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'Things God Hates' Series
#8

“One Who Spreads Strife Among Brothers”

Proverbs 6:12-19; 26:17-28

Introduction

When you hear the word *unity*, what comes into your mind – what do you think? It's been my experience that different people react differently. Some value unity as a wonderful gift and blessing from the Lord. But others view it with suspicion. They see unity as possible only at the expense of truth. Or they fear conspiracy – that unity is driven by evil intentions or greed.

Today we come to the last of seven things in Proverbs 6 that God says he hates – *one who spreads strife among brothers*. In this study we are going to see that God loves unity and he loves the peacemaker, but he is against those who stir up division and strife. Unity is a good thing. It is a fruit of God's work. It is His desire and expectation for the church. There is no sense in which it is tainted or wrong.

[Proverbs 6:12-19; 26:17-28]

The Bible uses some amazingly strong language to address those who stir up strife. God clearly does not think kindly upon men and women who instigate disunity and strife within the family of God. Listen to a few of the verses on the subject

and notice how God describes people in rather harsh tones.

- Perverse – Pro. 16:28 - *A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.*
- Arrogant – Pro. 28:25 -*An arrogant man stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the Lord will prosper.*
- Angry – Pro. 29:22 - *An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.*
- Lover of sin – Pro. 17:19 - *He who loves transgression loves strife; He who raises his door seeks destruction.*
- Fleshly – I Cor. 3:3 - *you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*

I don't know about you, but these are not terms that I want God to apply to my life. I don't want to be known by God as perverse, arrogant, angry, a lover of sin, and fleshly. This subject is obviously very important to God. When you begin to study this subject it's not hard to discover why. God hates disunity among his people for several reasons.

1. God Himself is One. The Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in perfect unity. We, as He people are to be a reflection of His image and glory. God desires that we be at peace with one another because He is at peace with Himself.
2. There is only one truth – only one gospel. There are not multiple options when it comes to what is true and what is false. *No Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.* It is true that unity is built upon the foundation of truth. Genuine

unity does not compromise truth. And it's precisely because there is one way, one truth and one life that God desires our unity.

3. Having died to bring us peace, Jesus abhors it when we live in discord. Ephesians 2 teaches us that He broke down the things that divide us; he destroyed the walls between us. The enmity between us and God is gone (vertically). And the things that divide us as people are removed at the cross (horizontally). The gospel is the very thing that brings us into deep fellowship and intimacy with one another. One of the characteristics of someone who spreads strife is that he separates intimate friends. That is exactly opposite of what Jesus died to accomplish. So he hates those who have a hand in it.
4. He designed the church to function as a body. He uses the body as an illustration of the church. We have different gifts and functions, but one head. We have diversity of functions but unity of purpose.

So for these four reasons God is passionate about our unity and aggressively opposed to our discord. And if you think about these reasons, you will see that they cover a range of fundamental truths. He desires unity because of who He is (one God); because of what He has revealed (one truth); because of what He has done (died to bring us peace); and because of how He has designed us (one body functioning to do His work). When we spread strife and live in strife we are living in opposition to God on all of these levels.

What is strife among brothers? It is simply the erecting of barriers. It is the dividing into groups that which the Lord united into one. Strife is evident by conflict, factions, taking sides, dissensions, distrust, division, and accusations. Anytime we are pulling in the opposite directions we have strife.

Let's be clear about one thing. God does not hate conflict of all kinds. Jesus said, *Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.* When God talks about hating those who stir up strife, there are two things He's not talking about.

1. He's not talking about those who defend the truth of the gospel.

I was thinking about this in our mid-week Bible study this week. We were looking at Acts 13. When Paul and Barnabas ran into opposition to the gospel in Paphos we read these words. *But Elymas the magician was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time."* Listen, those are not exactly warm, fuzzy, unifying words. Those are fighting words! When it comes to the gospel, we must recognize that we are already in war against the enemies of God. There is no true unity outside the gospel.

2. He's not talking about our responsibility to confront sin.

There are times when we need to sit down with a brother in Christ and talk about sin and offenses. Those can be difficult conversations. But we are not

to shy away from our responsibilities to help a brother in sin in the name of unity and peace.

So defending the truth and speaking clearly to another about sin and offenses is not spreading strife among brothers. That's not what God hates.

What is it that God hates?

1. He hates it when we spread offenses.

Sometimes it might not even be your own offense. Sometimes we pick up somebody else's offense and put our nose in places it doesn't belong. Proverbs 26:17 says *Like one who takes a dog by the ears Is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him.* You need to be very careful about listening to someone else's complaint and taking up their anger.

Even more critical is making sure you don't pass your own offenses to others. Strife is a funny thing. It's not like a fact that you either know or don't know. Strife is more like a living organism. It has life. It can grow and deepen and infect others. So, as we read in Proverbs 26 we need to make sure that we aren't throwing more wood on the fire of discord. There's a reason the Bible warns against *spreading strife and stirring up strife.* It sucks people in. A little germ of sin, a little conflict between two people becomes strife among brothers when it is fed and nourished and served up to others.

The tools for spreading strife are gossip, whispering, scheming, not letting go, meddling, and churning anger. Proverbs 17:14 gives this warning: *The beginning of strife is like letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.* You see, the writer of Proverbs understood the nature of strife. It can start with a few little drops – the leak in the dam, so to speak. If the conflict is not resolved biblically, in time the whole dam will burst. So, the first thing we notice is that God hates spreading offense.

2. He hates our insisting upon our personal preferences.

If you and I go to the concert together, I might hope the orchestra plays Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, while you may prefer Pachelbel's Canon in D Major. But there is one thing I think we could agree on. Neither of us would like it if the orchestra tried to play both of them at the same time. If they did that we would say that they were in discord.

But sadly, that's what happens in the church sometimes. We get so taken by our own idea of things that those very ideas that we hope will promote the kingdom of God become items that divide the church. There is a huge difference between preference and conviction. Strategic decisions are not on the same level as doctrinal decisions. We need to spend more time contending for the gospel than we do the color of the carpet. (And I only mention the carpet, not because anybodies arguing about that subject, but because I know we are getting ready to put in some new carpet and I want to warn us about the kind of little thing that can become contentious.)

Make no mistake some of these strategic issues are very important. They are not all trivial. Barnabas and Paul had great dissention over whether to take Mark on the second missionary journey – and they never resolved it. The consequence was the break-up of the team.

There are lots of philosophies of ministry and implementation questions that could divide us. But here's what God desires. He tells us in *Philippians 2:2* *make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*

3. God hates our undermining lawful authority and teaching.

This was the issue that plagued Timothy while he was in Ephesus. In I Timothy 6:3-5 Paul warned Timothy, *If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.*

Many, many years ago a man crept into the church here and unbeknownst to the elders, starting teaching strange doctrines. He was well read in reformed doctrine, professed faith and orthodoxy, had a PhD if I remember correctly – but privately, in spite of his assurances to me, began leading some of members in the church in curious doctrines. The result was that one of the young Christian families who was showing great eagerness and teachability was led astray. And several others struggled to recover from the divisiveness sown by that one man.

So what should we do to protect ourselves from falling into the trap of spreading strife among brothers?

- Make a commitment to avoid strife if at all possible. Proverbs 20:3 says it very pointedly. *Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.*
- Don't make scoffers your company. If you hang out with those who stir up strife you will get caught up in their nets. Again we turn to the Proverbs. Chapter 22:10 - *Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.*

- Cultivate love and forgiveness as the standard for your life. At the heart of strife is hatred. Proverbs 10:12 - *Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.*

We read Colossians 3:12-15 earlier in the service. That's a good place for us to end this morning. *As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.*