

RESPONDING TO CRITICS WITH HUMILITY

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As servants of Jesus Christ, we will be criticized. What does the Bible teach us on how to respond to critics? The answer is simple: Humility.

From Jesus' words on the Sermon on the Mount, we see that God wants us to show humility in three ways:

First, God wants us to be humble before Him by learning how we can be more pleasing to Him. Jesus said "*First, take the log out of you own eye..*" (Matthew 7:5.) We need to ask ourselves, "Is any of the criticism valid? Is there anything that God wants us to learn?" As an example of this, our movement of churches we went through a process in the late 1980's and early 1990's (described as Project Care) in which pastors made a concerted effort to listen to concerns expressed by members and former members of their churches. This led to the writing of the Weakness Paper in 1991—a paper that was part of a good faith effort by our movement of churches to "take the log out of our own eye."

Second, God wants us to be humble before men by seeking reconciliation. Jesus said "*first be reconciled to your brother...*" (Matthew 5:24) God wants us to take the first step and pursue peace with our brothers. We are to seek to understand, then be understood. As an example, in the late 1980's and early 1990's pastors in Great Commission spent many hours pursuing peace with individuals who had offenses or concerns. As a result, misunderstandings were cleared up, apologies were given and forgiveness was extended. Apart from a few exceptions, there was reconciliation with every person who was willing to talk through their offenses or concerns.

Third, God wants us to be humble before the world when mistreated. Jesus said "*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great...*" (Matthew 5:11,12) and "*Pray for those who persecute you.*" (Matthew 5:44) We realize not everyone will think well of us. Jesus was criticized. So is everyone who serves Him. So what does God want us to do when unfairly criticized? He wants us to rejoice before Him and to pray for our accusers. As an example, one lesson we learned through Project Care is that some individuals have a critical nature, no matter how much you seek peace with them. We also became reconciled to the fact that not everyone will go through a Biblical and honoring process of reconciliation. Instead of humbly seeking peace in a private setting or finding out the true facts behind some accusations, some people have chosen to publicly spread unfair characterizations of pastors and Christians in our movement. So, like Jesus instructed us, we rejoice before God and pray for our critics. And we make it our aim to continue to advance the kingdom of God.

Through all of this, we must remember that our reputation matters little. What matters is God's glory. Jesus said, "*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16) What people think of us or our church or Great Commission is not important. Rather, our desire is only that God is loved and worshipped through Jesus Christ His Son.

When criticism comes our way, may God grant us humble hearts as we seek to serve God and people. And amidst unfair criticism, may God accelerate our efforts to spread the message of the love of Jesus Christ to a world in desperate need of a Savior.