

attention was the fact that all five seemed to feel their treatment of the pastor was perfectly fine. What I heard was anger, divisiveness and discord. And knowing the pastor personally caused me great distress. He is a fine preacher and a godly man, who works to stay true to the Scriptures. How my heart ached for him! You see, these five were not contending for the faith, they were sowing discord and attacking God's gift to their church. What they pointed out did not qualify him to be a false teacher. He is simply a young pastor in process. We know that God hates strife among brothers (Proverbs 6:19). These people were not contending for the faith, but rather promoting a divisive spirit.

(Continued in Part 2.)



CONDITIONED TO CRITICIZE *(PART 1)*

Looking for the Worst in Others

Roger Loomis

CONDITIONED TO CRITICIZE, PT.1

Facebook provides ministers of the Gospel and others opportunities to post their thoughts. And overall, this may be a good platform from which to communicate. However, I've noticed, to my chagrin, that some Facebook posts set up pastors and ministers in general as targets for undue criticism. What do I mean?

Church leadership expert, John Maxwell, recently posted about the growth of his beloved church, while providing interesting statistics. He humorously spoke about the three who attended his first service (one being his wife), and how his church grew to become a megachurch. Maxwell, one of America's premiere church growth consultants, travels the country, teaching church growth principles for us, who lead local churches. I have found his books and seminars to be a great source of instruction and encouragement.

Sadly, however, I was shocked at the avalanche of self-righteous, critical, negative reactions that followed his post. What he had to say became fodder for those who felt it both their right and even duty to set straight the man of God. How it hurt me to read the many harsh reactions. Christians truly can be less than kind in their evaluations. I read words like: Charlatan, ungodly, false

teacher, self-centered, self-promoting, and narcissistic, to name a few. And I sensed that most who posted felt entirely justified to submit their contributions. That's what bothered me the most.

Then, it struck me that perhaps we pastors are to blame for some of the less than amiable backlash that follows our ministry at times. At this point, I'm not referencing John Maxwell, but pointing to the idea that pastors often use their pulpits to bring unnecessary judgment and criticism toward other ministries. "That church down the road," or "That television ministry," or "Those who do not agree with me," become targets for misguided sermon illustrations. And this is what I've learned: Contending for the faith does not license us to engage in spiritual smear campaigns. Nor does it negate Jesus' teaching on judging one another. Matthew 7:1-2 *"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."*

It is entirely possible that pastors use their God-given influence to inspire undue criticism and even encourage believers to sit in the seat of the "scornful," (Psalm 1:1) and self-righteously judge other believers, pastors or other legitimate ministries that God raises up. We need to be careful **about whom** and **to whom** and

for whom we are contending. We need to remember that God has raised up many streams of Christian endeavor to evangelize the lost and to mature the saints. To illustrate my point, two examples come immediately to mind.

My dad, who got hurt in church when I was a young boy, spent the rest of his life alienated from the Christian faith. He was not a Godhater, but certainly rejected what he saw and heard at church. Wonderfully, in his final years he began watching televangelist Joel Osteen, and the Holy Spirit softened his heart. When I heard his kind words about Joel, I too discovered that this megachurch pastor was touching lives beyond the scope of my influence; and while criticism against him seemed to prevail in Christian circles, I gained a sincere appreciation for this nationally known preacher. His ministry reached where I could not, and my dad came to faith in Christ.

Recently, my wife and I were enjoying Sunday lunch at our favorite restaurant. Close to our table was a party of five, whose voices easily carried. For the next 45 minutes we listened as all five of them enjoyed "pastor casserole." Unkind, at times harsh words were used to describe their pastor's sermon and leadership. His message was cruelly dissected and loud voices chimed in to "contend for the faith." It was a feeding frenzy that for sure dishonored the Lord. The thing that really caught my