

"The Art of 'Critique-ism'"

A devotional study by Pat Adamson

"Criticizing another's garden won't keep the weeds out of your own!"

In my line of work in Quality Assurance for Johnson and Johnson I am expected to be critical of the Medical Devices we manufacture as well as the components that go into those Devices. I am expected to compare what we make to given standards – drawing specifications as well as compliance and regulatory requirements. At any given notice, the Food and Drug Administration can (and does) come by to look at what we're doing. And just as I inspect the quality of our products, the FDA will inspect our organization to verify our compliance to industry standards.

When I'm at work during the week it's my job to be critical – I'm called to stand in judgment regarding the quality of the parts we manufacture. This topic of inspection and criticism really hits home for me because I sometimes find myself . . . well, sort-of taking the job home with me . . . and I find myself being critical or judgmental when I should be extending grace and more understanding.

What is criticism? The classic definition from Webster's Dictionary says that criticism is "an act of criticizing; to judge as a critic; to find fault; to blame or condemn." This is what a "critic" does. He (or she) is a fault-finder.

Most people respond very well to criticism if it is favorable but usually the act of criticism (or criticizing) carries with it the connotation of condemnation. Someone once said that "Criticism is one thing that is more blessed to give than to receive."

Listen, as a person involved in Quality Control, I can look at an inanimate object with criticism. I can look at a Medical Device and pass judgment on its quality. Or, as another example, one might look at a car, or a TV, or a book with criticism. But in the body of Messiah, we are NOT to criticize our brothers and sisters in the same way! People are not inanimate objects!

There is a subtle but important distinction between the word "criticism" and the word "critiquing."

Both critiquing and criticizing are examples of the way G-d has wired us together, and the ability to evaluate and place judgment at the right moment can keep someone out of a lot of trouble – even save a life! Just ask someone in the military or police

force. All of life is filled with examples of criticism and "critique-ism." Let's talk about "critique-ism" for a moment.

"Critique-ism" is obviously just a made up word, but what does it mean to critique?

"Critiquing" has to do with assessment, evaluation, and appraisal. Critiquing can be applied both to things as well as to people because critiquing has to do with observation and usually doesn't carry with it the connotation of judgment.

When having to do with people, believers like to call that "discernment." But at the end of the day, what one does with that "discernment" will either be a form of *critiquing to build up*, or it will become a form of *criticism to tear down*.

"Critique-ism" and "Criticism." I know some of you think I'm just playing with words here (semantics), so let's get into some Scripture and find out what G-d has to say.

In Romans chapter 14 it reads, "*You then, why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For all of us will stand before G-d's judgment seat; since it is written in the Tanakh, "As I live, says ADONAI, every knee will bend before Me, and every tongue will publicly acknowledge G-d." So then, every one of us will have to give an account of himself to G-d. Therefore, let's stop passing judgment on each other! Instead, make this one judgment – not to put a stumbling block or a snare [or an obstacle or hindrance] in a brother's way.*" (Romans 14:10-13 CJB)

The entire chapter 14 of Romans has to do with criticism – fault-finding in others. The content is very instructive that we must not criticize and even, unintentionally, bring someone down. In my opinion, *criticism and judgment has damaged or destroyed the faith of more believers than anything else*. Criticism is NOT a tool for the follower of Yeshua – it's a tool of the devil!

New believers are particularly sensitive to criticism. In Matthew 18 verse 6 Yeshua said, "*Whoever ensnares one of these little ones who trust Me, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the open sea!*"

There's an old saying that, "We tend to judge others by their actions, and we judge ourselves by our intentions." Truly, only HaShem can see what's inside a person's heart. Only He can know what motivates a person internally – we cannot. If we are to find fault in anything let it be in ourselves so that we can correct that which we

know, rather than attempting to guess the motivations of others. In 1 Corinthians 11:31 we are told to *examine ourselves* – NOT other people.

Now, what about overt sin? How is a believer NOT to criticize or find fault with that? The answer that I would submit to you is simply that we don't always know all the facts. And even when we do, the Bible says no judgment is valid apart from two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15 and 1 Timothy 5:19). Even more, Yeshua said "*Let he who is without sin cast the first stone!*" (John 8:7)

Don't get me wrong – sin needs to be dealt with directly, but for the most part – and certainly before any actions are taken, we should be on our knees, in fervent prayer before the Father.

The Critical Spirit – Have you ever met someone with a critical spirit? A person with a critical spirit usually only dwells on the negative and eventually only focuses on the flaws and shortcomings of others. Their standard of holiness becomes the standard for everyone else to reach. A critical spirit is damaging in many ways. Over time, if left unchecked, and aside from the affect it has on others, a critical spirit prevents that person from seeing and appreciating all that's truly good in the world, and all that G-d is actively doing in their midst.

Rather than walking in the spirit, the critical person is walking in the flesh and comes to expect that everything has something wrong with it – and so it becomes their mission to fix everything through finger-pointing. In fact, the identity of a person with a critical spirit actually begins to be marked by a quest for negativity – for fault-finding! And let me be very frank here – like l'shon harah (the evil tongue), a critical spirit will spread like a cancer in a congregation. Like l'shon harah, even the non-verbals have a tendency to send signals and messages of negativity to others.

HaSatan is called "*the accuser of the brethren.*" Personally, I don't want to share that title with him – he can have it!

Critique-ism vs. Constructive Criticism – What's the difference between "critique-ism" and so-called "constructive criticism?"

It has been said that nobody appreciates the value of constructive criticism more thoroughly than the person giving it! "Constructive criticism is when I criticize you. Destructive criticism is when you criticize me!"

Actually, I don't see anything constructive at all about criticism and just like divorce in married life, in my opinion criticism should not be part of the believer's identity in

Messiah. *Only “critique-ism” is constructive.* Why? Because fault-finding is *not the primary objective* as it is in criticism – do you see the difference? The primary objective in critiquing others is to understand that critique in a way that would help build up – not tear down. And whereas criticism is almost always expressed behind someone’s back, a constructive critique in love is expressed to the person – face to face.

In the book of Romans, Rabbi Paul says, *“Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, passing judgment; for when you judge someone else, you are passing judgment against yourself; since you who are judging do the same things he does.”* (Romans 2:1 CJB)

Words are powerful and what we say from our lips should only be used for edifying, encouraging, building up, and exhorting. The Scriptures encourage this very clearly:

“Moreover, I tell you this: on the Day of Judgment people will have to give account for every careless word they have spoken; for by your own words you will be acquitted, and by your own words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36-37 CJB)

Criticizing or cursing the darkness won’t change anything, but only by living out the Torah will we expose the light of God’s Word. And it’s the light of God’s Word in action among the people that will bring about change. We cannot change others – and this is true even in marriage. We cannot impose our standard of righteousness on other people. But as you continue to study and absorb the teachings of Yeshua, and as you live out the truth of Torah, guess what? – transformation happens! People will be changed – I guarantee it! Better yet, the Scriptures guarantee it!

In the book of Isaiah HaShem says, *“My word that goes out from my mouth – it will not return to Me unfulfilled; but it will accomplish what I intend, and cause to succeed what I sent it to do.”* (Isaiah 55:11 CJB)

With even a nominal commitment to God’s Word, with the right amount of love and encouragement, *people will change!* If we ever hope to bring improvement in others, we must continue to be a people of encouragement. I am firmly convinced from my years as a husband; a dad; a grandfather; and as a Congregational Leader, that this is the only attitude that constructively and scripturally will help people to change.

The Scriptures teach that the reason we come together as a congregation is not to criticize but to exhort or encourage one another. In Hebrews 10:25 we are told to “encourage” which is a translation of the Greek word “parakaleo” meaning to invite, lift up, exhort, comfort, pray, and encourage.

Please remember that the Scriptures don't promise shalom to those who dwell on the faults and shortcomings of others! In Isaiah chapter 26, verse 3 it says that "*Adonai will keep you in perfect shalom, you whose minds are focused on Him!*"

Like the politician that redirects the attention of his constituency to other issues so as to keep their watchful eye from seeing his own failure, the fault-finding, finger-pointing, negative and critical spirit will only point to the problems in others rather than taking time to look in the mirror. After all, it is MUCH easier to point to the sin in other people than it is to face the man (or woman) in the mirror.

If you think you might have a critical spirit but want to change that criticism into something that will encourage and exhort and uplift others, here are five suggestions you might consider:

1. First, we must be actively aware at all times how utterly sinful we are. Even in Yeshua, our righteousness is as filthy rags, and ONLY IN YESHUA is grace working in our behalf. We must pray, "Adonai! Open my eyes to see myself more honestly and to experience your love more intimately!" When you personally experience G-d's grace in the forgiveness of your own sins, you are more likely to extend that grace to others.
2. Secondly, you must be thoroughly convinced that it is absolutely impossible to know what motivates another person's actions. Even when constructively critiquing the actions of another person, your discernment may tell you one thing and you may be right-on the mark! On the other hand, without all the facts at your disposal, your assessment may very well be completely off! *Only G-d Himself has all the facts.*
3. Third, pray for the person. Pray for discernment and for how you would speak or respond to him/her. Pray that you would not be critiquing this person in order to dig up dirt and to cast judgment. Pray that you would openly recognize "different flavors of ice-cream for different people" and that differences of opinion can be (and often are) just as valid as your own. Pray that you would be gentle with someone who is seeking G-d. Before HaShem he will either stand or fall:

"Who are you to pass judgment on someone else's servant? It is before his own master that he will stand or fall; and the fact is that he will stand, because the L-rd is able to make him stand." (Romans 14:4 CJB)

4. Fourth, go to the person and use direct, tactful communication. Season your words (Colossians 4:6). Remember, criticism involves fault-finding but if you prayerfully approach someone with a constructive critique, you will not blast that person for (perceived) hidden character flaws. Rather, you will seek God's will and direction with the goal in mind that broken relationships can and will be restored and that greater understanding can be attained.
5. Finally, seek out opportunities to encourage and build up someone in their faith. I think we all know what it's like to be around someone that has the gift of exhortation – you feel like a million dollars! – that you are truly valued and needed. To exhort means to see the good in others and not to focus on anything else other than encouraging that person so that G-d would be glorified. In the book of James 2:13 it says that "*Mercy triumphs over judgment.*"

In closing, may I say that it is *impossible* to practice this kind of exhortation and yet simultaneously harbor a critical spirit. You've probably heard the saying that "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care!" And if a person harbors a critical attitude (a critical spirit), any spoken words usually fall on deaf ears. Sandi's mother used to say, "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all!"

If there's one Scripture I would leave you with it is this: "*Let no harmful language come from your mouth, only good words that are helpful in meeting the need, words that will benefit those who hear them.*" (Ephesians 4:29)

My prayer for all believers is that we would continue to be a people that are quick to seek out understanding, healing and restoration, and slow to place judgment on others.

Blessings, grace, and shalom,

Pat

Three attitudes for a healthy congregation: Mercy, justice, and humility.
The Prophet Micah 6:8