

The Challenges of Passive-Aggressive Behavior By Ethan R. Longhenry

There is a cancer that is destroying not a few churches these days. It is not a matter of doctrine, although doctrine may sometimes factor into the difficulty. It is an insidious matter, a practice nowhere commended by Jesus or the Apostles and yet prevalent among Christians. More than likely, all of us, at some time and at some level or another, have been guilty of it.

This cancer is passive-aggressive behavior. When we speak about passive-aggressive behavior, we are not using the new definition/diagnosis of a psychiatric condition of the same name but are speaking, in most general terms, of a certain type of behavior. "Passive aggressive" is defined by Merriam-Webster as: "Being, marked by, or displaying behavior characterized by the expression of negative feelings, resentment, and aggression in an unassertive passive way."

We can identify many types of "passive-aggressive" behavior. Perhaps a Christian feels as if he or she is not included enough in activities; they complain about the lack of inclusion but seem unwilling to work actively with other Christians or to facilitate such activities themselves. Or perhaps another Christian has, in ignorance, said or acted in an unbecoming or offensive way. Other Christians recognize the words or deeds, complain to others about it, but never have the resolve to address the matter with the one who said it or did it. There might be times when there is discontent with the way that elders shepherd or evangelists promote the Gospel or with the actions and/or attitudes of fellow Christians. This discontent easily becomes fodder for gossip and slander as opposed to addressing these matters directly with the elders, evangelists, or Christians in question.

Passive-aggressive behavior among Christians, therefore, represents those times when Christians are bothered, frustrated, or distressed about a person, condition, or situation, but for whatever reason they are unwilling to substantively address their concerns with the people in question themselves. Instead, they pour forth these negative feelings to other, less involved people, to their family members, or, God forbid, to unbelievers and outsiders. There may be times when many people feel the same way about a person or group and will talk with one another and sympathize with one another-- but the matter never gets addressed with that person or group. There is aggression-- the negative feelings are real-- but they are handled rather passively. The risk of actively addressing the matter and causing discomfort and possible hard feelings with the "offensive" party is too great; to keep the matter to oneself and to not let it become a hindrance, however, remains too difficult!

There is no approval of this behavior in Scripture. Jesus explicitly charges believers to confront a brother who has sinned against them directly (Matt. 18:15-18). While talking about fellow Christians seems to be standard policy in conversations in congregations, such too easily devolves into gossip sessions, condemned by God (2Cor. 12:20; 2Thes. 3:11; 1Tim. 5:13). In such an environment Christians are not "speaking truth" to one another, because internal bitterness and resentment is being covered up, which also should not be so (Eph. 4:25, 31-32).

This does not mean that we should address every difficulty that may come up with one another. There are times when we might have been too sensitive, and the

problem is really more with us and our attitudes than with the other person or persons and their behaviors. In such circumstances we must work on ourselves and to develop the right attitude of love, compassion, and tenderheartedness toward one another (Eph. 4:32). In so doing, however, we certainly should not hold our personal challenges against the other!

If, however, there is a circumstance where something does bother us, and it keeps being a hindrance, and if we are tempted to speak to others about it, we would do best to handle the matter directly with the person or persons involved. If we are willing to experience the negative feeling and to foster it and dwell upon it, and if we would prove willing to talk to others about it, then we should be willing to talk to the one who precipitated such a feeling. If we are too fearful or unwilling to talk about it with the person him or herself, we have no right to hold on to the feeling or to address it with others!

No one enjoys being the object of passive-aggressive behaviors; why, then, would we act in such ways about others (Luke 6:31)? Let us be willing to work with one another, and avoid passive-aggression in our attitude and behavior!

So Far

Dear Lord, so far today, I have done all right. I haven't gossiped, lost my temper, or been grumpy, nasty, selfish, or over-indulgent. I am very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, Lord, I'm going to get out of bed. And from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot more help.

Advice to Drinkers

Since you can't stop drinking, why not start a saloon of your own in your own home? Be the only customer and you won't have to buy a license. Give your wife \$125 to buy a case of whiskey. There are 240 drinks in a case and at \$4 a drink that is \$720 in 12 days. When the case is gone, your wife can buy another case for \$125, and put the balance of \$595 in the bank. If you live 10 years and continue to buy your drinks from your wife, you can die with your boots on, and your widow will have \$180,880 in the bank on deposit. That's enough for her to bring up your children, pay off the mortgage, marry a decent man, and forget she ever knew a drunk like you. (Author Unknown)

A Moments Wisdom

Look not mournfully into the past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future, without fear.

Too many people are thinking of security instead of opportunity. They seem more afraid of life than death.

Before we set our hearts too much upon anything, let us examine how happy those are who already possess it.

Patience has its limits. Take it too far, and it's cowardice.

Peace is not an absence of war; it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice.

Never be entirely idle; but either be reading, or writing, or praying or meditating or endeavoring something for the public good.

We cannot control the evil tongues of others; but a good life enables us to disregard them.