

In search of...

Truth & Right

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Critics and Criticism

Let me ask...have you seen any critics in the church? I mean, every church has them. That is, every congregation has a person or people who simply cannot be pleased no matter what you do. They just have something negative to say. And, when you are criticized, what did you do about it? Did you react? Did you blow up? Did you scream? Did you utter curse words in your mind? Did you just stay silent and drive your anger inward and make yourself emotionally and physically sick? Did you become embarrassed or defensive? Or, did you listen and learn from the critic?

Well, criticism never feels good. And, sometimes we have it coming to us and sometimes we do not. But, know that you are not alone when you face a critic. Take Nehemiah for instance, perhaps one of the greatest leaders of all times, was on a mission from God. And yet, he faced chronic critics: Sanballat and Tobiah. They very well could have derailed Nehemiah's God-given mission. But, they didn't. They failed

and here's why...

In Neh. 4:1-9, it tells the story like this: "'Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?'" Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, "Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!" Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before you, for they have demoralized the builders. So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for

the people had a mind to work. Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night."

Did you notice what happened? Did you see the response Nehemiah had for his critics? Notice, that he prepared for them (vs. 9). Nehemiah knew that if you want to make a difference for God, you will be criticized, even though what you're doing is noble. Oh, how often we forget that we live in a sinful world and that mankind is often filled with the influence of Satan and it is he that can use criticism to derail us. And in reality, the greater impact we have for God, the more we are criticized. And so, as I have learned from a wise saint, you cannot please everybody because if you do, you will be miserable.

We also learn from vs. 9 that Nehemiah took the time to pause and pray before his critics. Instead of going by a worldly standard of attacking, getting defensive, getting even and showing just how illogical man can be, Nehemiah kneels before God in prayer (vs. 4). Make no mistake, when we are attacked, criticism sure does hurt, but he did not even the score. Instead, Nehemiah asked God to bring the judgment upon them. And so, we learn that prayer can really take the sting out of criticism because it gives us an

opportunity to pause and reflect and to think instead of reacting irrationally and sinfully. It's what Jesus said in Matt. 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." That's tough, but by looking at Nehemiah, it can be done and it must be done if we want to be pleasing to God.

Now, chronic criticism not only makes us feel bad, but remember that there is an unhealthy way to respond to it. Therefore, when criticized, what do we do? Do we ask ourselves, "Is this even a valid complaint?" Do we ask, "Should I just ignore it like water down a duck's back?" "Should I confront the critic?" Or, "What did I learn?" I mean, we should not just ignore all criticisms because some people are really trying to help you but they just do not have tack when they speak. And so, there is much we can learn from some critics and even be like a coach for us to grow. Does this sound strange? Well, consider Psa. 141:5, "Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they reprove me, it is soothing medicine. Don't let me refuse it..." And so, we have to see things in light of the spiritual and attitude in which it was given. I mean, was it designed to hurt you or help you? Unfortunately, some people see just the smallest criticisms as so detrimental to their health that they flee and cry "Unfair!" and cause greater problems by taking things wrong. I mean, many people today are just overly sensitive about everything just like some are tougher than beef jerkey. So, listen to the voice of the critic is he there to help or hinder?

Next, we learn from Nehemiah that after prayer, he did not use his prayer as an excuse to do nothing. Many will pray and then sit and wait in their sackcloth and ashes waiting for someone to do something. Well for Nehemiah, he did something. He went forward with God's plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And so we learn, when we are criticized, don't let it immobilize you. Do something about it. You may need to separate yourself from that critic. You may need to boldly tell the critic to stop criticizing. You may need to listen and learn from your critic because he/she is trying to bring you closer to God.

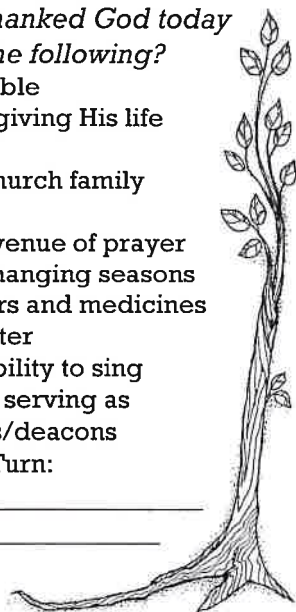
The last thing we learn from Nehemiah is to protect ourselves where we are at our weaknesses. Thinking of Nehemiah, in response to his critics, he posted guards at the wall's most vulnerable places and we learn that sometimes criticism reveals where we're are weakest and most vulnerable. And so, when such criticism reveals those weaknesses, we may need to take some extra steps to deal with those sensitive places. We can talk to a counselor or a safe friend, not to backbite, but to self-evaluate self. We can study the Scriptures to see what God Word says about what you have been accused of. But ultimately and I cannot emphasize this enough, we must look to Christ who provided the perfect pattern for responding to our critics. Peter wrote, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." (1 Pet. 2:23).

Robert Notgrass

God gave you a gift of
86,400
 seconds today. Have
 you used one to say
THANK YOU?

*Have you thanked God today
 for any of the following?*

- The Bible
- Jesus giving His life for us
- Our church family
- Jobs
- The avenue of prayer
- The changing seasons
- Doctors and medicines
- Laughter
- The ability to sing
- Those serving as elders/deacons
- Your Turn:



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Ephesian Elders

M	L	C	T	D	P	Q	P	G	R	O	C	W	E	C	U	N	N	C	V
P	X	F	O	C	H	L	E	E	Z	I	K	Z	H	H	F	B	C	P	Z
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I	Y	U	K	G	E	N	G	M	P	W	Q	C	Q	M	I	T	B	A	X

DIRECTIONS: Look up the scripture in the Bible, and find the answer in the crossword above.

Acts 20:17, They came and met Paul in this city

Acts 20:19, "serving the Lord with all _____ and with tears..."

Acts 20:20, he taught them in _____ and from house to house

Acts 20:22, Paul was going to this city, constrained by the Spirit

Acts 20:23, "...that _____ and afflictions await me."

Acts 20:25, this many of them would see his face again

Acts 20:28, they were to take heed to themselves and this

Acts 20:29, "...after my _____ fierce wolves will come in..."

Acts 20:30, "from among your own _____ will arise men..."

Acts 20:31, Paul did this night and day to everyone with tears

Acts 20:33, he coveted no one's silver or gold or _____

Acts 20:37, "and there was much _____ on the part of all;"