

"Let There Be No Strife"

When contention arose between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abram, "Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren'" (Genesis 13:8). God's friend Abraham knew that brotherhood demands the cessation of strife. I fear that some brethren today believe that brotherhood demands incessant strife.

Some practical measures for keeping peace include the following:

1. DO NOT START A QUARREL!

Proverbs 17:14 says, "The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts." While it is true that there are principles of truth that must be defended, argued and contended for (Jude 3, Philippians 1:17), MANY quarrels among brethren are over things that have not even been revealed in Scripture. Others involve judging hearts and motives by appearance, instead of judging with righteous judgment (as Jesus instructed in John 7:24). This kind of strife should be nipped in the bud! We must simply "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2 Timothy 2:23).

2. DO NOT SPREAD TALES!

Nothing fans the flames of strife more effectively than gossip. Conversation that is seemingly well meant can provide fuel to a fire that would otherwise die out. When a brother begins a conversation (or e-mail message) by asking, "Do you know what brother so-and-so said about you?" he may mean well, but what follows is usually combustible! "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases" (Proverbs 26:20).

3. LOVE YOUR BROTHER.

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins." (Proverbs 10:12). It is amazing how easy it is for folks to tolerate the faults of their loved ones, family, longtime friends, etc., while at the same time refusing to tolerate similar or lesser faults in those outside their circle of friends. If we could learn to show love, without prejudice or partiality, we might find a lot less to pick at in others (cf. 1 Timothy 5:21).

4. FORBEAR.

The instructions given in Ephesians 4:1-3 for "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace " include "forbearing one another in love" (KJV). According to Strong's Dictionary "forbearing" means to "put up with, bear with, endure, suffer". Some have the idea that they "don't have to put up with" anything from a brother in Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even if you are being unjustly mistreated, "putting up with it" and taking it patiently is one of the truest marks of a follower of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:20-21). Suffering real or imagined injustice from a brother is a sad excuse for causing strife. It's an excuse Abram would not use, and neither should we. We might learn to be more forbearing if we would stop and realize how much we need others to "put up with" us! "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them." (Matthew 7:12).

- by Steve Klein

Because It Is Right

Reward incentive motivation permeates our society. People respond to rewards just like little puppies do. Some parents think only in terms of rewarding their children, and, they even reward them for being bad. When a parent says to a little child, "If you will be quit throwing a temper tantrum, we will go get an ice cream as soon we get away from the Dr.'s office," he is rewarding bad behavior and the child quickly understands how to get what he wants. The "in thing" now in many churches is to offer physical rewards for being religious. That ranges from the "gospel of health and wealth" that says, "If you give \$100, God will give you \$1,000," to appealing to the fleshly appetites of entertainment to get people to come to "church."

Whatever happened to doing right because it is right? Surely, Jesus offers men rewards but those incentives have nothing to do with the sensual desires. In fact, he condemned those who followed him because they were fed -- "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life," (John 6:29). The reward for righteousness is eternal life with God. God expects right behavior, because he is holy and we must be like him to share in spiritual life (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Christians are committed to a way of life that is righteous, because it is the right way to live. Sometimes the righteous life may offer a material advantage but that isn't why the Christian lives that way. At other times, being righteous may be a difficult road and the righteous may be mocked and persecuted. The disciple of the Lord does right when people speak well of him and when they do not -- his motivation is doing right, because it is the right thing to do.

- by **Jim R. Everett**

Preachers & Opinions

"That's just the preacher, and that's just his opinion." With these words the sermon that has just been delivered is dismissed and the lesson ignored. Everything the preacher has taught is wiped away with the stroke of a very wide brush. "It's just his opinion, don't worry about it."

Do preachers have opinions? Of course, they do! Like everyone else, they have opinions about politics, sports, the weather, and a hundred other subjects. They also have opinions about the important judgments that must be made in our personal lives and in our congregational work. In this, they are no different than any other Christian.

Do preachers express their opinions? Of course, they do! Like most other people, preachers will tell you what they think about subjects that are of interest to them. And, spiritual subjects are very important to them. Thus, they are prone to state their views on issues that relate to serving God.

There is nothing wrong with a preacher, or any other Christian, expressing an opinion. When they do, you may choose to agree or disagree. Typically, preachers have based their judgment upon sound principles and years of practical experience. Their opinions, therefore, should carry some weight to those who are concerned about following the best course in matters of expediency. But their opinions are just that, opinions, and they do not carry the force of divine law. You are invited to totally disregard them if it is only their opinion.

But, be careful! Preachers are also proclaiming God's commandments, and these **MUST** be obeyed. If the preacher has demonstrated by 'book, chapter, and verse' that what he is saying is the will of God, you cannot just overlook it by claiming it is only his opinion. If he has shown the authority of Scripture for what he is teaching, then it is **NOT** an opinion, it is law – it must be obeyed. If you fail to do so, you are ignoring God, not the preacher. As Paul said; "he who rejects this is not rejecting man but God . . ." (1 Thessalonians 4:8). Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**