

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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"Let There Be No Strife"

By Steve Klein

When contention arose between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abram, "Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren'" (Genesis 13:8). God's friend Abraham knew that brotherhood demands the cessation of strife. I fear that some brethren today believe that brotherhood demands incessant strife.

Some practical measures for keeping peace include the following:

1. DO NOT START A QUARREL!

Proverbs 17:14 says, "The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts." While it is true that there are principles of truth that must be defended, argued and contended for (Jude 3, Philippians 1:17), MANY quarrels among brethren are over things that have not even been revealed in Scripture. Others involve judging hearts and motives by appearance, instead of judging with righteous judgment (as Jesus instructed in John 7:24). This kind of strife should be nipped in the bud! We must simply "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2 Timothy 2:23).

2. DO NOT SPREAD TALES!

Nothing fans the flames of strife more effectively than gossip. Conversation that is seemingly well meant can provide fuel to a fire that would otherwise die out. When a brother begins a conversation (or e-mail message) by asking, "Do you know what brother so-and-so said about you?" he may mean well, but what follows is usually

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combustible! "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases" (Proverbs 26:20).

3. LOVE YOUR BROTHER.

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins." (Proverbs 10:12). It is amazing how easy it is for folks to tolerate the faults of their loved ones, family, longtime friends, etc., while at the same time refusing to tolerate similar or lesser faults in those outside their circle of friends. If we could learn to show love, without prejudice or partiality, we might find a lot less to pick at in others (cf. 1 Timothy 5:21).

4. FORBEAR.

The instructions given in Ephesians 4:1-3 for "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" include "forbearing one another in love" (KJV). According to Strong's Dictionary "forbearing" means to "put up with, bear with, endure, and suffer". Some have the idea that they "don't have to put up with" anything from a brother in Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even if you are being unjustly mistreated, "putting up with it" and taking it patiently is one of the truest marks of a follower of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:20-21). Suffering real or imagined injustice from a brother is a sad excuse for causing strife. It's an excuse Abram would not use, and neither should we. We might learn to be more forbearing if we would stop and realize how much we need others to "put up with" us! "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them." (Matthew 7:12).

A Study in the Life of Jesus

A Selected Article

The Baptism Of Jesus

Jesus comes from Galilee [Nazareth (Mark 1:9)] to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. He left the quiet and calm of home for the stormy turbulence that would be His short, but busy public ministry. He is not the twelve year old that we last saw, but a mature man, having grown in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). Here is a mature man who seizes eagerly the responsibilities of Sonship and sets His face toward the cross

John seeks to prevent Jesus:

John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized - Matthew 3:14a He explains why: "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to Me?" There is a sense of shock in John's words. While John did not fully comprehend who Jesus was until later (John 1:29-33), he evidently knew enough that he was perplexed. John uses a verb tense (forbade) that indicates continued action. John repeatedly refused to baptize Jesus. Why baptize Jesus? John's baptism was for repentance because the Kingdom was at hand – yet John knew that Jesus was without sin (Matthew 3:5-6, 11).

The Spirit and the Father add their testimony:

The heavens open, and the Spirit of God descends like a dove and lights upon Jesus when He was baptized - Matthew 3:16. The opening of the heavens is a bit mysterious. Perhaps Fowler is right when he observes: "We are not told what was visible when the heavens were suddenly opened, nor even what constitutes such an opening in the heavens...Perhaps what Matthew means is that to the physical, fleshly eyes of John and Jesus, at least, the normally invisible but thoroughly real spirit-world was made visible in a manner similar to the vision of that world seen by Ezekiel, Stephen, Peter, Paul and John." We need not be looking for a literal dove any more than we would have expected to have seen literal tongues of fire on Pentecost. The important point is that the Spirit descended from Heaven to "light" upon Jesus. What a fitting symbol – symbol of purity and meekness

Out of heaven there comes the long-silent voice of Him who cannot lie, "This is MY Son!" We should not overlook in Luke's account this was preceded by prayer on the part of Jesus. Not a word from God had been heard since He spoke from heaven to Israel at Mt. Sinai. How significant that He should choose this moment to communicate directly with earth!

Mark and Luke's account of what God said differs slightly from that of Matthew's. Luke and Mark have God addressing Jesus and declaring to Him the Father's acknowledgment and good pleasure. The difference between the two so slight and plausible explanations so many that does not behoove us to investigate it at the moment. Anybody who has ever heard his father say, "I'm

proud of you son" can know something of what Jesus must have felt when the Father acknowledged His good pleasure in Him.

He is destined to be rejected, mocked, and reviled. What looms before Him is an awful tumultuous time of toil and hardship. Yet, before any of that there is the Father's cheering acknowledgment of kinship and pleasure. God is not only pleased with Who he is, but also with what He is doing.