Killing Criticism!

Article by: Tom Lane

One of the true enemies of worship is criticism, I’m amazed at how much it permeates the Church and worship. Everyone has an opinion and many feel obliged to give it regularly. We critique services like we do broadway productions or touring shows and hold lengthy meetings to evaluate seconds and minutes of the program so as to continue to improve it.

Sadly we are also some of the most offended people when the Word tells us not to be. So we send emails or make comments that hurt and wound others as if it’s a right. No matter how well intentioned we may be, it’s wrong! If we are so focused on things that offend or displease us that we allow ourselves to fester and brew with criticism, our hearts may well be nowhere near worship. What it signifies is that we need to grow up and deal with our own issues.

We’ve heard, said, and sung that worship is not about us yet our responses are often like children when they don’t get what they want. Whether on a team where criticism is rampant or in a church where it’s tolerated constantly we need to call it out, be sorry for it, and stop it. It impedes our personal and corporate worship as well our growth and maturity as believers.

The promise of God is that if He is lifted up He will then draw people unto Himself—all by Himself. It has been proven over and over for generations that He is able to do that. So our work is not to impress others into the kingdom, meaning that the production of worship is never more important than the spirit of unity. If it’s his kindness that leads us to repentance then at the very least our worship expressions should be rooted in kindness and humility, which is the opposite spirit of criticism. It’s hard to lift up one voice if we’re divided and diluted in our praise.

It breaks God’s heart when we try to move past sins without confessing and dealing with them. I’m not actually talking about our own personal sins though it’s the same thing, I’m taking about how we as a body seek to have encounters with God in worship while at the same time overlooking or avoiding dealing with our own corporate issues and sins. In this case criticism, but it can be a host of other things that we neglect to deal with.

It is on us as pastors, teaches, and leaders to lead and instruct on what worship is and is not. We’re not to be judges, spiritual police, or dictators, but servants and shepherds. We have to humbly and lovingly defend and protect from intruders and divisions. We shouldn’t allow a critical spirit to live and thrive in our own lives, our teams, and our churches. We have to remind that this is not how The Lord has called us to be. If we set that tone and pace then others begin to understand that it’s not tolerated. Just like gossip, if we don’t participate in it the gossipers begin to get the picture and stop approaching us with more gossip.

We spend a lot of time and words talking about the musical portion of worship, making our bands sound good and improving skill etc. All of it’s important if it truly helps us serve the Church. But what The Church really is, is God’s representation and body here on earth. We are supposed to be a sweet aroma, salt and light to people. Not another place where we come to feel more out of place, critiqued, or unaccepted. We can’t afford to miss the point of God’s presence being the true changing force and factor in worship. Since he’s chosen to use us and work through us we have the unique choice of being either fully surrendered or not, and if we are then we’ll not act like babies towards each other, we’ll grow up and mature in Christ as Paul says.

If we’re aiming to be a relevant, vibrant, thriving in the love and power of God kind of Church, then we have to be genuine and real, willing to stop and confess our failures. People are drawn to that kind of authenticity, to friendship and belonging. It’s extremely hard to feel any sense of belonging when criticism is a part of the environment. Let’s talk about it as the problem it is and change that about ourselves!