

On Criticism and Critics

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Jesus warned that some would reproach us and say all manner of evil against us (Mat. 5:11–12). While this context warns of outright persecution, we all experience criticism of lesser degrees from time to time. How should we respond to criticism? It is normal to desire encouragement. Few could survive constant criticism without plunging over the precipice of mental illness. Even occasional criticism is painful. It is so painful that some elders, deacons, and preachers have quit serving because of it. Others have even quit the church. Countless good works are never begun because of criticism. Other good works have been undermined and killed by it. Doubtless, many marriages have been destroyed by it.

Some folk major in criticism. Jesus specifically had this terrible trait in mind when he warned, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Mat. 7:1). He does not forbid all judging, but He rebukes in this statement those who spend much or most of their time thus engaged. Some Christians seem to receive a fiendish delight in criticizing an elder (or all of the elders) or the preacher. Our Lord was the only perfect man who ever lived, and men often criticized Him, nonetheless. How should we react to criticism?

- We should do what is right in spite of it. The critics were not able to deter Jesus from His purpose. In spite of them He pressed on: “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). Think of our terrible plight if Christ had let criticism defeat Him. We are in the God-pleasing business rather than the man-pleasing “business” (Gal. 1:10), and it is sometimes easier to please God than men. We must not say, “Why keep on trying?” and quit doing right when we are criticized.
- We should try to profit from criticism. Some critics want to help us and they will do so if we will let them. We should not consider constructive critics our enemies for telling us the truth (Gal. 4:16). Surely, none of us is above criticism. However, much criticism is intended to hurt; it is more for the benefit of the giver than for the receiver. Such verbal assassins may make a frontal attack where several others can hear, or they may drop an ominous suggestion here and there. They may use an anonymous call or letter. Often they will criticize their victim to anyone besides the victim himself (they “bite” behind his back, thus the term, “backbiting”). They may open a full-scale slander campaign, all the while claiming to “love” their target. We should even try to profit from such painful and unfair criticism as this.
- Finally, we should try to live so that criticism is not justified, or that it is at least kept to a minimum. Remember, the more one tries to do, the more he or she will be criticized. If you must criticize another, try to be helpful rather than hurtful.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Lighthouse*, weekly bulletin of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, TX, January 23, 2011, of which I was editor.]

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