



## **Living in a World of Critics – Part 1**

### **Adopting a Strategy from Another World**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well, I assume you would agree with me that we live in a world of critics as you see our theme is now for the next few weeks in Second Corinthians. We live in a world of critics and sadly criticism stings. And just consider the fact that you can be at work and you can deliver some presentation or maybe you're a parent and you can throw some birthday party for your child, and after you do all that you can have ten beautiful compliments after it's all done. And then you have one-off-the-wall criticism. And of course, that night the one thing you're going to be remembering and mulling over in your mind is not any one of the ten compliments. It'll be that one criticism that sticks in your craw for the rest of the week. Am I right about that? That's just how it goes. Pew Research did some research on criticism and said that 41% of adults and 64% of teenagers say that their experience online is that they get a lot of name-calling, they get a lot of insults, and they get a lot of sustained criticism online. I know I do. I know that's hard for you to believe, isn't it? (audience laughing) But I just know that's the case.

Well, it just happens. But we can all unplug our computers. We could get off of social media if we wanted to, but most of us have to work. And the reality is Pew Research goes on to say that over 50% of all employees say that generally they feel like the feedback they get at their jobs is overly critical and generally negative. And that just happens at work. It happened to me this morning before the first service. I was told that I am a bad preacher, (audience laughing) which that couldn't wait until after the service. It had to be before the service which is always nice to hear. Matter of fact, one in three employees say that they have left a job because of criticism at work, one in three. So, you know, we're going to get criticism at work. We're going to get criticism online. And sadly for a lot of you here, you also claim to be a Christian and as a Christian there's a whole wave of promises that God gives you and some of them are that there's going to be an addition of criticism you're going to get because you are a follower of Christ. This is what God says is going to happen.

And because of all that criticism that you're going to get just for being in this world and now being not of this world because you are a follower of Christ, you'd better know how to respond to criticism. Because if you don't know how to respond to it eventually it's going to get a hold of you and it's going to start to destroy you from the inside out. It'll certainly control you. It'll ruin your testimony at some point because you'll respond to it in a way you ought not to respond to it. And sadly it will also get you to a place where you'll respond in a way that doesn't reflect Christ, probably in situations where it is most needed, where it could do the most good. So we need to rightly know how to respond to this and then we need to work hard to make sure that we do. And God is ready to help us through that. And one of the ways he does that is by giving us good examples like we have in Second Corinthians Chapter 10.

So I want you to turn to this text. We're going to take three different installments of our study through Second Corinthians to deal with this tenth chapter. Today I want to work through the first six verses with you and use this as a platform to think through how the Apostle Paul is

being criticized, how he's responding to the criticism, and just to think through what Jesus has to say and what he models in all of this as well. So let me read this for you. The first six verses of Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verses 1 through 6. I'll read it from the English Standard Version and here's how it starts, "I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I, who am humble in face-to-face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!" You can picture him writing that rolling his eyes. And the reason is between those dashes. This is one of the criticisms he's receiving, and that should become obvious to you in part because he just said what he said at the beginning of verse 1, and he's writing while away from them. Right? Do you follow? Right? He's writing away from them saying "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ," I'm entreating you while I'm away. And yet they're saying I'm "humble when face to face," but I'm just so mean when I'm, you know, far away, I'm so bold to you when I'm far away.

And then he says well, speaking of coming to you, "I beg of you that when I am present, I may not have to show boldness," he's talking about when I'm bold in letters, but I'm going to show, "boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh." There's another complaint and criticism he gets. "For though we walk in the flesh," of course we're humans, right? We know we are humans. We walk in the flesh, "we're not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but we have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete."

Now he's dealing with the critics over the wall, so to speak, of the Corinthian congregation. But the Corinthian congregation is starting to believe what the critics are saying so he's having to deal with them. He wants their obedience to be complete. He wants them to work through the doubts that they may be having about the Apostle Paul. And then he's going to deal with the critics. So he's really showing in part, how he's dealing with the critics in his own mind and his response to them as we'll see throughout this chapter and it really continues on throughout the book. But this particular foray into his response to criticism is going to be very helpful for us and I trust we'll learn from it.

But let's start with the criticism. We get a little bit here at the bottom of verse 2. And just that cordoned off section there in the bottom of verse 1, "I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I'm away." You followed what I said about this. This is clearly not true even in the context here. And all you have to do is go back to First Corinthians, the one extant letter that we do have, the existing letter from Paul that we do have. Right? There were others, but we have this one from Paul and you can see well, yeah, there were hard sections in it, very bold, but also some very tender sections and very nice sections in it, calm and meek and gentle sections in it. So it's just not true. Not to mention the fact that when he was there, I'm sure he said plenty of things that were bold and harsh and difficult. Right? Because he's a preacher, he's an apostle, he comes with authority. So it's not true but that's what they were saying. So also at the bottom of verse 2, "who suspect us of walking according to the flesh," that's what the critics are telling the Corinthians. The critics are taking pot shots at the Apostle Paul saying, you know, he's not as godly as he says he is. You guys



think he's godly but he's not all that godly. He lives a life that's just like, you know, everybody else. Okay.

He's getting criticized. And I know you can say well, he's a high-profile Christian. He's an apostle. But, you know, as a Christian, you're going to be criticized just living in the world you're going to be criticized as I tried to illustrate just at the opening of this message. But let's just jot it down for the sake of completeness. I know it's just master of the obvious kind of point, but jot it down, number one, okay, we need to "Expect to be Criticized." Expect to be criticized. You just need to expect it. You live in a fallen world and the Bible's very clear. Luke Chapter 6 verse 45 says the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. And Jesus says this: the evil person out of the evil that's in his heart is just going to overflow with evil. And so you don't even have to be a Christian to know you're living in a fallen world, people have fallen hearts. Just drive up the I-5 for 10 or 20 minutes and you'll see some of that spill out. You won't be able to hear it necessarily but you'll see it mouth to you occasionally depending on how traffic is.

People, they're going to criticize you. People are going to criticize you at work, your neighbors for your trash cans being taken in too late or your lawn or I don't know, you're going to be criticized. There's going to be lots in this world and there's going to be plenty of criticism. The Bible's very clear. Here's another one from Romans Chapter 3. And this is just a statement in verse 14 about people's mouths. "Their mouth," speaking of sinners, "is full of curses and bitterness." There is just no way around it. People are mad. And even if it's not just about religion and politics, just go online and watch people. It's just everybody's mad about stuff and they criticize and lob bombs at each other. Or how about James Chapter 3 verse 6 and the whole chapter? I mean, half of it at least is about our tongue. And it says, "the tongue is a fire," verse 6, "a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of our lives," and then it says this, and it is "set on fire by hell." Now think about that.

Here is James saying there's something about our tongue and it's not only just like uncontrolled and untamed, right? But think about the fact that it is set on fire by hell. That's kind of poetic, flowery language, right? It's not flowery in a nice sense, but it's poetic and symbolic and allegorical in a sense. But we know that it's coming from a place of someone who is, to put it in terms of Ephesians Chapter 2, with the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. It's like when Jesus said that Satan is a liar and when he lies he speaks from his own nature. Right? Or let's put it this way, he's also a slanderer, right? And when he slanders, that's just right in keeping with what he loves to do. Well, Satan, who's a liar, loves it when people lie and he loves to set on fire people's tongues to lie. He loves liars and he loves to make people lie. He loves to lead people to lie. He loves to tempt people to lie. And he also loves to tempt people to slander and to malign and to criticize.

So the tongue is set on fire by hell. And you know a lot of what's going on online, a lot of what's going on at your workplace and the workroom and the conference rooms and you know what's going on in your neighborhoods and you know what's going on, even sometimes, sadly, at church is happening because Satan is just making sure it's all fueled, because we



live in a fallen world. So you're going to be criticized just because you live in a fallen world. As a Christian though the Apostle Paul here knows that as a Christian he is being criticized in ways that are not only just like, okay, you're teaching these people, you're leading these people, they're calling you, in essence in verse 1, a hypocrite, are they not? Right? You're two-faced. You're here and saying things in such nice ways. But when you go away and write a letter you're bombing us. You're so harsh. Or as he says in the bottom of verse 2, you know, they're suspecting that we're walking according to the flesh. Right? You're a super spiritual apostle but you're just sinning like everybody else. You're just a normal person. You have no super spirituality. You're just like everybody else. You're a sinner. You're unspiritual, you're ungodly.

Drop down to Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 10. There are two things that happen here. It's what we might call in debate, an ad hominem attack. And it gets real personal here. It says, "His letters are weighty and strong, but," this is what the critics say, "his bodily presence is weak." I don't know, that's almost getting into like, really personal stuff, right? It's like he's short, his biceps aren't that big, or he's hunched over or... "His bodily presence is weak," and not only that, it says, "his speech is of no account." Paul's even admitted that. I didn't come with persuasive speech. I'm not some rhetorician. I'm not some, you know, statesman. I'm not a Roman statesman. I'm just coming to you giving you the truth. But they're just picking on him now, right? Your body is weak. Your words aren't all that strong. And, yeah, he writes good letters but, I mean, just like I pointed out in verse 1, Paul's saying, they're calling me a hypocrite. They're saying I'm not godly, they're saying I look funny or weak or whatever, and I can't speak well. Okay. Criticism there.

Well, that's just the tip of the iceberg. And it really is just a fleshing out of some of the things that Jesus promised that we would get. And let's just talk because we're Christians here, most of us, let's just talk about what Jesus said about what Christians should expect in terms of criticism. Let's start in Luke Chapter 6 just to kind of round out this topic. If you're going to expect criticism, what kind of criticism should you expect just because you are a Christian? Okay? Let's think this through. Luke Chapter 6, drop down to verse 22 and get started on this list. Luke Chapter 6 verse 22. Now you can glance at verse 23, and it's supposed to end with like you're supposed to be happy about this in some weird, oxymoronic way. Like, how am I supposed to be happy? Well, because the prophets were treated badly. But basically we're going to talk about attitudes the world's going to have toward us. Now we can look at other passages that say it more starkly about the feelings, and that is that Jesus said in John Chapter 15 well, if you get hated by the world, just know they hated me first. And the reason they hate you is because you're not of the world, right? I've drawn you out of the world or John Chapter 17, like, I know that these are my people. I've called them to be my people and the world is not going to like them because of that.

Now, here's the thing about Christ. At the beginning of the earthly ministry of Christ, Simeon takes him as an eight-day-old child in his arms on the Temple Mount, and he says a couple of things about him. Mary is standing there watching and he says, you know, Christ is coming here, the fulfillment of the Messiah's role. And he knows this as the Spirit of God goes over him and he knows the Old Testament prophecies. And now he prophesies something and he

says it in some stark terms. They're going to get into some specifics that he says to Mary but he starts with this: the Christ, "is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel." Now, that's just a kind of a way to encapsulate what Jesus is going to say later in his ministry, like in Matthew Chapter 10 when he says, "don't think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." He said, I have come to bring division. "I have come to set a man against this father, and a daughter against her mother." The reality is that Christ is going to divide people in half. And the way he puts it here is that some are going to be up and some are going to be down. He's going to take people and put them into two camps. He's going to bifurcate people in half, some for the rise and some for the fall. And in a real sense we know, we put it this way, some onto a narrow road and some onto a broad road. You're either going to love them or you're going to hate them.

And Simeon says this; he's going to be "a sign that is opposed." Now that's a helpful way to think about it, "a sign that is opposed." And the reality is that Christ is going to be someone who is assigned to be opposed. Look at the bottom of Luke Chapter 6 verse 22, it says all of the things that he's going to say in verse 22 ends with it's all going to be, "on account of the Son of Man." Now, the Son of Man I often remind you this is the Daniel Chapter 7 terminology. Jesus loves this title for himself because it is the way the Messiah was understood to be, "one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days," and the Father saying to the Son, one like a Son of Man in human form, found in the likeness of man, and all of the authority of heaven, and all the authority of earth given to him, as he says, at the end of his ministry, all authority in heaven to earth have been given to me. And so Christ is the one to whom all dominion and authority and riches and power, all are supposed to be given to him. So all people, the kingdoms of the world, are supposed to be subservient to him.

So here is the one that is a sign to be opposed, this great one. You would think, okay, everyone is to look at him. There are lots of things in your neighborhood, when you drive in your neighborhood today, there are a lot of things, the hose and this guy's front lawn and there's, you know, whatever. There's siding on this house, and there are the rain gutters up here and just all kinds of stuff. But then there's a sign, there's a stop sign or there's a whatever, a street sign or a speed limit sign. The signs are out there to get your attention. The Son of Man is like a sign to get your attention. But it's not just a sign, it's a sign to be opposed is what Simeon said. And people are going to take that sign, and it's going to be for the rising of some, Jesus said a few, but it's going to be a sign for the falling of many. It's going to be a sign that most are going to oppose. And if you are called for the rising of many, you're going to call to align yourself and to embrace Christ, you just know that a lot of people are going to go after it. "A sign that is opposed." Let's put it this way. Another way to say that is a target, right? A target is something that everyone shoots at, it's a sign that is opposed. Right?

So if you go down to the pistol range with your friends after church today and everyone's going to shoot at a target and one of your friends says, why don't you just go down range and hold the target and we'll all shoot at it? Don't agree to that. I don't care how good a shot they are. That's not a good idea, right? You don't want to hold the target, right? And yet we're supposed to go and break from the crowd and go hold to the target. We're supposed to go and align with the sign. We're supposed to be with the Son of Man. We're supposed to step



out from the crowd. The "Ekklesia," the church is supposed to be called out from the world and be the little flock around the sign, around the king. And the problem is the whole world according to the spirit that's now at work in the sons of disobedience is all about attacking this sign. So it ends with this in Luke Chapter 6 verse 22, all of this stuff's going to be "on account of the Son of Man." Well, how does it start? Well, blessed, which is a hard way for us to compute any of this. Well, he's going to explain that in verse 23, which we won't have time to look at. But he says here's what's going to happen, right? "When people," it's not "if" because it's going to happen, "when people hate you." Okay? Because of the Son of Man, they hate you. So let's talk about this, right? Clearly there's going to be hatred. And that's the kind of thing we look at John Chapter 15 there could be hatred, but when they hate you, they're eventually going to say hateful things toward you. So a lot of the criticism you're going to get in this life because you're a Christian, is going to filter its way to you and to your ears by saying things that are critically hateful, right? They're hateful words of criticism. And that's just going to happen because they don't like you. Right? And that's what happens when you're a Christian and you stand with Christ just because you're with Christ. They don't like you and if they don't like you they're going to say things that are critical of you, words that are hateful words. And we just need to be ready for critical words where they say things that are completely unearned.

By the way, this whole sermon is not about critical words that have truth connected to them. That's a whole other sermon, right? I mean, we should love the reproofing Christian who comes, and we should have a listening wise ear, and we should adjust our lives to the reproof. We're not talking about that. I'm talking about the people who are coming to the Apostle Paul and they're coming to criticize him with no basis. That's why I use the illustration about the outlandish criticism after your presentation, the outlandish criticism after your birthday party for your kid. But it's out in left field. That's the kind of criticism I'm talking about, people hating you for no reason, which is exactly what Jesus said would happen. And they're going to come and bring criticism driven by their dislike for you. Now, that can ramp up into persecution but right now in Southern California, in America, we're not quite there yet, but they're not going to like you. And so they're going to say critical things driven by hatred. And the hatred is going to be expressed in words that will be negative. They will be hateful things.

Look at the next word. They will exclude you. Okay. That can be a literal exclusion. They don't invite you to something but that starts with words as well. There are words that they give you, critical words, to push you aside, to say you're not one of us. And here's a cross-reference to put down if you happen to be a note taker, jot this down, First Peter Chapter 4 verse 4. The context is verse 3, of course, which talks about people doing things in parties, drunkenness, it talks about drinking parties, lawlessness, idolatry, passions, sensuality. And it says with respect to this stuff, they're surprised when you do not join with them in the same flood of debauchery. And because of that, "they malign you." Okay, those are words of exclusion, maligning you. And why do they malign you? Because you won't do what they do. So the exclusion, they want to exclude you, but when they exclude you they don't just say, well, let's just not invite them and not say anything about you. They say things about you when they exclude you. And that's the critical words of exclusion. Of course, the critics of Paul did not want to take Paul to coffee. They wanted to exclude. That's part of why they're saying things



to exclude him. Who wants to go, you know, hang out with a guy who you say doesn't speak well, whose words are weak, he's a hypocrite, he's not godly, right? His bodily presence is weak. Of course, these are words of exclusion. And people are going to say things about you to exclude you. And those are going to be critical words, a whole category of negative words to exclude you.

What's the next one? Luke Chapter 6 verse 22, to revile you, to "revile you." A good word there a synonym for that would be to mock you to say things about you that would just make fun of you, to say things that just are jabs at you to somehow take something, make a caricature of you in some way, and just to mock you. The next one is the category of us being aligned not just with Christ but the group that follows Christ. They'll spurn your name as evil, but "your" is in the plural. And so you need to see this in the plural which, of course, in English we don't have a second-person plural distinction unless you live in the south. Then you might say, you know, they'll spurn "you all." All y'all's name is evil. Okay? So you need to know that's what they're saying. We're spurning Christianity's name as evil. Once you're known at your job as a Christian, or once you're known in your cul-de-sac as a Christian, once you are called out as a Christian, they often associate our whole group. They spurn it as bad. And that's just how this works, right?

You go, if you get talked into it by your wife, I guess, to your high school reunion, because we don't go willingly. Let's just say that. Right, men? I'm sorry. I'm sorry. No one's with me on this but you are silently with me on this. But you go to this, right? And then everybody wants to talk about their careers. First of all, you wonder why they look so old. That's the first thing you say. And then they want to talk about careers. Well, guess who doesn't want to talk about their career at my high school reunion? I don't want to talk about my career. Because do you know what I know? They spurn my career as evil not to mention my group, my Christianity is evil. So what's interesting is once they know who I am as a Christian and as a pastor, that I give my life to this they associate me with the worst of Christianity, right? Do they not? Right now I'm, you know, Jim Baker and my wife is Tammy Faye, right? That's how they see it. Now, if I'm sitting at a table where one of the guys who graduated high school with me had just had some long, successful career in the NFL, right? No one says, oh yeah, NFL, O.J. Simpson, huh? (audience laughing) No one says that. They never associate him with the worst of his career. But that's how this works, because there's a spirit at work right in the sons of disobedience to spurn the whole organization, the whole thing as evil.

And the Bible says get used to the criticism. It's going to come your way, and it will sometimes be a scratcher for you. It won't make sense. And that's because a lot of the criticism that comes toward us will not make sense, sometimes just because the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. You don't even have to be a Christian to get criticism. But sometimes you get unfounded criticism because you are a Christian and Satan is lighting these words on fire to come your way, and oftentimes to discourage you or to provoke you to do things that you shouldn't do and respond in all the wrong ways.

We could go on and on. There's a lot. I'll leave this to your own study. There are Judases there are betrayers, there are wolves that grow up among us, there are people making up bad



things about you. There are plenty of things in the book of First Peter, which is a great book about persecution and things that are said about us. But let's, for the sake of time, move back to our text, Second Corinthians 10 verses 1 through 4. Paul says, "I, Paul, myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Now I want to get to that because that's huge, and that's going to open up a whole, you know, wonderful door for us to consider. But let's look at the negation in verses 2 through 4a. He's going to contrast, "I beg of you that when I'm present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh." Well, that picks up now this theme. I don't walk according to the flesh. Right? "For though we walk in the flesh," of course we're human, "we're not waging war" like humans do, mere non-Christians do. "For the weapons of warfare are not of the flesh." When I engage with people who disagree with me or when they're criticizing me, I'm not just going to respond like a non-Christian. I'm not going to do this in a fleshly way. Okay.

So I want to be able to say if the benchmark is, I want to respond like Christ does, right? Then that's 1a I want to make sure that's in contradistinction to the fleshly responses. So that's the compare and contrast. So let's just get the positive and codify that as our second point. And then we'll look at both the fleshly responses and the Christlike responses. Number two, we need to 'Respond with Christlike Control,' because there is a time for things that... there's a varied set of responses that Christ gives to criticism. And we'll look at some of them. But I'm not saying they're all the same, because I could say, well, "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Well, it's not always meek and gentle as you know. Sometimes he turned over tables, I realize that. But let's just deal with this. He was always controlled, it was never reactionary. He didn't just have some flying off the handle response.

So I'm going to say this: Christ was always in control of his attitude, of his thoughts and so I want to respond like that, because the flesh is not that way. And let's just unpack that a little bit. We don't need to take long with this because I could just open up the podium for you and say you come up and tell us, how do people respond in the flesh when they're criticized? Most of you could come up here and do that, right? You could just come up here and do that. You don't want to nod because I might call on you to do that, right? (audience laughing) You can come up here and say I know how to respond, I know how I respond if I were going to just be a total non-Christian in response to criticism. Well, let's talk about it, right? First John Chapter 2 talks about the fact that when it comes to the flesh, the desires of the flesh, here it is connected with this, the boastful "pride of life." There's one thing about the flesh, and that is numero uno. Me. I always come first. It's about me. It's all the way back to the Garden. Hey, Eve, if this is good for you, good for food, good for gaining knowledge, then do it. Whatever you do. You come first, right? You put yourself first. And see that's the thing about the flesh. The flesh is super hypersensitive to me. And so if you criticize me, then I'm ready to react, right?

And then how do we react? The flesh wants to react and we don't want to slow down. Control, it's the opposite. Matter of fact, think of the works of the flesh in Galatians Chapter 5. One of them on the list is outbursts of anger. See? Because when you are someone who's very prideful and sensitive to any impingement on you, if there's a door ding on your character,

someone tries to ding you, right? You want to lash out and anger is right there. I want to go after it. Right? Think about what James says, James Chapter 1. You need to be, "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. That's control. In the next line. Why? Because "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." So I don't want outbursts of anger. Is there a time for anger? Yes, but "be angry and don't sin." So there has to be some kind of measured control, and I need to make sure I'm doing the right thing. So we'll get to Christ's response in a minute. But just make sure it's not fleshly. And fleshly is always quick, it's always snap, it's always reaction, and it's usually fueled by a very short fuse of temper. And then BAM! So we don't want that. The flesh is quick to respond. It's usually angry. It's usually driven by pride. We don't want that.

Here's another one. Let's just take two more from the list. Actually, two from each. There are two in each of these two, so four. Galatians Chapter 5 verse 20, two on the list of the works of the flesh. Enmity and strife. Enmity and strife. Now enmity means I've made you my enemy. Strife means I'm ready to put my dukes up. Okay? The flesh is, let me give it a word, "vindictive." The flesh is vindictive, right? And that means if you criticize me, right? Let's just say I'm Paul and you say you're bodily weak well, I'm going to look you up and down from head to toe and figure out what I'm going to say about you. Because I'm vindictive, right? I'm ready to make you my enemy. There's going to be enmity between me and you, and I'm going to cause some strife right now because I'm talking about your hair is falling out. I'm talking about your belly hanging over. I'm going to talk about whatever. You have a hammer toe, or I'm going to go after something on you because I am vindictive. I'm going to criticize you. The flesh is vindictive and very impatient. Okay.

Two more for my fourth one. So flesh is prideful. Flesh is all about outbursts of anger. Flesh is vindictive. Okay? Galatians 5 verse 20 also says these two words. There are works of the flesh, dissensions and divisions. Dissensions and divisions. I put it this way: the flesh always seeks allies. We seek allies for no good purpose. In other words, when my pride is dinged and I'm angry and I want to be vindictive, do you know what I want? I want a team. I want to build a team. And I do that by saying, hey guys, here's the critic, you need to join my team and let's have a common enemy now. My common enemy is this guy, and I don't want to really solve this in a godly, Christ-controlled way, I just want you to help me take vengeance on that person. It's gossip, right? It's team building. It's all of this kind of divisive gossipy enmity and strife but it does it with a team. Flesh is prideful. Flesh is all about outbursts of anger. Flesh is vindictive and impatient. Flesh always wants allies for no good purpose.

Okay. That's the negative. We're not of the flesh. We're not warring according to the flesh. We're not doing fleshly things. We're not walking in the flesh. We'd like to do it the way Christ would do it. I want to entreat you, by the virtues of Christ, the meekness and gentleness of Christ, or however Christ would respond that's how I want to respond. Okay, let's talk that through. How does Christ respond? Now there's a lot in Scripture about Christ being criticized. I just picked five real quick, okay? Five times Christ was criticized and I look for five different ways Christ responded. Let me just give you these in no particular order. Matthew Chapter 12 verses 22 through 28. Matthew 12:22 through 28. A demon-possessed man. He

was blind and mute. Jesus comes along. He cast out this demon from this man. So now he's in his right mind. He can speak. He can see. All the people who are amazed and the right thing happened, verse 23, the people said, "can this man be the Son of David?" Maybe this is him. This is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. This is the fulfillment of everything that was in the Abrahamic Covenant, that all the people of the earth are going to be blessed through him. This is the fulfillment of everything that we heard about that the Son of Man was going to appear. This is the Messiah. Everyone was like this is great.

"But," verse 24, "when the Pharisees heard it," here comes the criticism. Are you ready? "It's only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." Okay, you just did a good thing, man. You just healed this dude. Think about it. And your critics go, hmmm, the devil's at work here. That's a pretty big criticism, is it not? That's a big criticism. Do you want to talk about outlandish criticism? This is outlandish criticism. How's Christ going to respond? He's going to say, no, you're of the devil. That's what he said, right? (audience laughing) No. Let's just see how Christ responded to this one. Five different ways he responds. Here's how he responds. He said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he's divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?" What is that? It's a very calm, reasoned, rational, logical response basically saying that doesn't make any sense. What you're saying doesn't follow. That's a non-sequitur. That doesn't really make sense. Now that's his first response. Okay? That doesn't make sense.

His second response is, hey, "if I cast out demons by," Satan, "by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." In other words, maybe you ought to think I'm the Son of David. Maybe you ought to think about my messianic credentials. What? Okay, they're going out, certainly in the inter-testimonial period and there are some pseudo-spiritual writings, things that were going on in the inter-testimonial period about them trying to cast out demons. And there were things that were written about them coming up with incantations. And surely there were things where some of the followers of the Pharisees were trying to do things when they had oppressive people and weird situations where they were trying to, much like you might see in the Catholic Church, and people trying with exorcisms to do these kinds of things, and they were clearly calling upon God to do it. It would be insane for them to call upon Satan to do it. And of course, they would be saying, well, of course we're calling on God to do it. They had all kinds of prayers and things they would write out to plead with God to do it. And they would go, yeah, of course. All it does is strengthen his logic in the first point. Of course they're appealing to God. And he says well, if that's what your son... well, let's have your sons wade in on this. How in the world would they try to cast them out? If I'm doing this by the Spirit of God, which your sons clearly are well, then maybe you ought to rethink my credentials in all of this.

I just love this. It's a very reasoned, calm logic. You accept your approach to this, right? And there is some commonality in the approach in that we're both appealing to the God of the Bible, and you just need to rethink all of this. It wasn't vindictive. It wasn't angry. It was logical, calm and persuasive, at least for the people standing around. Maybe the Pharisees didn't



come around right away, but what he said was very effective. Matthew Chapter 9 verses 10 through 13. "Jesus reclined at table in a house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples." Now, you know he's going to get criticized here, right? "When the Pharisees saw this, they said to the disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" Those are the low lives of Israel. You should not be doing that, right? You shouldn't do that.

Jesus' response, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'" That's a quotation from Hosea Chapter 6 verse 6 calling their minds back to one of the northern prophets in Israel when Assyria was coming to punish them and talking about God's desire for mercy. Right? The Jewish southern tribes, thinking about the mercy of even having Amos and Hosea going to the northern tribes and God wanting mercy upon them, you know, the estranged brothers of the North and here the estranged tax collectors and sinners, and he's reaching out to them and wanting God's mercy to save them. He's not going to the ball game with him. He's not going to the bar with these guys. He's calling them to repentance, just like Hosea and Amos were calling them to repentance. And he says I want you to go back to Scripture. So the first one they call him, you know, you're satanic. He says let's just think through that claim for a second. The second one they're calling him ungodly, right? You're compromised. He says let's go to God's Word to kind of consider what you're saying there. Two different responses to two different criticisms.

Mark Chapter 2 verses 23 through 28. "One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him," here comes the criticism, "'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?'" So they're going through the grain fields and they're taking the top off the grain, and they're rolling it in their hands and they're eating something, okay? That's what they're doing. The rabbi is a traveling, itinerant rabbi. That's the picture of this connection. The disciples are following him, right? As he says in Luke Chapter 9, he has nowhere to lay his head. He doesn't have a home to bake his bread in. Right? Here he is eating. Now, a lot of people make the mistake in reading this passage and it's parallel in the synoptic gospels and say, oh, he's breaking the Sabbath. You think that because of his response to this text. He is not breaking the Sabbath. He's not breaking a single Levitical law. He's not breaking a single Mosaic Law. You can read through the Law of Moses, and you can say there's no way he's violating the law because Jesus came to fulfill the law. He did not break any of the laws, any of the ceremonial laws. None of them. He kept them perfectly.

So it is not against the Mosaic Law to walk through a grain field and the gleaning laws that we talked about in the last series are totally in place. You go by the edge of the field, you can take a head of the grain and you could eat a piece of it, because clearly God is not trying to make this Sabbath an onerous day where you couldn't eat. Eat, eat. God is all about the Sabbath being made for man, which he ends the discussion on. Of course you can eat. Eat. And he didn't break any laws. Now Jesus could have responded, we're going to get to his response right now, but he could have responded with your making your customs of man, your traditions of man, you're putting it on a par with God. Because in fact, they were because



they had all kinds of extra-biblical laws that they were trying to raise up to the level of command. But that's not his response here. His response is different and it's clever and it's insightful.

Here's his response to the criticism. "He said to them, 'Have you never read?'" It is a scriptural response, but it's an interesting, different kind of approach. "'Have you ever read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: and how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence,' called the shewbread, 'which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and he also gave it to those who were with him?'" Yeah, we've read of that. Okay. What question is he begging? I haven't heard you criticize that one. Well, that was David. Well, the Pharisees are not going to criticize David for doing that. Did David violate the law? Yes. Did Jesus violate the law? No. Right? This is interesting. You violated our custom. We've kind of made some rules about that and we don't like you. We're really holding you to a very stringent rule here that really we can't even find or exegete in the Mosaic Law. And we have a clear violation of Leviticus Chapter 23 that no one is to eat the shewbread except for Aaron and his sons in perpetuity. Right?

Think about this. David 400 years later is eating the shewbread just because he's hungry. That's wrong. He breaks the law and these Pharisees are in no way going to go on the record criticizing David. Why? Because he's so important. That's why Jesus ends this with "the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." He could have quoted Psalm 110, which he quoted more than anything else. And that is I'm also the Lord of David. David said, "the Lord said to my Lord." In other words I outrank David. I outrank the Sabbath. But he didn't break the Sabbath. In other words, he's showing they're hypocrites, you're hypocrites. He's pointing out exactly the problem with them. Not just their logic but with you. It's funny how you will not criticize them, in this case David and his band of guys. Hey, you're satanic. Let's just slow down and consider the logic. Hey! You're ungodly. Let's go back to God's Word. Hey, you're a lawbreaker. Well, let's stop here and consider how hypocritical you are about who you choose to condemn. When I'm not even really breaking any laws, I'm breaking your sensibilities. And David clearly broke your laws and you're not going after him. And really, what you're missing is how important I am as compared to David. This is just genius what he did in that passage.

Matthew Chapter 26, this is at his trial. He's standing before the Sanhedrin at the end of his earthly ministry. "Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none." No one could find anything that he had done wrong including breaking the Sabbath. Nothing. And "though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward," and here's what they said. "This man," Jesus, "said, 'I'm able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" Now, that is recorded in John Chapter 2 but clearly in the context he's talking about his body. And that's what it says in the text. He said that to his disciples and he's talking about his body. I can "destroy this temple, and in three days I'll raise it up." Well, that's such an outlandish thing when you think about how many decades Herod had poured money into the temple. The temple of Herod looked even more magnificent than the Temple of Solomon. It was gigantic. It was gilded with gold. It had even Roman insignias on it at this point. This was a massive



edifice. You had one guy, a traveling itinerant rabbi from their perspective, who stood there in the shadow of a giant, most impressive edifice in the ancient world, at least from the Jewish perspective, and you're going to tear it down with what? Your 12 disciples? What are you talking about? Jesus' response, here it comes, verse 63, "Jesus remained silent." That's one of my favorite responses, right? I just want to see the video on that one day, like did he roll his eyes? Because this is a stupid accusation.

There are things that I think you need to realize that you are going to be criticized on and you just need to take the high road of Christ. Some of them are so outlandishly ridiculous. You need to be able to say with peace in your heart this doesn't even demand a response. I'm not going to dignify this with a response. I'm not going to respond. Jesus kept silent. Jot this down next to that, Proverbs Chapter 19 verse 11. Proverbs Chapter 19 verse 11. You ought to quote this one in your head all the time. I was teaching a class in Compass Bible Institute this week and I said this to my class. It's so true. And I threw a number out. I mean, it's an educated guess but I said probably in my experience, 85% to 90% of the criticism I get at least I think this is the right response. And I just think 85% to 90%, this is the right response. Proverbs 19:11. "Good sense," which I'd like to have, "makes one slow to anger." Just forget the anger part. "And it is his glory to overlook an offense." Does criticism sting? It stings every time, right? But it's my glory if I can overlook it. And you know what? Most of it doesn't need a response.

And if you can get to this place to remember this word, I just love the word "glory." Don't you love it if God can say it is your glory to do something. I just love God's Word saying it is your glory if you can overlook it. And sometimes when Jesus models for us, someone says something as ridiculous as you're going to tear down the temple with your bare hands or, I don't know, a battering rod that Thomas came up with or Peter put together a slingshot that's going to take down Herod's temple. And Jesus is like, okay, I have nothing to say for that one. I just think that's the model we often need in "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" he said nothing. "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."

One more. This one even takes it a step further. Five examples. You can create five more. There are plenty of examples of Christ being criticized. This one is when he is being crucified. In Luke Chapter 23, he is being crucified on a cross. He's hanging on a cross. He's at the place of the Skull. They're mocking him. He's between two criminals hanging on a cross. They had already beaten him up. They're trying to offer him sour wine on a stick. And here's what Jesus says in response to the criticism. Ready? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That is amazing. There's some criticism that you're going to get where you have to understand the person's lack of understanding and have some pity for them. Have some compassion for them. Are they responsible? Sure they're responsible, but sometimes they don't know the gravity of their actions. Sometimes they're ignorant about what they're saying. And sometimes you need to be informed enough to know how ignorant they are of the gravity of what they're saying. And sometimes you need to pray for them.

If you want the meekness and gentleness of Christ, that's probably the most powerful example on display in Christ's life, and I'm sure that's touched you before when you've read it



there in Luke Chapter 23. How could you do that? Half the time how can you be silent before your critics? But how can you pray for them? Paul echoes that in First Corinthians Chapter 2 verse 8. "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." It's unthinkable. And yet they did it because they were just fools. Are they still responsible? Sure they are. And so are the people who criticize you in outlandish ways. They hate you. They revile you. They mock you. Whatever they do this week that you know is completely out of bounds and you didn't earn that, sometimes you need to say, God, have some compassion and mercy on these people. They don't even know what they're doing. Be self-controlled like Christ was. Respond with his Christ-like control.

With no time left let's go to the last couple of verses here. Second Corinthians Chapter 10. In the middle of verse 4 it says, but we "have divine power to destroy strongholds," at least the weapons of our warfare do. What's the first weapon? Let's just camp on the word "divine." Divine power. We have divine power because we have the divine with us. Let's call it this. Number three, "Rely on God's Powerful Resources," the most powerful resource you have Paul talked about in Second Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 7, when he says, "We have this treasure in jars of clay," you have this treasure in jars of clay, "to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." Right? In other words God is with us. That's so key. God is with us. And if God is with us, you need to realize that every time you're criticized, God is with us. The best defense we have is that we are here holding the hand of God. To use that prayer at the end of the prayer in Ephesians Chapter 3 when it says you do know that God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think." Now listen to the last line. Do you know the next line? "According to the power that works within us."

Where does the power come from? Well, it's not the jar of clay that's for sure. It's that God dwells within us. He'll never leave us and never forsake us. It's like you standing there being verbally attacked by people knowing that God is here. It's like you looking up saying God are you hearing this? Are you hearing this, right? He is our defender. Our best defense and weapon of warfare is the weapon that stands with us. It's God himself, divine power. The Bible says that we are, to just use the Old Testament picture, the apple of his eye, which has nothing to do with fruit, you understand. The apple of his eye, which had to do with, and twice in the Old Testament, the sandstorms of the ancient world in the ancient Near East. And you wanted to wear all that stuff so you didn't get the sand in your hair and your ears and your eyes. And when the apple of your eye, it means the lens of your eye. You don't want sand in your eyes. Because when you get sand in your eyes you know it. It's bad enough in your ears and in your hair, but you don't want it in your eyes. Very sensitive. And when that kind of grit of criticism comes in your eyes, God feels it personally. Yeah, we have divine power and the weapons of our warfare, the first weapon is God himself.

But then it says to destroy things, strongholds. There's a big stronghold just outside of Corinth, which clearly if we had time, we could talk about even the geography that would bring to mind a picture of something strong in their eyes as Corinthian Christians. But he says we do destroy strongholds. Like what? Just try arguments in Second Corinthians 10 verse 5. "Every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and every thought captive to Christ." I want everyone to think right about Christ. I want everyone to think right about God. If



they're thinking wrong about God, I want them to think right. I'm not a hypocrite. I'm not ungodly. I'm not doing the wrong thing. I am speaking powerful words not because I'm great at speech but because I'm speaking the truth. He said that clearly to the Thessalonians. He needs them to think right. How is he going to do that?

Well, according to Ephesians, that whole picture of the Roman armor, right? The armor of God, what's the one offensive weapon we have? "The sword of the Spirit." What's the sword of the Spirit? "which is," you know the verse, "the Word of God." I have one offensive weapon. It corrects people's thoughts. It transforms people's minds. It's "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." It is the sword of the Spirit. It is the Word of God. It is the truth. It's the thing that I'm supposed to align my mind with so that I can maybe quote Hosea Chapter 6 verse 6 when someone is completely off thinking I shouldn't care about lost people, I shouldn't show mercy to the down and outers. Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 6, "being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete." We'll get to the disobedience of the critics, he says. But let's make sure we're all on the same page "when your obedience is complete."

Let me quickly end with this passage. Acts Chapter 4. Turn there with me really quickly. Acts Chapter 4 is a lot like what's going on here at least in paradigm, to what's happening in Corinth. The criticism, which was threats coming from the government in Acts Chapter 4, was happening because Peter and John had healed this guy and everyone was excited about that in the community. But the government said, no, you have to stop preaching in the name of Christ. And they threatened them. Well, when they threaten them, look at verse 21, "They let them go, finding no way to punish them," because if they punish them the people were going to be in an uproar because they were all praising God for what had happened. Verse 22, "For the man on whom the sign of the healing was performed was more than forty years old." That's just an interesting, unique historical point. Verse 23, "When they were released, they went to their friends." I even love that word because it's very rare in the New Testament. I mean, it's not super rare, but it's rare enough. We don't see it a lot in Scripture, "and reported," and we're talking about the church now. They're coming to the people of God. They're coming together. Right? "And reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them." Is it positive or negative? It's negative. They threatened them.

"And when they heard it," the friends, the Christians, the fellow brothers and sisters of Christ in this church in Jerusalem, "they lifted their voices together and they said," oh, God's in charge. He's sovereign and he's the big, the ultimate weapon, right? He "made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said." Now he's quoting Scripture like Jesus quoted Hosea Chapter 6. Now they're quoting Psalm 2. And what did Psalm 2 say? It said that the Gentiles were going to rage, the nations were going to rage, the people were going to plot in vain. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against," his Messiah, "his Anointed -- for truly in this city," we saw it play out against "Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel," they crucified them all. And they did "whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." They strung them up on a cross. That all happened. We knew it was going to



happen, sovereignly happen. "Now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness." We don't want to back down. It may bring more criticism, more threats, it may bring persecution. And it would in the book of Acts it would. But we're not going to back down. We want to be bold.

And here's the thing about living the Christian life, it will invoke criticism, but we need to know how to handle it. Handle it not in the flesh but handle it in a way that pleases God with Christ-like control. Right? We have resources, we have God himself. He's going to settle the score, right? Don't take your own vengeance. Leave room for God, right? Use his Word. It's the sword of the Spirit. Quote it, live in line with it. And then we have each other and we should draw together and make sure we do it. We're not for selfish purposes, right? This is not to build teams. It's not to gossip. But it's for us to say, you know what? We need to make sure we're thinking biblically. Our obedience needs to be complete. Then we can deal with the critic. Now, I preach a lot of sermons where you have to kind of go out and find the application. This is a sermon the application is going to find you, probably find you by Wednesday. Right? (audience laughing) It's going to find you. I just need you to remember what you heard today. Have ears to hear so that you can put it into practice. Okay?

Let's pray. God, help us, please, to remember these things that we might do what you told us to do. Put the words of God into practice that we might be people who build our house on a rock, that we might, as James Chapter 1 verse 22 says, not just be hearers of the Word and so deceive ourselves, but be doers of the Word, and in so doing be blessed in our doing that we would actually be practicing your Word and being much more careful about how we respond to criticism. God, we don't want to be criticized as Peter said, we don't want to be criticized as meddlers or gossips or murderers or criminals. But if we suffer and are criticized as Christians then we'll bear that. We'll bear that gladly and we'll want to respond very carefully as Christ would want us to. So God help us to do that. Thank you, Jesus, for being an example to us living in our skin down here in human flesh to teach us how to do this right. So let's be better at it, please. Even this week.

In Jesus' name. Amen.