



# The Southeast Sower

Southeast Church of Christ

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## “Self-Righteous Critics”

by

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“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

- Theodore Roosevelt

In baseball folklore the story is told of a young, minor league outfielder who could hardly contain his exuberance when he heard the news he was

being called up to the major league by his team. Upon his arrival the team manager immediately sent him out to centerfield to field for batting practice. He enthusiastically trotted out to his position, energized by the sudden realization that he was on the verge of living his lifelong dream, while at the same time nearly paralyzed with nervous anticipation. This was his big chance to show his stuff. He wanted so badly to make it count. He knew he just had to do well.

The first hit that came his way was a hard, low line drive that hit an uneven spot in the turf, took a bad hop, and bounced right over his left shoulder. The next hit was a deep drive all the way back to the warning track. He quickly angled back and was in perfect position to make the play, but lost the ball in the sun as he turned his head to catch it. The third hit was a hard ground ball up the middle, which he charged and easily fielded, but with so much adrenalin pumping he overthrew the third baseman allowing an extra run to score.

At this point the manager had seen enough and was so infuriated that he stormed

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## SERVICES:

### Sunday

Bible Study: 10:00 am

Worship: 10:50 am

6:00 pm

### Wednesday

Bible Study: 7:30 pm

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out to centerfield, took the rookie's glove away and said, “Go sit in the dugout and let me show you how it's done.” The very next batter then hit an easy pop fly ball right to the manager who promptly tripped over his own two feet and fell flat on his face, missing it completely. The manager got up, ran to the dugout, threw the glove at the rookie, and said, “Just look at what you've done. You've screwed up centerfield so badly now nobody can play it!”

How tragically discouraging and hopelessly pathetic it is to have or be associated with such a self-righteous, hypercritical, and hypocritical spirit! Yet they can exist in all segments of our lives, even within the Lord's church. In fact, Jesus dealt with such an attitude and mindset as exhibited by the Pharisees during his life on earth, and much of his teaching centered around them. Therefore, we should take heed to His message, identifying that spirit in any semblance, not simply in others, but first within *ourselves*.

The self-righteous, critical spirit is someone with an obsessive attitude of criticism and faultfinding, who seeks to tear others down. (It is not the same thing as exhorting, or giving what is referred to as "constructive criticism." The only criticism that is ever constructive is that which is expressed in love to "build up," not to tear down. It is always expressed face-to-face, never behind one's back.) They greatly overestimate their own goodness, righteousness, and spirituality, seeing themselves as the spiritual elite, while "rolling their eyes" at and disassociating themselves from those they view as spiritually inferior. Self-righteous critics are also characterized by having a bitter or jealous

attitude toward others. They are often insecure and jealous of the success of others. Their criticism and sarcastic comments are typically a subconscious way of tearing down others in order to elevate themselves and their standing in the church. In the absence of their own spiritual growth, belittling others gives their fragile egos an over-inflated sense of relevancy and self-importance. As a whole, it is a venomous mindset and toxic lifestyle that is clearly demonstrated, and spoken against many places in scripture.

1. In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, consider the elder brother's reaction to his younger brother when he returned home. In particular, notice the overestimation of his own righteousness and spirituality in verse 29. "I never transgressed your command at any time." Given the fact that "all have sinned", I find it difficult to believe that after all those years a son never transgressed his father's word even one time. Secondly, notice his mindset of disassociation from his brother in verse 30, referring to him to his father, not as his brother, but rather as "your son." One can almost hear the sarcastic tone and see the "eye rolling" of the elder brother as he makes this

reference to his "spiritually inferior" younger brother. Thirdly, the elder brother's lack of rejoicing in the return of his younger brother belies an underlying jealousy, indicative of a competitive attitude of spiritual rivalry. From the elder brother's religiously superior standpoint, the younger brother is perceived as a threat to his own spiritual status within the family, and therefore must be marginalized. Given the elder brother's overestimation of his own spirituality, his disassociation from his "spiritually inferior" brother, and his jealous, spiritual competitiveness, his inability to "rejoice with those who rejoice" is not surprising.

2. In Luke 18:9-14 we see another characteristic of the self-righteous critic demonstrated. That is, they tend to elevate a few qualities or commands in their own mind, set out to excel in keeping them, and then rate themselves and others based on those few qualities or commands *alone*. Furthermore, because they may excel in keeping a few qualities or commands, they develop an overinflated sense of their own spirituality. As a result of such prideful posturing they are blinded by the spiritual weaknesses they have in other areas. Jesus

describes the problem in Matt. 23:23, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”*

Exhibiting certain qualities and keeping certain commands is good and right as long as we do not become prideful as a result, and remain grounded and balanced in adhering to the whole counsel of God. However, consider the Pharisee’s boastful statement as he prays to God in verse 12, *“I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”* Notice that he doesn’t ask for forgiveness, because he doesn’t think he needs forgiveness. He doesn’t ask for mercy because he doesn’t think he needs mercy. In his mind, forgiveness and mercy are for “other men” (verse 11) like the extortioners, the unjust, the adulterers, or that other guy, the publican. After all, how could someone like him who fasts twice a week and tithes so much to God be in need of forgiveness and mercy? Unfortunately for this Pharisee, his self-righteousness in keeping a few commands coupled with his condescending view of those that didn’t measure up to himself,

caused him to overlook an evident weakness which he had - a glaring lack of humility. Whether we may excel in certain areas, or others may excel in areas we don’t, we all need to take heed lest we fall into this same self-righteous, hypocritical mindset.

3. In Matthew 9:10-13 we see the disdain and lack of love evident in the Pharisees that also exists in the self-righteous critic. Here again, they see themselves as overly righteous, having a higher spiritual standing than others. That attitude results in arrogance, pride, an outright disdain for others, disassociating one’s self from the needs of others, and having no genuine concern for others. Many publicans and sinners had come and sat down to eat with Jesus and his disciples. *“And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, Why does your Master eat with publicans and sinners?”* (Matt. 9:11). They should have rejoiced that many were being led to repentance, rather than carefully looking for something with which to accuse Jesus. Better still, they should have been led to repentance themselves. But, the self-righteous critic is not interested in helping anyone, spiritually or physically. When someone is in need of spiritual assistance or strengthening

they have the arrogant, *“They should be more strong like I am”* attitude, or the condescending, *“(sigh...) Look what you’ve gotten yourself into now. I guess we will help you, AGAIN”* mindset. They have become oblivious to Galatians 6:1, *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”* Likewise, they disassociate themselves from those who are in physical need. Like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan they simply *“pass by on the other side.”* Again, they may make self-righteous rationalizations for not assisting those in need as they have opportunity by making statements like, *“I’ll not give any money to help them because if they were righteous like I am, they would not be in this predicament.”* Galatians 6:9-10 is the furthest thing from their mind, *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* As such, the self-righteous critic will try to plead his case to no avail in the final judgment as described in Matt. 25:44-46, *“Then they*

*also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* Quite simply, they don't notice others who are in need because they don't care to notice.

4. In Mark 7: 1-2 we see the Pharisees finding fault with some of Christ's disciples for eating with unwashed hands. Being self-righteous critics they could not see their own faults, but they could readily see the faults of others. It is a hallmark of those who are jealous of the spiritual growth and potential of others while being spiritually insecure themselves. Given their generally negative disposition toward others, and life in general, it is not surprising. Jesus illustrated the problem perfectly in Matt. 7:3-5, "*And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from*

*your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."* Even though they could not see their own faults, God's word clearly lists them as a warning for all who may be susceptible to that mindset. Among other things, self-righteous critics follow the traditions of men over God's commands, (Mark 7:9,13). They love the praise of men more than the praise of God, (John 12:43). They do not practice what they preach, (Matt. 23:2-3). They blame others for their problems. Since they have an exalted opinion of themselves in their own minds, nothing is ever their fault. (Jesus was not responsible for their problems with the Romans, John 11:47-48). As mentioned earlier, they omit the weightier matters of God's word, (Matt. 23:23). However, it is wrong to focus on the faults of others. We should consider Paul's example in 1 Thess. 1:2-3, and appreciate, praise, commend and pray for the good work of the brethren.

5. In the end, the Pharisees developed a stubborn, calloused will, were unable to accept rebuke, and set about to destroy their opposition. Such is a classic tactic of the self-righteous critic. "*Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they*

*came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus."* While the self-righteous critic of today may not try to physically kill their opposition, they often resort to character assassination. Having little control over their tongue, or their temper, they have a propensity for gossip, slander, tale-bearing, unwholesome speech, and railing on their opposition which Paul said were sins "worthy of death" (Rom. 1:29-32). As such, they seem to secretly rejoice when others stumble, as evidenced by the earnestness and fervor of their gossip as they gleefully recount the details to their friends. It is almost as if somehow they have ascended a spiritual ladder one rung because someone higher up fell all the way down. However, we should not behave this way. In I Corinthians 13:6, Paul says that "*love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*

Jesus said to, "*Beware the leaven of the Pharisees...*", (Luke 12:1). May we avoid that same self-righteous, critical spirit in our own

**lives today.**