**THE KINDLERS OF STRIFE**

Most of us don’t like causing controversy and stirring up trouble.  However, some do.  In Proverbs 25:21, Solomon warns, “As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.”  To use a more modern metaphor, people like this are a spark to gunpowder.  With seemingly little effort, they cause an explosion.

Certainly, Christians should not be quarrelsome.  Especially in our dealings with brethren, but also in our dealings with everyone, we should seek to unite and reconcile.  If that means keeping our lips clamped down on personal opinions that others find offensive, so be it!  Romans 12:18 urges us to live peaceably with everyone so far as it is possible with us, and even if limiting our self-expression may not be pleasant, it is certainly possible.

Indeed, the only inflammatory views that Christians should express are those that come from the law of God.  Like Paul, we are to declare the whole counsel of God, even knowing that it will prove divisive.

Too often, though, brethren shy away from proclaiming the gospel while freely expressing their provocative personal views on any number of topics.  They get the Biblical pattern exactly backwards.

The sources of this problem are obvious.  There are many in our society, of every political and philosophical persuasion imaginable, who do not honor the Bible’s teachings on the importance of peace.  Instead, their goal in life is to stir up strife.

This is often quite calculated.  They know that if they take a loud, obnoxious stand on some contentious issue, they will get lots of attention.  Half the people will hear them, get infuriated, and start screaming back.  The other half will hear them, applaud them for “telling it like it is”, and scream in the opposite direction.

Page views and video clicks skyrocket.  Blood-pressure readings elevate.  Our poor, divided country becomes even more divided, as suspicion of the other increases.  People become more cynical, more embittered, less warm and loving.

Incalculable spiritual damage is done, but the instigators don’t care because they got money and attention out of the deal.  Next week, they will try to do the same thing again and recklessly cause even more damage.  Only God knows where it will end, but the outcome won’t be good.

As Christians, we need to be very, very suspicious of the professional disturbers of the peace.  They want to manipulate us too.  They want to use fear and anger to enroll us in their hateful little tribes.  Even though it’s true that fear and anger leave no room in our hearts for the love of Christ, they’re not concerned about that.

We need to be concerned.  Paul points out in Romans 13:8 that love is something we owe to everybody.  To Christians, there is no “them”, other than the devil and his angels.  We are on everybody’s side, even the side of the people who aren’t on our side.  When we stop listening to Christ’s call to service and self-sacrifice, we become less than the disciples He wants us to be.

Watch out for the strife-kindlers.   Watch out for the people who want us to look at others with anything less than love.  When they provoke enmity in our hearts, it is not the work of God that they are doing.  It’s the work of someone else.

-- M. W. Bassford

***Comment from Lanny:*** *Brethren, please read and re-read this article. After that, just stare at the ceiling and think long and hard before you let your politics overshadow your Christianity! And yes, I am talking to BOTH political parties! We cannot heal the division in our country by being even more divisive! Put it aside, and serve the Lord. Your brother is still your brother, even if he does not share your political views; and there are more important things than who wins the next election. Politicians come and go; but Heaven and Hell are forever.*