another about yourself as infallible. However, you must also be aware of the tendency to over measure yourself. Is the criticism speaking to some blind spot that you have in your life. But finally, you must seek to expose yourself to the divine measurement. What does God think about me in this?

The focus of our lives should be upon gaining the divine commendation. This "crown" will make everything else worthwhile.