

“Doing Nothing Through Faction ...”

“... or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself, not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you to the things of others” (Phil. 2:3f).

The word *“faction”* in this text is its second occurrence in the letter. It is found first in 1:27 when the apostle wrote of some who proclaimed Christ of *“faction,” “not sincerely.”* It is defined as to *“denotes ambition, self-seeking, rivalry, self-willed ... hence it denotes party making”* (Vines, Dict. of N.T. Words, Vol. 2, p. 68). Because it comes from the word translated *“hireling”* it carries the thought of one who seeks to gain a following and followers. The word is found in 1 Corinthians 12:10; Galatians 5:20; James 3:14 and Romans 2:8. It is said to be the fruit of jealousy.

The apostle warned Philippians to do nothing through faction or vainglory. Here are two prongs which almost invariably led to division in the body of Christ. Jealousy seeks followers. This spirit may be seen either in the teacher or the disciple who is wedded more to him than to Christ. Some disciples of John appeared to be jealous when they heard that Jesus was making more disciples than John. They informed John of that but John reminded them his work was temporary. *“He must increase, but I must decrease,”* he said (Jn. 3:20). Divisions existed in Corinth. Paul said, *“For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean that each one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ”* (1 Cor. 1:11f). At Corinth the divisive, factious spirit was most likely the work of jealous disciples. Paul disclaimed fostering such an attitude about himself, reminding them they had neither been baptized into his name, nor had he been baptized for them (1 Cor. 1:13). These words should have reminded the Corinthians that just as Paul had not been crucified for them, neither had Peter nor Apollos.

Factions will always exist because Satan never misses an opportunity to make gospel preaching ineffective. The cause of our Lord is in shambles in many places because brethren have not learned to lay aside party spirits which genders party loyalty. When will we learn that our loyalty must be to Christ, that we must do all things to keep *“the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace”*?

Of course it is true that factions exist sometime because teachers themselves are jealous and envious of others. When such is true, a spirit exists in which one seeks disciples for himself, not for Christ. Saul was

nettled by the acclaim multitudes gave David when they praised him saying, "*Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands*" (1 Sam. 18:7). Obviously both accolades were exaggerated but David had wrought a great victory in slaying Goliath. Jealousy sprang up in Saul and he "*eyed him from that day forward.*"

A practical lesson is in order just here for those of us who are older preachers. As we grow older and newer, fresher preachers emerge with stamina that youth vitalizes (which vitality is sapped from the older) let those of us who are older rejoice that a new generation of capable preachers is emerging who can carry on the work after we have passed from the scenes of life. Let older men do all it is possible to do, to encourage younger ones -- teaching, training and inspiring them to live a self-sacrificing life that in every age Christ may be both glorified and magnified.

Then Paul urged "*in lowliness of mind, not looking to his own things, but each of you to the things of others.*" What a beautiful thought! How perfectly this spirit was demonstrated repeatedly in Paul's life! How often did he sacrifice his right to support, providing for his own needs, that infant churches might prosper or to quell future criticism that he had been interested in personal support, not Christ. And, his spirit was imitated by Timothy of whom he wrote, "*I have no man like-minded who will care truly for your state*" (Phil. 2:20).

God grant us all a love for Christ and a love for His church that we each determine that we will do nothing through faction or vain glory but that with lowliness of mind, we will sacrifice our personal interest in the greater, grander cause of Christ!

Jim McDonald