

Party Spirit in Disagreement

By Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

A. 1Cor. 3 - The danger of brethren falling into partisanship instead of standing only on God's Word

B. Illustrate party spirit - "I've heard that Vernon Teagarden and the church here breaks the bread into two pieces at the Lord's Table. I believe that carries a Jewish traditional flavor. At Tomlinson Run, we break it in four pieces. And I'm going to preach against the two piece bread issue every chance I get. And if Vernon doesn't change, I'm going to out him on a brotherhood website. TR will not recognize this church as faithful, and we will warn everyone that Vernon is loose and weak. We will tell folks not to come to meetings here, and treat with suspicion every preacher who holds a meeting here.

1. That is party spirit 21st century style.
2. How was it in the first century? - 1Cor. 3:1-7
3. Pharisees washing couches

C. Two factors have contributed the present struggle we have with party spirit:

1. Difficulty discerning between matters of revealed doctrine and matters of Divine liberty and personal application, and
2. An almost Pharisaic fear of anyone who differs from us in matters of Divine liberty and personal application

D. We will consider the following questions:

1. What attitudes facilitate party spirit?
2. How is party spirit incompatible with being a Christian?
3. What is the impact of party spirit on a local congregation?

I. HALLMARK ATTITUDES OF PARTY SPIRIT

A. Party spirit is addressed in Gal. 5:19-21 in Paul's outline of works of the flesh

1. Did you ever wonder why the Gal. 5:19-21 list of works of the flesh contains nine sins against brethren and only eight sins of personal immorality?
2. Do you suppose that it is more likely that Christians will engage in mistreatment of others than in acts of immorality?
3. There lies the greater temptation. As Christians become morally pure, Satan tempts them to think they are morally superior, and they become vulnerable to sins of self-righteousness and other Pharisaic behaviors.

B. Eirtheia (selfish ambitions, disputes, strife)

1. This word describes a self-centered attitude in the performance of any work, for example:
 - a. Doing the work of the Lord out of a desire for recognition, personal ambition, or rivalry.
 - b. Determined to have one's own way convinced that his way is the only correct one; that the brethren would fall into digression without his oversight.
2. It is used to describe those who were preaching Christ out of jealousy and selfish ambition - Phil. 1:16.

3. It is this word which describes those who create party divisions in the church, who act out of selfish interest in power and a desire to be first, rather than from a true desire to stand for truth.
 4. It is contrasted with the "mind of Christ" described in Phil. 2:3-5.
 - a. Christians put away the compulsive need to be in control of everything when they put away the other works of the flesh.
- C. Dichostasia (dissensions, seditions)
1. This word literally means "a standing apart."
 2. It describes a condition where all fellowship and togetherness are gone.
 - a. The condition at Corinth - 1Cor. 3:3, 1:12
 - b. Paul said mark those who cause such divisions - Rom. 16:17
 3. This sin is committed when we confuse prejudice with principle, and unreasoning stubbornness with unwavering resolution.
- D. Hairesis (heresies, factions)
1. As used in the NT, it most commonly denotes a body of people belonging to a particular school of thought or action.
 - a. The sect of the Sadducees - Acts 5:17.
 - b. The sect of the Pharisees - Acts 15:5.
 2. The early Christians were accused of being a sect.
 - a. Acts 24:5; 24:14; 28:22
 3. Peter used it to describe those false teachers who will bring in destructive divisions - 2Peter 2:1.
 4. It refers to divisiveness brought about by variant teaching.
 - a. Most of the issues in the past 30 years that threatened to divide the church have instead become minority fringe groups soon to be forgotten: Deity issue, some aspects of the fellowship issue, race to the courthouse issue, etc; all have their own little ever shrinking fellowship pitifully grinding old grudges

II. WHY PARTY SPIRIT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH BEING A CHRISTIAN

- A. Because of what Jesus did on the cross. Two reconciliations, not one
 1. He died to reconcile man back to God - 2Cor. 5:18-21.
 2. But also to reconcile man back to man in one body - Eph. 2:13-16.
- B. Because we are instructed to preserve this reconciliation.
 1. We preserve it by avoiding sins that violate the law of love - 1Cor. 6:5-8
- C. Because it is a violation of the law of love:
 1. The will of Christ concerning unity - John 17:20-23.
 2. Dividing over party spirit is a denial of the law of love and a dismissal of the command to be united by the bond of love - 1Cor. 1:10-13.

IV. THE IMPACT OF PARTY SPIRIT ON A LOCAL CHURCH

- A. The great weakness of the scribes and Pharisees was their inability to distinguish between greater and lesser matters.
 1. Jesus warned his disciples about their attitude; they believe they are the only true guardians of truth - Matt. 23:1-12.
 2. Proclaimed eight woes against the scribes and Pharisees:

- B. Focus your attention on the 4th and 5th woe:
 - 1. They honored the gold of the Temple more than they did the Temple itself - Matt. 23:16-17.
 - 2. They cared more about tithing spices than practicing justice, mercy and faith - Matt. 23:23-24.
- C. They were so consumed by giving attention to the small things of the law, that they forgot the vital aspects of the law.
 - 1. The command to tithe was established by God, but they took such great pains to avoid offence in the very small matters superstitiously observing the smallest points of the law, that they devoted no effort to avoid hypocrisy, deceit, oppression, and lust.
 - 2. Matt. 23:24 - "Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" Calmet's Dictionary: "You take great pains to avoid offence in very small matters, superstitiously observing the smallest points of the law, like a man carefully straining out the minute insects from his wine; while you are at no pains to avoid great sins--hypocrisy, deceit, oppression, and lust--like a man who should swallow a camel."
 - 3. The Arabs have a similar proverb: "He eats an elephant, and is suffocated with a gnat."
 - 4. "They were majoring on minor things" - Gary Ogden

II. CHURCHES AND PREACHERS WHO MAJOR ON MINORS

- A. What are we doing in this age with the stewardship God entrusted to us?
 - 1. Jesus said, "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?"
"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"
"Upon this rock I will build my church"
 - 2. What are the most valuable things in the present world?
 - a. Our soul - The kingdom of God - The gospel.
 - b. Why are so many majoring on minor things, neglecting the weightier matters?
- B. Consider the Church and Its Work
 - 1. We may ask about any busy, active congregation: Is being busy a sign of productivity and progress?
 - 2. What are they busy with: revealed doctrine or scruples of conscience?
- C. For 20 years, I sat in business meetings dominated by mundane matters like leaky faucets, trimming shrubs, and the color of the carpet, while matters of teaching the lost, edifying the saved, and restoring the erring were ignored.
- D. Some churches and their evangelists major on minors in the teaching work.
 - 1. Undue attention to brotherhood issues and politics. Preach the truth on the issue, arm the disciples with the scriptural answer, and move on.
 - a. 'KJV only' brother: "I counted over 7000 differences between the KJV and NKJV." Jonathan: "What an incredible waste of time."
 - 2. Some churches develop an orthodoxy on personal scruples, matters of individual conscience, and variations on individual applications of truth, and focus an inordinate amount of time and energy on getting the disciples to line up on these matters of liberty.

- a. The above conditions lead to party spirit, self righteousness, religious arrogance, hypocritical inconsistency, and an un-loving treatment of fellow Christians who differ from them.
- b. All of these are hallmarks of the Pharisaic party spirit.

III. SYMPTOMS OF PHARISEEISM (MAJORING ON MINORS)

- A. Failure to discern the better part - Luke 10:38-42
- B. Following the practice and forgetting the purpose
 - 1. Luke 13:10-17 - Sabbath law was given to prevent men from working for themselves. A merciful, unselfish deed is intended to help another.
- C. Practicing the exception while condemning it in others - Luke 13:10-17
- D. Looking with contempt on those who do not tithe mint, anise, and cumin.
 - 1. Luke 18:10-14 - After the Pharisees got their tithes right, then...
 - 2. Why rebuke erring brothers; because they are wrong only?
 - a. Matt. 18:15-17 - To win him back to Christ
 - 3. Why discipline an unrepentant brother; because he is wrong only?
 - a. 1Cor. 5:5 - To save his soul
 - 4. If these are not our motives, then our works profit nothing - 1Cor. 13:3
- E. Damaging the kingdom with hobbies - Rom. 14:17-20
- F. Making scruples, traditions, and expediencies equal to law - Rom. 10:1-3
- G. Binding scruples, traditions, and expediencies as law
 - 1. "Communion bread must be pie crust and broken into quarters"
 - 2. "Obeying the gospel can only come after invitation song"
 - 3. John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." Was that the day of punishment against the nations in Revelation, or was it Sunday? Does it matter; does it impact fellowship? No.
 - 4. The Spirit dwells in us literally or through the word? Does it impact fellowship? No. If by your words, attitudes, or actions you manifest that it does, you are guilty of party spirit. You have elevated a personal belief to the level of doctrine.
 - 5. On these and all other such issues, you will eventually become fringe if you continue militantly pursuing them. The tragedy is that you will cause a great deal of pain and sorrow along the way.

Conclusion:

- A. We must never forget that we became morally pure through the grace of God, the blood of Christ, and obedience to the gospel, not through some strict code of scruples developed and enforced by misguided men