

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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Critics or Worshipers?

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Unnecessary and unfair criticism.

Few things harden the soul, deaden the heart, close the ears, and chill the affections more. It serves as one of the greatest weapons of our adversary the devil, though few recognize it. One would expect such a foe to be obvious, but it often chooses to operate subtly in the shadows of the mind and the private ruminations of the heart.

It has the added deadliness of feigning holiness while encouraging pride with the false assumption we are more holy than others due to our greater “discernment.”

Donning the cloak of the critic maims and kills many would-be worshipers in churches every single Sunday morning.

In all honesty, very few of us knowingly enter church with such a motivation. How silly it would be for us to rise early on Sundays to play the role of the critic. But as we take our seat in the church pew, our focus and motivation cowers to the voice crying out within, “they are not doing this right,” “they are not doing this well,” “they are not doing this as I would do it.” And in the midst of it all, we move from worshiper to critic.

No doubt, the Christian is called to be discerning and discriminating in worship. All that passes for worship these days should not receive our approval. Paul has no qualms identifying wrong practices in the worship of the Corinthian Church

(1 Corinthians chapters 11-14), Jesus is clear about worthy and non-worthy worship (John 4), and God’s seriousness about the manner and means by which we worship cannot be overestimated (Leviticus 10).

Yet, there is a temptation to spend more time at church critiquing than confessing, judging than rejoicing, criticizing than praising, and challenging than receiving, when there is very little reason to do so.

This trap is great and our adversary is pleased with the results. The critic leaves church with a self-satisfied conscience. He rests having fulfilled his “weekly duty,” but little worship was practiced or experienced. Instead of meeting with God, he played the cynic. Instead of hearing the voice of God, he heard the frail words of the preacher. Instead of a mind stirred by truth, it was stymied in negativity. Instead of a heart moved with joy, it was hardened in judgment.

If you or I depart church on Sunday mornings and our main thoughts or topics of conversation consist of concerns, critiques, and criticisms, it is likely we have become a critic rather than a worshiper.

How do we fight this tendency?

There is a temptation to spend more time at church critiquing than confessing.

First, we must remind ourselves of the great privilege of corporate worship. My friends, we are meeting with the Triune God of the Universe. The Lord of Glory is speaking to us, the grace of Christ is being extended to us, and

we are enjoying a taste of that which we shall enjoy for all of eternity. Nothing in all the earth is more significant, monumental, and remarkable than the reality that God chooses to meet with us by His Word and Spirit week in and week out. Corporate worship is the high-point of the Christian’s week. Anything that detracts from it is an enemy.

Second, intentionality goes a long way in fighting unnecessary critique.

- Begin Saturday night by setting aside time in prayer and reading the Bible to soften your heart for the next day’s holy appointment.
- On Sunday, rise early enough to seek the Lord in order to have your heart moved with

affection for Him before entering the church building.

- As you take your seat in the sanctuary, remember above all else that worship is a meeting between God and His people. You are not there to sit in judgment or question the motives of others. You journeyed to this place at this time to meet with the one True and Living God of heaven and earth.
- As the music begins, even if it is not your "cup of tea," seek to meditate upon the words you are singing. Allow your affections to be stirred as you think and meditate upon Him.
- As prayers are uttered, seek to stay your thoughts upon Him. Say over and over in your mind, "Amen," as you agree with the words offered in corporate prayer.
- As the sermon is preached, plead with the Lord to lay bare your own heart, root out sin where it is found, and provide comfort where it is needed.
- When driving home from church talk about how the service or sermon impacted you. Limit critiques and abound in discussion about how the Word preached, sung, read, confessed, and prayed that morning shaped and informed your own understanding and life in Christ.

- And throughout the week meditate upon that Word and watch for how the Lord is conforming you more and more to the image of Christ.

Criticism can detract and deject the worshiper. We all must seek to limit it to healthy bounds. It may be the case that you attend a church where the Word isn't preached, the Sacraments aren't administered, and worship is absent. If that is the case, it is time to move on. However, if you attend a church where the Word is preached, the Sacraments are rightly administered, and worship is present, then delight in God. Don't let our adversary tempt you to do something less.

Worship critics stand in judgment over everyone and everything else. God-adoring worshipers kneel in unity with their brothers and sisters humbly before their King.



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