



YOKEFELLOW

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Co-Editor's Column IS THERE NOT A CAUSE? (I)

Garland Elkins



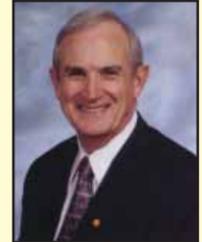
It was a crucial time for the people of God when the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle Saul and the men of Israel. Both armies were poised for a fierce battle. The Philistines had in their army a powerful giant who terrorized the Israelite army. "And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span" (1 Sam. 17:4). The description of his armor is enough to awe anyone. He was very vocal in challenging the Israelites to battle. "And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together" (1 Sam. 17:8-10). "When Saul and all Israel heard those words, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid" (1 Sam. 17:11).

About this time, David's father sent him with provisions for his three eldest sons who were in Saul's army. The Philistine had already challenged the army of Saul for forty days. Shortly after David's arrival "there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them. And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid" (1 Sam 17:23,24). David was not afraid of Goliath and, in fact, offered to fight with him. However, his eldest brother Eliab was angry with David and said to him, "Why camest thou down hither? And with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle" (1 Sam. 17:28). David responded, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" David did have a cause, and we, as Christians, have a cause today! Peter instructed: "sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the home that is in you, yet with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

There Is A Cause When We Contend For The Existence Of God
There is abundant proof of the existence of God. "God is" (Heb. 11:6), and we can prove it. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). "For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). "Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God" (Jno. 6:66-69).

(CONTINUED NEXT MONTH)

From The Director



WILL WE BE TOO LATE WITH TOO LITTLE?

In view of the upcoming election, the following quotations are appropriate. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psm. 33:12). "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psm. 9:17). "Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psm. 127:1).

We are blessed to live in a country in which we have the right to participate in selecting our government, and we have the responsibility to do so. If Christians cannot participate in government, then the ungodly, immoral, and unbelievers will determine the government and laws under which we live.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour (1 Tim. 2:1-3).

Have Christians not a right to help these prayers to come to pass--just as with our prayers for our daily bread (Mat. 6:11)?

Curtis A. Cates

STRIFE

Bobby Liddell
INTRODUCTION

Strife, the consequence of selfishness and cause of separation, divides and destroys. Ambitious self-promotion fuels the consuming fire of this work of the flesh. Its cost is far too great for us to allow it to pollute our souls and to poison our relationships with man and God. We dare not afflict our brethren with this carnal failing, nor be the ones to open the door to strife in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18; cf. Acts 9:4). Rather, we should seek to cultivate within us the gentle selflessness and humble consideration for others as manifested by the Patriarch of old.

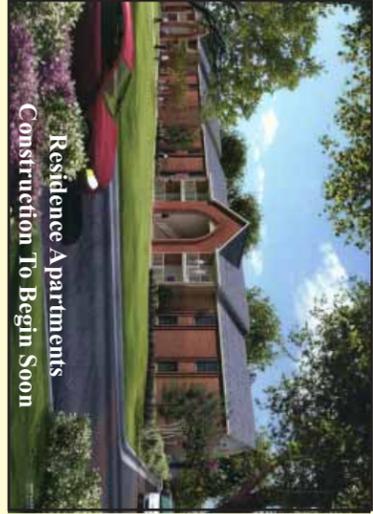
And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

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Which Begin the Last Sunday of March and Continue Through the Following Thursday.
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NEWSLETTER from MEMPHIS SCHOOL OF PREACHING

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(LIDDELL: Continued from Page 1)

strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren (Gen. 13:7-8).

How gracious for the elder Abram to allow the younger Lot to choose the way which he thought to be the best and most advantageous to him.

Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left (Gen. 13:9).

Had Abram been of the attitude of heart (condemned in Galatians 5:20) of serving himself, and of putting himself above others, he might have claimed the land for himself and fought with Lot, or banished him. Our fervent prayer and earnest desire should be that “there be no strife” between us, “for we be brethren.” Likewise, our actions and interactions should demonstrate to all our concern for peace, harmony, and unity, and our determination to think right, talk right, and live right, and, in so doing, seek the best for others, so as not to be the cause of sinful strife (Rom. 12:9-21).

Sadly, instead of love, strife has become the “badge of discipleship” for too many who wear the Lord’s name, but who, in reality, follow Satan, not the Christ (cf. John 13:34-35). Saints who permit self-promotion to change them into self-serving sinners use strife as a tool to drive a wedge between best friends and brethren. It does harm, unnecessary and eternal, to congregations, and to good works and good men. Strife serves as a means to an end, and also as an end for those who are mean. In other words, strife is the way to accomplish the goal of the ruthless (usually nasty and often angry) lovers of self, and is far too often, for such men, the goal itself.

WHAT IS STRIFE?

Strife, as used in Galatians 5:20 (and as we shall use it in our study), refers to contention caused by the evil desire to promote oneself.¹ **Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged** uses these words to describe strife: contention, struggle, and quarrel. **Vine’s** equates strife with faction, and notes:

ERITHIA (or—eia) denotes ambition, self-seeking, rivalry, self-will being an underlying idea in the word; hence it denotes party-making...seeking to win followers.... Faction is the fruit of jealousy.²

Thayer gave this derivation of the word and its meaning.

...used of those...courting popular applause by trickery and low arts...apparently, in the N. T. *a courting distinction, a desire to put one’s self forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts; partisanship, factiousness.*³

The Analytical Greek Lexicon includes these descriptive terms: “party spirit, feud, faction...contentious disposition.”⁴ **Berry** has “self-seeking, a partisan and factious spirit.”⁵ Meredith states:

In Phil. 2:3 it stands opposed to the mind of Christ. Barclay says, “In Paul the word clearly denotes the spirit of personal ambition and rivalry which issues in a partisanship which sets a party above the church.” ...Aristotle lists this activity as one of the practices which in the end lead to revolutions.⁶

Smith cites seven occurrences of the word in the New Testament (it is found once in the LXX in Isaiah 38:12) where it is translated as strife five times (2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phi. 2:3; Jam. 3:14, 16), as contention once (Phi. 1:16), and as contentions once (Rom. 2:8).⁷

Thomas W. Larkin wrote the following.⁸

Strife (*eritheia*) has an interesting etymology. It has its roots in those days that laborers engaged in honest labor for their wages, but it came to be used of one whose sole motive for working was his pay. With no concern for the quality of work, or no motive of service to others, the only concern was, “What will I get out of it?”ⁱ In Aristotle’s day, *eritheia* was used of those who sought political office by unfair means.ⁱⁱ Against this background, “strife” in

the NT refers to selfishness and selfish ambition. The danger of such is seen in James’ statement that “where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (Jam. 3:16). Paul uses *eritheia* twice in his letter to the Philippians (1:16 and 2:3) describing “the wrong motive for preaching and the wrong spirit in which to live.”ⁱⁱⁱ Lipscomb’s comments on Philippians 2:3 are worthy of note:

“The moment a man falls into a factious temper and thinks so much of promoting his own selfish ends, and makes it his chief business to object and find fault, he becomes an element of discord to everyone with whom he may be identified. If there is to be any real unity of mind and heart, the factious spirit must be crucified.”^{iv}

i William Barclay, **New Testament Words** (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964), pp. 99, 100.

ii William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature**, second edition, revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 309.

iii Barclay, **New Testament Words**, p. 99.

iv David Lipscomb and J. W. Shepherd, **A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles**, Volume 4 (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1969), p. 179.

Burton’s extensive discussion of the etymology of the word includes these thoughts helpful to our study.

Examination of the passages from this point of view suggests two meanings: (1) “self-seeking,” “selfishness.” (2) “factiousness,” “party spirit.” ...We seem, therefore, justified in deciding that erithia in N. T. means “self-seeking,” “selfish devotion to one’s own interest”; that this is a possible meaning for all instances; but that “party spirit” is in some passages a possible alternative.⁹

What shall we conclude concerning the meaning of strife as the Holy Spirit revealed the word used in Galatians 5:20? Strife is the sin of selfish ambition which sows discord, causes quarrels, and promotes divisions as one seeks to advance himself to gain position, prestige, and power over others. It is the result of the motivation to seek followers that one might lead his own faction (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13).

One who acts this way does so callously, disregarding the expense of unity and peace, and without Christian consideration for the body of Christ (the church), individual members (brethren), the law of Christ, or the lost who observe the strife and are repulsed by it. Strangely, some seem blind to what they really are doing, and would be surprised to learn their guilt; however, strife is still, and is indeed, a work of the flesh.

In addition, strife is one of the “works of the flesh” which Paul, by inspiration, declares is “manifest.” Manifest means apparent, known, open, evident, or well-known.¹⁰ Thus, these are sins which are not hidden, secret, or unknown. Were they such, the terrible impact would be lessened for the consequences would be limited; however, these sins manifest themselves in contentious conflict affecting many.

The words in this list of vices fall into four groups, indicated by the punctuation of the translation. The first group includes three sins in which sensuality in the narrower sense is prominent; the second includes two that are associated with heathen religions, the third group contains eight in which the element of conflict

with others is present; the fourth consists of drunkenness and its natural accompaniments.¹¹

We all know strife is wrong, for it obviously is so. From its secretive hold of gestation, it is born, creeps forth, gains boldness, and becomes known to all. Having learned the sinfulness of strife, let us consider the source of strife.

HOW DOES STRIFE BEGIN?

Strife begins in the heart. It is the evil fruit of a wicked mind, the rebellious child of ungodly rearing, nourished by carnality, encouraged by worldliness, mentored by Satan, and brought to manhood by inexcusable ignorance of, or rebellious disregard for God’s will (cf. John 12:48).

It surely starts with love of self above others—even above God Himself, contrary to all the spirit of Christianity entails (cf. Mat. 6:33).

To the Romans, Paul penned:

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another (Rom. 12:9-10).

Thus, Paul, inspired apostle, lists this despicable characteristic, which loves, honors, and prefers self above others, among the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). Hogg and Vine make the obvious connection between strife and jealousy.

Factions,—eritheia, party-making, and taking sides for or against party leaders; it is frequently associated with jealousy, see James 3:14, 16, “where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed.” The order is significant; jealousy is the root of which faction, like wrath, is the fruit. These four words appear in the same order in 2 Cor. 12:20.¹²

Jealous men will not long tolerate the acclaim or advancement of others without finding fault, even if it takes a microscopic, mote hunting, hyper-criticism of the most minute matters (Mat. 7:1-5). Calvin wrote:

The envious man has no desire to excel, but is grieved at the excellence of other men.... What produces heresies but ambition, which deals not with the lower senses, but with the highest faculties of the mind?¹³

Strife may begin in a small way—with a diminutive, unintended affront, an undersized oversight, or simply a single word mistaken by

the recipient as a slap at his standing. From Proverbs, comes the admonition to stop strife before it can begin. “The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with” (Pro. 17:14). This indicates strife may begin in the same way as a small opening, cut in a bank of a river or in a dam, allows water to flow, and may widen till the water rushes out of its bounds to do great harm.

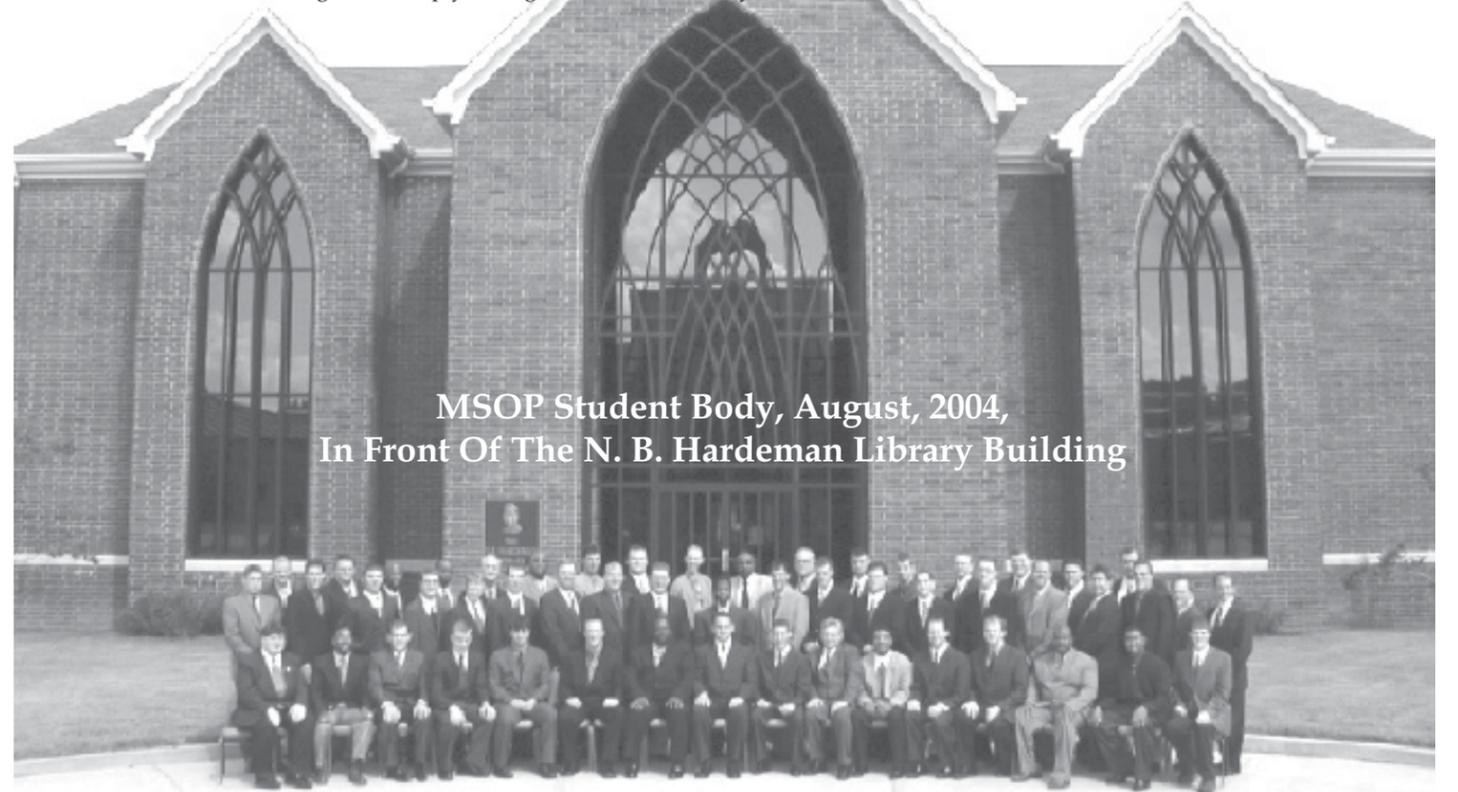
So, some elementary principles are: do not meddle with strife; do not let it begin; and, if it does begin, be quick to stop the leak before it becomes a raging, destructive torrent (Pro. 20:3). Surely, we can act like grownups, not children, and overlook slights, whether intended or not. Our concern should be for the good of others, the promotion of Christ’s cause, and the glory and honor of God (Mat. 5:16).

...Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.... Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross... (Phi. 2:1-11).

In like manner, we must be ready to give up strife, repent of it, and repair the damage (as much as possible). We dare not let strife rise, like the Phoenix, from smoldering embers of long-held animosity. Jean Ingelow wrote: “An old affront will stir the heart through years of rankling pain.”¹⁴ How sad to think of wasted years nursing a grudge, harboring hatred, plotting and planning to undermine and overthrow another in a twisted, perverted scheme to elevate oneself. The real loser is the conniving striver.

Strife is a sinful, soul-damning work of the flesh intended to advance one’s selfish ambition. It begins in a heart out of tune with the way of Christ, but where does it end?

(CONTINUED NEXT MONTH)



MSOP Student Body, August, 2004,
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