

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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Bitterness, **A Form of** **Religious Insanity** by Cled Wallace

The bitterness and malice which is often displayed toward each other by members of the body of Christ when unpleasant situations arise in the church is occasion for tears. Worthy men and women in normal situations act very unworthily under emotional stress. Good men sometimes threaten each other with physical violence or recourse at law, and have been known to make good their threats.

They take advantage of each other, watching hungrily for any statement that may be used or warped for personal or factional advantage. Men under the domination of the party spirit, party passion running high, often display evidence of religious insanity. They are beside themselves, and their best friends outside the heat of party

passion marvel at their excesses in speech and rancor. Situations can arise in any church which call forth the best efforts of level-headed men, "sober-minded, sound in faith, in love, in patience." We need more men who are anxious to claim the blessings of the Lord. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God." "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you."

It is most difficult for even good men to tell the truth when they come under the influence of factional passion. It is reason enough why we should all be watchful of the intents and purposes of our own hearts. "But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not and lie not against the truth . . . For where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed." Every observer of

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church troubles has noted conflicting reports of what actually happened by men who were considered reliable in matters where their personal feelings were not so deeply stirred. A truthful man can earn a reputation for being a consummate liar in a short time in the middle of a church fuss. And too often the reputation is deserved. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom . . . But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace." And it often happens that the individual who is most aberrant in his handling of facts is also most ready to hurl the short ugly word at the opposition. It reminded Paul of the manner in which beasts go at one another. "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." Think of brethren in Christ biting and snarling at one another like hungry wolves or wild dogs! It often happens.

Does It Favor My Side?

The factious spirit plays some ugly tricks on its possessor. It victimizes and deceives him. When he listens to a sermon or reads an article, his eye is single to only one consideration. Does it favor my side? If it does, then he is not critical of the facts involved. The rankest inaccuracies or the most reckless perversions may be passed upon with approval. If it does not, he may react resentfully toward pointed and helpful truth. A factious spirit can rob a man of the good he might receive from reading the Bible. It can change him into a mote-hunting, faultfinding hypocrite. Light becomes darkness as soon as it reaches his soul.

Preachers and Petitions

It sometimes happens that a preacher who advocates majority rule will lead off a minority if he can't get a majority. There is usually a grievance against elders and a circulating of petitions. Sometimes the preacher has an advantage in that he is in a position to do more electioneering among his admirers than the elders can. And when it comes to voting and circulating petitions, it may be that some of the most active ones were in a state of suspended animation before the

fuss came up. Children and various irresponsible's can be herded for a vote who are incapable of judging the principles involved. It is easier for them to fancy a preacher than an elder, anyway. Elders are not as good at flattery as preachers are who circulate petitions and advocate majority rule in churches of Christ. The friends of one preacher circulated a petition demanding that the elders "resign" and turn the church over to "the pastor." Think of a thing like that happening in a church of Christ! In a case like that, of course the elders are responsible for any trouble that arises over their refusal to "resign" and turn the church over to "the pastor." Circulators of petitions among churches are ordinarily good logicians also! If they cannot arrive at a conclusion along the route of sound reasoning, they can jump at it.

**No Doctrinal Difference, But
No Fellowship**

Our brother mixed a little humor with his philosophy as he watched a preacher lead away a following to another place of worship. In justice to the preacher, be it said, he disclaims the idea of leading away anybody. He didn't follow, either.

Anyway, they went along together. I'm not good at splitting hairs. The ones, who went away, including the preacher, could not worship amidst the awful conditions in the old church. Our humorous brother thought it a bit arbitrary for anybody to come along and thus separate the sheep from the goats, when the only difference he could see between the sheep and the goats was that the sheep followed and the goats didn't. No doctrinal difference now exists between the two groups. And there is no fellowship between them, either. Former friends are now enemies, and those who once thought well of each other now have nothing to do with each other all in the name of Christ.

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