

Class - Sunday, 5:00 pm, April 9.

Criticism - receiving and giving - Bad? Good?

1. Read **Jn 7:12**. If you had been in the crowd and heard these two contrasting statements about this man, what challenge would you have faced?

Which is true? If influenced to join those who said “He leads the people astray” it would unjust and in this case, disastrous, in view of who he is. **Beware** of *believing* criticism we hear and *joining in* “criticism” without investigation or foundation!

In **v15**, we see that sometimes people criticize, not on the basis of *fact*, certainly not on the basis of God’s direction, but on the basis of their *prejudice and their ignorance*. See **vv48,49**. So, with the “crowd” (**v20**) who were simply *uninformed*; lack of knowledge of the facts can lead to unjust criticism.

2. Read **Jn 7:15-23**. What did Jesus do in response to the criticism he was receiving? (note first few words of **vv16, 21**)
“Jesus answered them...” He *responded* to the criticism. He did *not* simply ignore it, nor did he apologize, but rather showed the fallacy of the criticism. You may be criticized, and you may have the right to respond to it, because the criticism may not be *just* criticism.

Furthermore, in his response *he criticized them!* **vv22-23**

There were at least three different groups on this occasion with different views regarding Jesus—the “Jews” (i.e. the rulers) who wanted to kill Jesus, **vv13,15,19,32,35**; the “crowd” - pilgrims coming to the feast who did not know of the Jews plan to kill Jesus (**v2,20**), and the “people of Jerusalem” who did know of the plan of the rulers to kill Jesus (**v25**).

3. In the midst of all this criticism, what was Jesus’ admonition? **Jn 7:24**
“Do **not** judge according to appearance, **but** judge with righteous judgment.” Jesus does not forbid criticism, but teaches we must be sure it is *just* criticism.

“Aggressive” - right or wrong?

1. Look up the meaning of “aggressive.” Is it *right* or *wrong*? Explain. (Remember, the “bus” may have more than one “passenger.”)

There are various definitions and connotations of the word “aggressive.” Here are two prominent ones:

“**1.** characterized by or tending toward **aggression**.”

“**2. vigorously energetic**, esp. in the use of initiative and forcefulness; boldly assertive: *an aggressive salesperson*.” *Random House Kernerman Webster’s College Dictionary*. (TheFreeDictionary) “**2.** vigorously energetic: *an aggressive approach to solving problems*” *WordReference Random House Learner’s Dict. of American English* (wordreference.com) [boldmine]

The 1st definition above, “characterized by or tending toward aggression,” can refer to something that is *right* or *wrong*, depending on how “aggression” is defined and the circumstances under which this aggression takes place (as will be seen in the rest of the study).

The 2nd definition above, “vigorously energetic,” can be a positive trait, and, in fact, *essential* to successful results in certain tasks as in the illustrations given in the dictionary. In this sense, being “aggressive” is not only not wrong, but *commendable*. Further illustration of this connotation is, “having or showing determination and energetic pursuit of your ends; ‘an aggressive businessman’; ‘an aggressive basketball player’...” (*The Free Dictionary*; Cite: Based on WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. © 2003-2012 Princeton University, Farlex Inc.) We might *commend* being “aggressive” in some of these examples.

So, there is no *universal* definition of “aggressive” that would fall under judgment, or be commended. *Each scenario must be weighed on its own merit*.

While “**aggressive**” can refer to “**Inclined to behave in an actively hostile fashion**.” *American Heritage Dict*, it can also refer to “**Ready or willing to take issue or engage in direct action; militant**.” *Webster’s New World Dict*.

“**aggression**” may suggest “**1a. Hostile** or destructive behavior or attitudes...**3. A hostile act or military attack**” *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fifth Edition. (TheFreeDictionary) [boldmine]

“**Words are vehicles upon which thought travel**” and we need to be sure the right “passenger” gets off the “bus” and that his mission is approved of God. Realizing this shows there is no universal definition of “aggressive” or “aggression” or “hostile” that would always be “wrong”; rather, sometimes these are needed traits in our service to God.

Ah, but *how aggressive* should one be, even in cases where it is needed and justified? One may say, “you don’t use a sledge hammer to kill a fly.” True! But, do you ignore the fly? Do you use a fly swat, a newspaper, or simply your hand? That’s where *judgment* comes in, and everyone’s judgment may well not be the same. So it is with moral and spiritual issues. We will note some **case studies** later in the class that may help us.

2. Read **Num 25:1-13**. Would you describe Phinehas’ action as “aggressive”? No/Yes? If yes, what definition from the dictionary would you use? What was God’s view of his behavior?

If “**aggression**” is used in the sense of definition. #3 “A hostile act or military attack,” it may or may not be wrong. Phinehas was very “aggressive” in that he took a spear and thrust through an Israelite man and Midianite woman and God commended him because he was “jealous with my jealousy” **Num 25:11**).

This example and others show that one trying to serve God and is molded by the Holy Spirit’s revelation *should* at times be “aggressive,” and at other times, should manifest the *opposite* attitude. The “context” of the situation must be considered as to what is “right” or “wrong.”

3. Look up the *antonyms* of “aggressive”—are *all* of these *desirable*? If not, give examples. Among the antonyms of “aggressive” are “**submissive**,” “**complaisant**,” “**timid**,” “**cowering**,” etc.

Sometimes the opposite of being aggressive is one or more of these attitudes, which may *not* be commendable. On the other hand, some of the antonyms describe good attitudes, e.g., “submissive” (yes, it can be *good* to be submissive, or, at times *bad* to be submissive, e.g. Micaiah, **1Ki 22:13**, apostles **Ac 4:18-20; 5:29**), “humble,” “meek,” etc.

Hostile

1. Look up the meaning of “hostile.” Is “hostility” wrong? Explain. (Remember the “bus”...)

“**Hostile**” is derived from a Latin word meaning “enemy” and one meaning today is, “Of, relating to, or **characteristic of an enemy**: *hostile forces*” (*American Heritage Dict*). [boldmine] When Israel approached Canaan to conquer it under the leadership of Joshua, those in Canaan would indeed have considered the Israelite army, and correctly so, “hostile”—their “enemies” in a campaign of “aggression” to be “destructive” through “military attack”—and this by God’s intent and direction!

“Hostile” can be used to connote “**being in opposition; opposed**: *hostile to the proposal*.” (*Ibid*).[boldmine] Servants of God *must* be “hostile” in this sense to sinful “proposals” and action.

But, “hostile” can also connote, “**Feeling or showing enmity or ill will**” (*Ibid*). [boldmine] This “hostility” may indeed be *unjustified* and *sinful*. While “enmity and ill will” toward Satan and those who promote his agenda is characteristic of those who love God and His will, “enmity and ill will” toward someone can be unjustified and wrong, e.g., simply because they reprovved me, or they do not approve what I do, or they don’t join me in the things I like to do, or they’re smarter, or better looking, or financially better off, or more successful than I am, etc.

> So, we must be discretionary in using the word “hostile” and not simply use it as a weapon to vilify those we have “ill will” towards. In fact, it may be a commendable trait, and the lack of it entirely may point in failure in understanding of and allegiance to God.

2. Read **Num 25:16-18**. Compare the NASB with the NKJV, ESV. What attitude and conduct was Moses instructed to have toward the Midianites?

God told **Moses**, “**Be hostile** to the Midianites and attack them” (**Num 25:17**) due to the Midianites hostility toward Israel and efforts to entangle them in idolatry.

“**aggression**” may suggest “1a. **Hostile** or **destructive** behavior or attitudes...3. A hostile act or military attack” *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fifth Edition. (TheFreeDictionary) [boldmine]

Saul was reprimanded and lost his dynasty for not completing a military attack that would wipe out the Amelekites (**1Sam 15**). He was not “aggressive” enough! In fact, God intended that he practice “destructive behavior,” and while he did to some degree, he failed to “utterly destroy” (**1Sam 15:3**).

Joshua was encouraged to be “strong and courageous” in conquering the land God was giving them, which would demand he be “ready or willing to take issue or engage in direct action; militant” (**Josh 1:6,7,9,18**). Obviously, we have no right to wage that kind of war or take these kind of actions without Divine authority, and, if the “hostile or destructive behavior” is borne of contempt and hatred and personal revenge, and without Divine approval, it would indeed be wrong (**1Sam 25, esp. v31**-David/Nabal).

Intimidation

1. While “intimidation” *can* refer to a forceful, *intended* effect of fear and lack of action, it can be simply due to the *circumstances* and have nothing to do with intent or base motives. Find examples in dictionaries that show “intimidation” may be the result of *circumstances*, not base motives by someone who *intended* to intimidate.

“Intimidate” comes from the idea of “timid,” and may at times suggest a hesitance, or fear, to act. While “intimidation” *can* refer to a forceful, *intended* effect of fear and lack of action, it can be simply due to the *circumstances* and have nothing to do with intent or base motives (“To force or deter with threats or violence” (defin. #2 in WNWD).

These examples from dictionaries bear this out: “Even after the intensive six-week workshop we all attended, I felt somewhat *intimidated* given the scope of the task before me.” “I am not from a posh background, and felt very *intimidated* being in the House of Lords at Westminster.” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/intimidated>. A new hire may be “intimidated” by his instructor’s expertise and knowledge, not due to the instructor’s *intent* to make him feel fearful or inadequate or less important, but *simply due to the nature of the circumstances*—the instructor’s knowledge and expertise gained over the years compared to the new hire’s lack of this knowledge and experience.

2. Read **Mt 22:46** and the context. Why were the Pharisees and Sadducees intimidated into not asking Jesus another question? (Compare also **Mk 9:32** in context.)

The Pharisees and Sadducees were intimidated into not asking Jesus another question (**Mt 22:46**).

Even his disciples were intimidated and “were afraid to ask Him” (**Mk 9:32**) about His statement that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die.

If the risk of “intimidation” is the barrier to trying to teach others, it puts an end to the work of professors in college, those who train soldiers in the army, the work of knowledgeable elders and preachers, and knowledgeable instructors’ work in training those who know little and have no experience.

A person may respond to being intimidated by *inferring* that that the person *intended* to intimidate them, when that may not be the case at all. And if the person did not fear intimidating them, it may have been for their *good*, because the he, or she, realized the danger associated with a failure to understand and follow directions, e.g. a foot soldier on the front lines of battle, or a pilot carrying an atomic bomb. Now, the person who was intimidated may cower into inaction or accusation, or they may use it as a motivation to increase their knowledge and experience so they are better qualified in that particular field. So, intimidation in and of itself is not necessarily bad; it can have *negative* effect, or, it can have *positive* effect, or, even have *no* effect if the person considers it of no consequence.

Case Studies (as time allows)

There are a number of examples the Holy Spirit has given of people that taunted and responded to people in a way that we might consider “aggressive” and even “hostile,” but were people used and approved by God.

Moses - Num 12:3; Ex 32:19

Moses, was “meek” (KJV, ESV) or “humble” (NASB, NKJV) “more than any person who was on the face of the earth” (**Num 12:3**), but reacting with burning (NASB), or hot (NKJV), anger when he came down from Sinai and saw the people practice idolatry, and even threw the tablets with the Ten Commandments down and shattered them! (**Ex 32:19**).

Samuel - 1Sam 15:32-33

Samuel told king Saul he had “acted foolishly” concerning the sacrifices at Gilgal (**1Sam 14:13**), and when king Saul failed in his duty regarding the Amalekites, Samuel would accept none of his excuses, but charged him openly with “rebellion” and “insubordination” because he “rejected the word of the Lord.” When king Agag was brought to Samuel, he “hewed him to pieces”! (**1Sam 15**). “Aggressive”? Did God approve?

John the Baptist - Mt 3:7-12

John the Baptist boldly and directly told king Herod his marriage was unlawful and lost his head for it (**Mk 6:17-29**). See also the nature of his preaching, **Mt 3:7-11**.

Jesus - Mt 15:1-14

Was Jesus *too* aggressive in his response to the Pharisees when they questioned him about why his disciples did not wash their hands when they ate bread (**Mt 15:1-14**)? The Pharisees did, and *Jesus own disciples were concerned that the Pharisees were “offended” (v12)*. If we would have been there, would you or I have thought he was *overly* aggressive, especially if we were not at the point where we were persuaded Jesus was the Son of God? Would we have thought, “You could’ve done it this way...” or, “This is the way I would’ve done it ...”? After all, these were religious people, believers in Word of God, and respected leaders among their people. He not only accused them of transgressing the commandments of God, but of being hypocrites, but did it in front of all present! They weren’t atheists, idolaters, are criminals. Would we judge Jesus as *unkind, uncompassionate, and not showing love?*

Did they accept it well? If the disciples were correct in their assessment, No!—they were “offended.” Did they change? No indication of a change of heart or practice. *If these criteria are used to measure his response by, how does he measure up?*

An observation: Is there *anyone* else who would have responded as Jesus did? Would *any* one of the apostles? Would Mary, Jesus’ mother? Or Martha? Would Joseph of Arimathea? And, if *not*, does that mean they are wrong, or in sin? Obviously, no. *People are different*. However, the fact that they may have reacted differently does not indict them in the Pharisees attitude and conduct.

Paul - 1Co 3:1-2; 4:10; 4:19; 6:5; 11:17

When Paul responded to what he had heard about the **Corinthians (1Co 1:11)**, he said they were immature (**1Co 3:1-2**), he used sarcasm (**1Co 4:10**), said some were arrogant (**1Co 4:19**), “shamed” them relative to how they were handling differences between them (**1Co 6:5**), could not “praise” them due to how they were corrupting their assembly to partake of the LS (**1Co 11:17**), and authoritatively, as an apostle, challenged those who thought they were “prophets” who differed with Paul’s instructions in this letter (**1Co 14:36-37**). And remember, this was a church he started and worked with for a year and a half (**Ac 18:1-22**). He wrote this letter with “anguish of heart” (**2Co 2:4**), and wrote what he did because of “*the love which I have especially for you*” (b).

He did *not* know how his letter would be received, and, in fact, was very concerned that it may not be received well (**2Co 2:12-13**). He was comforted when he learned of their penitent attitude upon receiving the letter (**2Co 7:5-13**). However, *not all* received it so well! 2Co 10-13 almost sounds like a different letter, as he now turns his attention to those who did receive him nor his efforts well, and addresses this group with sarcastic irony (e.g., **2Co 10:1-2,8-10; 11:1,6-7, 16; 12:11-13**). Again he affirmed that he wrote as he did out *love and concern* for them (**2Co 12:14-15,19**). Now, since he was aware that what he wrote and how he said it in the first letter may not be received well, did he “mess up”? Was he to blame for the poor reception of a number in the congregation? Should he have been more “gentle”? If Paul asked us to read his first letter before he sent it, would we have told him, “I would’ve...”, “You should’ve...”, instead of what you said, “You could’ve...”? Ah—the “woulda, shoulda, coulda” approach of criticism! *Maybe*, some of the Corinthians will be in heaven due to the “aggressive” and loving (though at times “hostile”) efforts of Paul in these two letters!

In Paul’s letter to the **Galatians**, he said he was “amazed” at their being led astray from the true gospel so quickly (**Gal 1:6**), called them “foolish” for letting someone deceive them about salvation through grace in Christ (**3:1**), and that he had “fear” for them (**4:9-11**) due to their attitudes. He became *very* “aggressive” when referring to those who leading them away (**5:12**)!

Did he know his letter would be received well? Evidently, he feared it would *not*: “have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (**4:16**). Did he sense they would consider him “hostile” (“hostile” is derived from the idea of “enemy”)? If we read his letter before he sent it, would we have advised him that he was “*too* aggressive”? But he affirmed, as he did with the Corinthians, that his motives were honorable and seeking their welfare (**4:19**).

An observation: Would Timothy have written such letters? Paul had to admonish him to a stronger spirit (**2Tim 1:6-8; 2:3-13**). Would Aquila? Priscilla? Phoebe? Barnabas? We don’t know, but if they would have taken a different response to the situations Paul addressed, does that mean they are weak, or ungodly, or fail in duty? To make such charges would be unfounded and unfair. *People are different!* And the fact that Paul’s letters were so direct and even “aggressive,” *does not mean he was wrong*, and for any of these who might have chosen a different approach to criticize Paul for his “hostility” and “aggression” would have been unjustified and contrary to the Holy Spirit’s wisdom to use of him to write thirteen NT letters! In addition, it may be said that no one may be found who loved the Corinthians and Galatians more than Paul!

Others

There is **Micaiah (1Ki 22)** who was hated by Ahab, the king, because he would not go along with the other prophets and prophesy good about him. **Jeremiah** was beaten and thrown in a dungeon for his harsh and unwelcome messages (**Jer 37:15-16**), **Ezekiel** was commissioned to preach to “rebellious” people who were “stubborn and obstinate” and to preach them “whether they listen or not,” and encouraged not to “fear” or be “dismayed.” He was then warned that if he failed to carry out this commission, he would be “rebellious” like them (**Ezk 2**)! **Amos** was told by King Amaziah to go home and prophesy there, not where he was king (**Amos 7:12**). And there are other examples that could be cited.

Were these men “*too aggressive*”? “Hostile” in their strong opposition, when they should have been more amicable?

But, the observation can be made again—who else would have done the job they *did in the way they did*? And because others were not cut out for it, does it mean God did not have fellowship with them and use them in other ways? *People are different.*

Character or Caricature?

Define “caricature.”

Caricature - “a picture, description, or imitation of a person in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a comic or grotesque effect” Oxford Dict.

Political cartoons. Some particular feature blown out of proportion. Lyndon Johnson - ears; Jimmy Carter - teeth; Bob Hope - nose.

A distortion not true image. So with character when one feature overemphasized.

Balance in God-approved “character”

Like sharpening edge on knife. Each side must be honed in proper balance to attain sharp edge.

- **God** - So to understand clearly (have a “sharp” image) of God, must strive to view all sides of his character in proper balance.
- **Christians** - So With The Character Of Christians

Proper character composed of multiple, and sometimes, seemingly *opposing* traits.

Proper balance needed—kindness, mercy, gentleness, patience ... and ... willingness to criticize when needed, aggressive when appropriate, hostile to evil.

Out of proportion traits produces *not* the *character* we should have, but a *caricature*.