

How Do I Handle Criticism?

Last week I received a question from a young man of God who is going through a barrage of criticism. He wrote me, "Have you learned the fine art of dying to self so much that critics don't bother you anymore? I am trying, but still fail at times because they still sting. Have you ever gotten over it? Just curious how you have been able to cope over the years." After reading these words, I was touched deeply. The truth is, I still feel the sting and hurt when criticism is launched toward me or people that I love. This is how I try to handle criticism:

1. Consider the source of the criticism.

Ultimately our goal is to please God and magnify Jesus. If we care more what people think of us instead of what God thinks, we are going to be snared. *"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe"* (Proverbs 29:25). *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge..."* (Proverbs 1:7). *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding"* (Proverbs 9:10). When we fear God, He supplies an understanding heart to decipher what is happening to us. Fear God - not man! *"The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"* (Psalm 118:6). *"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Hebrews 13:6). Earl of Mortoun, the regent of Scotland, in the presence of an immense crowd, who had followed the body of John Knox to its last resting-place said, "Here lyeth a man who in his life never feared the face of man." It is understood he developed this fearlessness of man because he feared God so well.

2. Evaluate and learn from the criticism received.

Give a benefit of doubt to a critic before over-reacting. They may have a point. For instance, if I we are criticized, it is perfectly healthy to ask, "Are these statements justified?" Never take it for granted that we are always right. The Bible says, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"* (Proverbs 16:18). *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"* (I Corinthians 10:12). Sometimes it is not that our stand is possibly wrong, but our attitude could be prideful and hurtful toward other well-meaning brothers or sisters in Christ. Oftentimes it is not what we say that hurts, but how we say it.

We need to consider if what we are we doing is for the glory of God. We are commanded, *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"* (I Corinthians 10:31). It would also be beneficial to ask, "Am I a stumbling block preventing Christ-likeness or a stepping stone promoting Christ-likeness? I Corinthians 8: 11-13 says, *"And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."*

My critics may be right. I pray, "Lord, keep my heart open to the truth and I will change if You reveal to me the way in which to go." The truth will indeed make us free, however, it first may make us miserable. If after re-evaluation, you

come to the conclusion that the stand you are taking is right, then I admonish you to claim, *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31).

3. Have mercy toward those who are hurting you.

This is the hardest but perhaps one of the most important points I want to make. I bring to your attention two verses in Hosea, *“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”* (Micah 6:8). *“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy”* (Micah 7:18). God loves to give mercy and He delights in mercy! Jesus said, *“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy...”* (Matthew 9:13).

Like a wounded animal, many of our critics are hurt people and they don't even realize what they are doing. They are lashing out because they are misunderstanding your attention. They sometimes attack you because they have been taught in a hateful environment. Some of our brethren don't follow the admonition, *“Hate sin; love the sinner.”* They hate sin and the sinner too! Why? Sadly, it happens sometimes because that's the way they were taught. The teaching may not be overt; it may be covert, but it is there. Have mercy on these people. They won't know how to handle it at first but please be patient; you may be the first person in their whole life who acted like Jesus. Rather than fighting them, turning the other cheek may be that which wins them. Too often, we feel the urgency to win the argument. I have learned the hard way; I may win the argument and lose the relationship! People are more important than our arguments! Fight the issues, not people. There is a way of addressing a subject without castigating personalities. If you decide to sling mud on someone who threw mud on you, you not only become muddy yourself, but you will “lose ground.” He who throws mud loses ground! Never forget that. Hold on to your ground of peace! *“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”* (Matthew 5:9).

Sometimes criticism just doesn't need an answer. My dad used to tell me, *“Boy, if something is right, it doesn't need too much defending.”* If criticism is unjustified, don't give it the credence of publicity. I remember a few times in my young adulthood false statements were said about me and when I would fly to the next meeting, I would address it with the pastor. He often had not heard a thing about it. To my chagrin, I realized I was carrying my own gossip. If a friend has heard something and it bothers him, he will probably let you know. When asked, give the honest answer. If he has heard and doesn't believe it or isn't bothered by it, fine - you have so much better things to talk about anyway.

Let your trials make you better not bitter. And don't be waiting for those who have given offense to say they are sorry. Nobody was saying they were sorry at the foot of the cross. And yet, forgiveness was proffered. May we be echoes of Calvary: *“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”* (Luke 23:34).

In conclusion, be at peace, *“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them”* (Psalm 119:165). *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”* (Romans 12:18).

-Pastor Pope-

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