

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: October 2, 2022

Twisting or Cutting-Straight?

by Dan Trygg

“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete (‘equipped, fitted-out’) in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For I have been informed... that there are quarrels among you.” 1 Corinthians 1:10-11

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk worthily of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and teachable-gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3

“Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort (twist), as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and experiential-knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” 2 Peter 3:14-18

“Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately (‘cutting-straight’) the word of truth. ¹⁶ But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene.” 2 Timothy 2:14-17

There are many places where the NT scriptures encourage, exhort and expect us to come to be of one mind about things. Divisiveness, ...especially strife and argumentative disagreements..., are a sign of immaturity. Quarrels, a “party spirit” or factionalism, outbursts of anger, dissensions, and divisive opinions are “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:20), said Paul. In 1 Corinthians 3:3, the apostle said that he would have preferred to speak to them as spiritual people, ...people oriented to and led by the Spirit..., but he had to speak to them as “fleshly people”, ...as people who were thinking and responding out of their “flesh”. They were living according to their natural-human nature, not according to the Spirit. Clearly, he expected more from them than this. He expected that they *could and should no longer walk like mere humans*. It is possible to be united in mind and understanding. Another corollary of Paul’s declaration is that **people who are led by the Spirit do not think and operate as people of the world do**. They *shouldn’t*, because the Spirit of God will cause them to see and perceive things differently.

This is a serious matter. *It is a significant problem which we all must be concerned with*. Jesus prayed for and expected **unity**, ...oneness of mind and purpose (Jn. 17:21-23). **It was to be an identifying mark that would indicate that Jesus was indeed sent by God**, if His followers would walk in unity. So, it is not surprising that this is a point of attack that the enemy attempts to exploit. **Where does unity come from? It comes from two basic sources: the life of the Holy Spirit within us, and the clear understanding of what the Scriptures teach. We have an inner, subjective source of unity and peace, and we also have an external, objective basis for oneness.**

The inner source, ...the influence and leading of the Holy Spirit..., should create within us a gracious, patient, reasonableness, whereby we value love and unity more than disagreement. The Spirit of Jesus will lead us to defer to our bond of oneness in Him above any misunderstanding or misperception. **It will motivate us to have gentle, open-minded discussions with one another, diligently maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace above all else** (Eph. 4:1-6). The word for “diligently” means to “work hard, expend every effort”, ...and the word for “maintain” is to “guard or keep”. In other words, there *is* a “oneness of the Spirit” that is an objective reality, ...we *are* “one in the Spirit”. **It is only when we are deceived, or in some way diverted, from recognizing that oneness that we allow ourselves to “split” over opinions or divisive thoughts and misbeliefs.** *When* we are “walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which we were called in Christ”, *then* we will have the humility and gentle-teachableness, ...the patience and tolerance toward one another in love..., to enable us to work hard to preserve our unity of Spirit even when we do not fully perceive things in the same way. **Our relationships will be more important than our opinions, ...right relations will triumph over the need for “right beliefs”, and we will walk in love in spite of differences. We will give no “room” for the devil to do his work of disrupting, deceiving and dividing us.**

The external source, ...the objective revelation of the scriptures which God has given to us..., is available to us to study in order to come to a place of unity. According to 2 Timothy 2:14-16, however, it requires effort, ...hard work and careful skill..., to be able to interpret it correctly. That does not mean that we should not try. There have

been long periods where the people of God were *not* encouraged to read and study the Bible on their own. **Clearly, it was *not* God's intent to keep people from reading the scriptures. On the contrary, we are *encouraged* and *exhorted to do so*, ...but with the awareness that we need to do so with *care* and *diligence*. We *should* read and familiarize ourselves with the scriptures. That is the only way to develop a clear perception of biblical truth that can keep us from error. **The first three principles for good Bible interpretation are: Context, *context* and *context*!** We need to understand *who* was writing, and *what* was the circumstances or situation they were addressing. What was the historical setting, and *what was the purpose* of the author's message? Then, we need to *read the section before and after the passage in question*, in order to more clearly understand what is being said in the flow of the argument. And, if we have the ability, we would benefit from *a closer look at the grammar and vocabulary used by the author*. Are there *unusual terms* being used? Are there *other places* where the same words are used? Examining *those* passages may give us a clearer understanding of how the language is meant to be understood. **If we want to understand and interpret the scriptures with accuracy, it will require some effort and research on our part. The Bible is *not* meant to be a magical or incomprehensible book. It is meant to be a revelation *from God to people*. It is *meant to be understood*!****

If you look at the passages from 2 Peter 3 and 2 Timothy 2, you will notice that these apostles warn those to whom they were writing to "be on your guard" and to "avoid" certain activities. **Unestablished people, ... people who are *not* soundly and solidly anchored in a clear understanding and relationship with Christ..., tend to "twist" or "distort" the scriptures.** They may be reading the same Bible you are, but they are misunderstanding and misapplying its message. **Of course, *they do not view themselves as unstable or unsound; ...they think they are right!* They can be very insistent, persuasive and convincing.** If this were not the case, there would be no need for Peter or Paul to give us a warning about such people. **They *captivate* other people, who are *also not soundly established in the faith*.**

Peter describes them as "untaught". This is *not* necessarily a reference to being educated or schooled. The word for "untaught" is a negated form of the word for "disciple". A disciple is not simply a student, ...a learner of information. **Being a disciple is about *developing a skill, learning how to do something with proficiency*.** Sometimes, some very learned and educated people are hopelessly caught up in ideas, theories and speculations, but they are incapable of recognizing plain truth. Sometimes, an "unlettered" or "uneducated" person may have more discernment of biblical truth, because they have immersed themselves in it and have experienced it in their own lives, ...and they intimately know the Author. **Do not be overly impressed by educational credentials or claims of superiority. Look for the fruit of the Spirit, ...look for the speech and character that looks like Jesus.**

In 2 Peter, the apostle describes these people as "unprincipled". That word means that **they break through the restraints of custom or law, or even self-restraint, in their zeal for their erroneous beliefs.** It's like they can't stop talking about such things. In 2 Timothy, Paul describes them as quarrelsome, striving about words to no profit. **It produces nothing of tangible or practical value.** All it seems to produce is the ruin (Gk., *katastrophē*, the 'turning down' or 'corruption'; ...the *opposite* of 'building up') of those who listen to them. **We are to be edifying people, ...building them up in their faith in Christ, not filling their heads with fear and speculative arguments.** We are to step back from, shun, or avoid worldly, irreligious, and empty talk, for such conversations and teachings lead to further ungodliness (lack of devotion and reverence toward Him), and their talk will spread like gangrene or cancer. **Such speculations and controversies are infectious and poisonous. They are a danger both to devotion to Christ, as well as to the possibility of a spiritual communion and oneness of the members of the body of Christ.** A healthy body life requires that we grow in the grace and experiential knowledge of Jesus, not deterred by empty speculations.

In 1 Corinthians 4:6, Paul pointed out that **we are stewards of the revealed mysteries of God.** God has entrusted His word to us, and **we are responsible to interpret it correctly.** **As long as we do *that*, ...as long as we don't twist the word, or go beyond what it says..., it *can be* the objective basis for unity.** It can keep us from being puffed up in pride and divisive arguments. It can keep our focus on Jesus, so that we are following Him, and not some other questionable cause. But **this requires diligence.** The Greek word means "to make every effort, to be zealous, to work hard and to apply oneself strictly and firmly toward the goal". We are to be zealous and apply ourselves firmly and strictly to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the binding-bond of peace. **We are to be like guard dogs watching over the healthy and unified communion that we share together in Christ.** We are to work very hard at keeping that unity, and guarding against anything that might corrupt or ruin it. **We are to avoid and turn aside from any speculative theories or arguments that draw our attention away from our devotion to Christ Himself, or our responsibility to love and build up one another in Him.** They are dangerous, ...infectious, gangrenous, cancerous..., and can destroy our communion and hijack our attention away from Christ. **We are to put forth every effort to skillfully "cut straight" the word of God, ...to learn to interpret it correctly..., so that we do not get led astray by twisted ideas, but remain faithful to our devotion to Christ, and our mission to help one another reach people with the love of Jesus.**