



# MONDAY'S MEAL

SUSTAINABLE NOURISHMENT *for the* LONG DISTANCE RUN

## Criticism That Kills

by Nancy Wilson

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Monday's Meal is a service of The Oaks Classical and Christian Academy. Each meal is selected specifically to feed and nourish parents for the long distance run. If you found it helpful, consider passing it along.

**"...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds..."**  
Hebrews 10:24

One of the great hindrances to Christian unity, whether in the home or in the community at large, is a critical, backbiting tongue. It is not just a "bad thing" that we are to generally avoid, but as Paul says, it kills and destroys real people. Those people whom it crushes and drives away are most often our own parents, husbands, children, and our fellow saints who should be our friends.

I believe it was Spurgeon who said, "faultfinding is the easiest thing in the world." Backbiting is a work of the flesh; it is not a fruit of the spirit. Wisdom and grace and maturity are not needed to have an eye to see the shortcomings of others. Any fool can see how others fall short. What requires wisdom is the ability to see our own sins and think soberly of ourselves, not our normal fleshly tendency to think "more highly" of ourselves than we ought (Romans 12:3).

Paul addresses this again in Philippians 2:3, "let nothing be done through strive for vainglory; but in lowliness of mind that each esteem others better than themselves." Where there is criticism and backbiting, the root problem is always pride. The other associated symptoms may be jealousy and envy, but either way, pride is at the bottom. We have no need to learn to think much of ourselves, care for ourselves, consider our needs, wants, desires. We already do that for too much. The problem is getting us to think of others, to have a lowliness of mind that springs from humility and love. Spurgeon said, "faults are thick wherever love is thin." God never said we would not live with people with faults. But he

has told us that "love covers a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). Peter says to "have fervent charity among yourselves." This is what is needed in a world full of sinners. Not just charity, but *fervent* charity. Criticism and backbiting, rather than covering sin, expose it and breed more sin.

A critical spirit does not need to look far to find material for its favorite pastime of running people down. And because family members are usually in closest proximity, they get it the worst. Let's start with husbands. The wife commits the sin of backbiting when she runs her husband down to her parents, her children, her friends. She may laugh when she says these things, or she may tag "bless his heart" on the end of her remark; but when she shares his faults, his shortcomings, his sins to others who have no need to know, she is sinning against the husband she is commanded to respect. This is one way a foolish woman tears down her house with her own hands (Proverbs 14:1).

A wife can kill her husband with criticism to his face as well as behind his back. This comes in many forms: complaining, criticizing, arguing, attributing motives, not responding, sighing, rolling her eyes, or ignoring. A critical spirit says, "you are not meeting my needs. You're not being a spiritual leader. You are not being a good husband and father. You are not providing for me the way I want. I wish you were more like so-and-so." This is the kind of wife Proverbs describes as being a drippy faucet (Proverbs 19:3). And it's no wonder a man would rather live in the desert or up on the roof than in the same house with such a cantankerous woman.

But this is the point where women begin to justify. "I know that's all true, but you don't know my husband. You don't know what a poor leader he is." Even if he is an unbeliever, Scripture tells women how to live with difficult husbands. Scripture does not forbid backbiting at all times, only when it involves sinners. It is always sinful to run people down in this manner, and it is especially sinful when it is the man who is to receive honor and respect from you. We do not render obedience to God only when we think it is a good idea; we are to obey God with our whole heart all the time in every circumstance by the grace he provides. Once we compromise, it is a slippery slope into many other sins. In this case, a wife is alienating the one who should be the closest to her. Then she wonders why he isn't very loving toward her.

Of course all of this applies to other family members as well. Mothers who glibly criticize their children are driving them away. When they do this to their face, it is destructive and alienating. When they criticize them to their friends, it is spreading the devastation even further. Children should receive our input in a loving manner, and only after much has been covered with love. But there is no excuse for parents to share negative things about

their children to anyone else. This springs from a self righteous "I have been wrong" attitude that is looking for pity. Sometimes it can come from a desire to lord it over our children, to try to maintain some kind of control, but it can never come from a charitable, merciful, gracious spirit.

Finally, repent of a critical, backbiting spirit. If you have sinned with your mouth, repent and make restitution. Do not say you were just joking. Confess to God a proud spirit and seek to be lowly of mind. Seek forgiveness of your husband or your children and by all means, go to your friends who have heard you speak unkindly and seek their forgiveness as well. Ask God to cover your own sins and ask him for love to cover the sins of those around you. This is the only way to rescue a marriage or a family from impending destruction. It may not be too late to turn back the awful results of a backbiting spirit.

