

Microphonobia

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According to the Mayo Clinic, more than 19 million Americans suffer from anxiety disorders (<http://www.mayoclinic.com>). More than one in ten Americans suffer from specific phobias. The list of identified phobias grows every year, in part because identifying the phobias is an integral part of the treatment process. Phobia sufferers frequently go from doctor to doctor, receiving treatment for symptoms of phobias which remain undiagnosed.

To aid in the battle against these irrational fears, I want to add "Microphonobia" to the list of specific phobias. Microphonobia is a relative of glossophobia, the fear of public speaking. Microphonobia is an irrational fear which hinders men from taking teaching roles in church.

Microphonobia varies in intensity. Severe sufferers tremble at the thought of donning the lavalier, refusing any contact with it. Moderate sufferers are able to work through the fear to speak, but as soon as they step down from the podium, they pull off the microphone and cast it aside as though it were poisonous.

Like all phobias, Microphonobia is a learned condition. If we are to be freed from its grasp, we must understand its origins.

Some of the most extreme cases of Microphonobia involve men who have been in church all of their lives. Seemingly strange, this phenomenon makes perfect sense when the origins of Microphonobia are examined. A 20 year old who has attended church every Sunday morning and evening and mid-week services has heard something in the area of 2000 sermons and 1000 short talks. If the same young man, during the rides home from services, has heard his parents castigate the speaker on a regular basis, how could the young man not feel ill-at-ease at the idea of facing the same reproach?

Public speaking is frightening in and of itself, and issues of knowledge and study are sometimes involved, but first, and perhaps, foremost, Microphonobia is the result of criticism. Savvy speakers may notice a few irritable glances even while they are speaking, but brethren seldom speak directly to a man about his perceived shortcomings. The discussions about the speaker take place in the aisles, in the cars, on the telephones. Paul wrote, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). Still, the brethren review, criticize, and murmur with a predictable result: men choose not to speak and avoid the criticism.

The history of murmuring is an old, distinguished one. Moses faced the murmuring of the Israelites on numerous occasions (Exodus 14:11; 15:24; 16:2-3; 17:23; Numbers

14:1-4; 16:13-14; 16:41). Moses recognized that when the people complained against Moses and Aaron, the people were actually complaining against God (Numbers 16:8). One would hope that such a realization would quiet the critics, but murmuring continues.

Everyone has critics. Paul's said that his letters were weighty but that his bodily presence and speech were contemptible (2 Corinthians 10:10). Their words did not silence Paul.

Will we cower in fear, paralyzed by Microphonobia, or will we stand with Moses and Paul, facing down the critics in the doing of God's will?