

Putting a Stop to Quarrelling

Based on 1 Cor. 1: 10-12 and chapter 2, David Jahnke, 1/14/18

First, a quick follow-up from some extemporaneous preaching at the end of the second service last week about how there are so many good people who do not exactly know why they do good other than they feel moved to do so and acting upon their intuition is rewarding. Our role is to help them understand that the movement inside their conscience or their soul is actually the Spirit of God. And that they and the world around them can be wondrously transformed as they come to understand and more deeply follow the Holy Spirit. Paul confirmed this in 1 Cor. 2:13 when he says that we are to interpret spiritual things to spiritual people.

But who is spiritual? I wrote a brief scriptural defense of the Spirit guiding and empowering moral and spiritual people from various faith traditions and worldviews. It is in your bulletin and I welcome your reading and feedback later, along with your consideration of some questions. Here are three related benefits to such an understanding: 1. First, it shatters barriers to fellowship and cooperation with people who believe differently than we do. 2. Its focus on common ground frees and encourages the mutual interpretation of spiritual things; in other words, we can more easily cooperate on Kingdom things that we have in common and respectfully dialog about our ideological differences. 3. And acknowledging our common foundation reduces the likelihood of quarrelling about differences.

Quarrelling is the unpleasant but pervasive matter which Paul first addressed in his letter to the Corinthians. We learn a few things from him: 1. First, it stems from being human-centered and me-centered rather than God-centered.

Paul mentions the various apostles who had been with the Corinthians-- Paul, Peter and Apollos-- all of whom had their different emphases and styles. And when sin popped up in the community, instead of containing and destroying it by way of apologies and forgiveness, it spread through gossip and faction-building and emphasizing differences rather than commonalities. People were saying, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Peter.'

Paul connected this to spiritual and emotional immaturity rather than intellectual immaturity. It's amazing that Paul, who had a great intellect, de-emphasized the intellect in his letter to the Corinthians and told them to instead focus on spiritual matters.

I saw a good quote from the great Jewish mystic Abraham Joshua Heschel who said this:

**When I was young, I admired
clever people. Now that I am old, I
admire kind people.**

Abraham Joshua Heschel

~ BrainyQuote

This hit home as I remembered my college days when I focused on trying to be clever and parsing out differences; cultural differences, worldview differences etc. Even into my thirties at my first call in Corpus Christi, I remember talking with a wise elderly gentleman about generational and cultural differences and how people and things have changed so dramatically over the centuries and how hard it was to overcome differences in worldviews. I was shocked when he said that he thought people were basically the same across time and space. But the longer I live, the more I realize he was right.

I saw a video yesterday about a young couple who love to travel. And how their experiences are entirely different, though both generally wonderful. The guy was able to walk around in his t-shirt at any time and generally enjoy the sites and the people. The young woman was regularly treated like an object, had to think carefully about what to wear and would not go out at night by herself in a lot of places.

To me this speaks only tangentially to cultural differences; the metoo movement has highlighted the prevalence of gender discrimination and sexual harassment and assault issues in our own nation. This speaks more to how sin is both prevalent everywhere and gradually being overcome everywhere by the Holy Spirit! And our job is to first acknowledge problems in ourselves and our own country; and only second to point out sin and its consequences wherever we see it elsewhere; and finally to accept the freedom of individuals and nations to do something about it or not, rather than further dissension and the possibility of war.

My niece was recently griping about quarrelsome internet trolls. And I commented that all you can do is speak the truth, rejoice when they receive it and shake the dust off of your feet when they do not. And instead of quarreling and letting our peace get stolen, we let the peace we want to share with others return to us instead of getting entangled in other people's problems.

This depends on emotional and spiritual maturity, rather than a focus on the intellect. Knowledge without God discriminates, divides and puffs up the ego whereas God's wisdom reconciles, unites and humbles.

It really blows me away that 2000 years after Paul and Jesus walked the earth, we are finally coming around to emphasizing the emotional intelligence and spiritual wisdom that they knew and expressed. Listen to what Elon Musk, the founder and CEO of one of the biggest tech. companies in the world, recently said,

"The biggest mistake, in general, I've made, is to put too much of a weighting on someone's talent and not enough on their [character.] And I've made that mistake several times. I think it actually matters whether somebody has a good heart; it really does. I've made the mistake of thinking that it's... just about the brain."

Musk is learning what Paul knew-- that God cuts us to the heart more so than the brain. And Paul told the Corinthians that their quarrelling was proof that they were infants in Christ and that they needed continual nourishment.

Friends, there is almost nothing that feels worse than quarrelling and nothing more frustrating than our inability to get over it. I think quarreling persists and pervades because we think we can reason our way through it (and when the other person or group does not listen to "reason," we think they are not smart or good enough which, of course, only makes things worse.)

We cannot reason our way through quarreling because it is rooted in sin and filled full of emotion. The only way to reduce quarreling and the pain associated with it is to make space for God. We have to put first things first-- the breadth and depth of his love for all, his peace which passes understanding according to Paul, his call to repentance and forgiveness, kindness, mutual respect, gentleness. We have to recommit to spiritual disciplines-- prayer, Bible study, fellowship events, looking for God in the books we read and shows we watch and conversations we have.

That is how we gain the perspective to see things rightly and the strength and temperament to calmly stand up to anger and meanness and become the peace-makers that God is calling us to be.

And I am sure you long for peace as much as I do...; may you find it in your heart by turning daily to God. May you find it in your home by leading your family in these disciplines. May we find it in our world by focusing on all that humanity has in common and seeing the Son of Man therein and recognizing that the unifying presence of God in these heavenly purposes. With such a foundation, we will freely and respectfully pursue conversations- the mutual interpretation of spiritual things that furthers peace and prosperity for those who have too little of both.