

"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

Standing Alone

In the days of wicked king Ahab, the nation of Israel had drifted far from God. They had embraced idolatry and at the center of that apostasy stood 450 prophets of Baal, boldly supported by the king and queen. Against them stood one faithful man — Elijah. On Mount Carmel, Elijah asked the people a piercing question: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Sadly, they answered him not a word.

What a lonely position Elijah was in - one man standing for truth while hundreds opposed him. Yet Elijah was right, and the multitude was wrong. When God sent fire from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice, it became unmistakably clear that truth is not determined by majority opinion. God's faithful servant stood alone, but he stood with God.

This has often been the case for God's faithful servants. Noah preached righteousness while the whole world ignored God (Genesis 6:5-8). Micaiah stood alone against 400 flattering prophets who told king Ahab only what he wanted to hear (1 Kings 22:6-14). Jeremiah was mocked and persecuted for declaring God's word to a rebellious nation (Jeremiah 20:1-2,7-9). The ultimate example is that of our Lord Jesus who was rejected by many who loudly professed devotion to

God.

Faithful Christians should not be surprised when the same thing happens today. Those who insist on teaching the pure truth of God's word are often criticized, isolated, and misrepresented — not only by the world, but even by their own brethren. Paul warned Timothy that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:3). Truth makes people uncomfortable when they are determined to follow their own desires instead of God's will.

One danger should be noted. We must never assume that being unpopular automatically means we are faithful. But when Christians humbly and lovingly teach the truth of God's word, opposition should not discourage them. Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... for my sake” (Matthew 5:11).

Elijah once thought he was completely alone, but God assured him there were still seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Likewise today, faithful servants of God are never truly alone. Most importantly, the Lord stands with those who stand for His truth. We must never compromise God's word for the sake of acceptance or popularity. The majority crowd may be large, loud, and even appear ‘religious’ — but truth still belongs to God and His faithful servants. Think!

- by Greg Gwin