



Factions

The Trouble with Choosing Sides

“Let’s choose sides and play a game of touch football.”

Such an impromptu game at a family gathering or a church picnic can be an enjoyable time. Provided that some of us don’t lose sight of the fact that it is a game, participants are no worse off for the energy and time spent. (Ahem! If you’re one with a competitive nature, i.e., *you just have to win*, think this one over.) We can come away saying, “A good time was had by all.” Little or no residual negative feeling toward one another results since it is just a game.

In the realm of the spiritual however, picking competitive sides (that is, sides other than that Lord’s side) can be a bad thing. Jesus once said, as recorded in Matthew 12:25: “*Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand.*” This is a universal truth. Of great concern in several Bible passages is the issue of faction.

Faction in Action

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-16. Describe in your own words what was going on in the Corinthian church that would cause Paul to call this to their attention.

Read 3 John 9-11. Describe this man Diotrephes. What does John say about Him?

- He loved to be _____.
- He did not accept _____.
- He unjustly accused John of _____.
- He did not receive _____.
- When those associated with Diotrephes received other brethren (presumably without his permission) he _____.

How might the following be related to the situation at Corinth or the case with Diotrephes?

- Love of power and popularity
- Showing more respect for human teachers than for Christ
- Formulation of extrabiblical creeds and tests to make distinctions among believers.
- Pride, ambition, and bigotry

Faction a Work of the Flesh

Read Galatians 5:19-21. According to these verses, how serious is the issue of factions in the church? (Note the company it keeps: “...*enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions....*”)

Read Galatians 5:16. What does the presence of a factious spirit in a person show us?

Factions According to Definition

The American Heritage Dictionary gives the following definition of “faction.”

fac-tion *n.* 1. A group of persons forming a cohesive, usually contentious minority within a larger group. 2. Conflict within an organization or nation; internal dissension: “*Our own beloved country . . . is now afflicted with faction and civil war*”- *Abraham Lincoln*

Notice especially those words, “cohesive, usually contentious minority.” Apparently those who are factious are ones who have a “contentious bone.” They like to fight and win. What do you think is behind such an attitude?

Read Titus 1:7-8. Here Paul was giving a list of necessary (“*the overseer must be*”) qualifications for elders in the church. Which of these qualifications would particularly help assure us that such a leader was not a factious man?

While there may be times when even non-factious people must oppose the majority view for the sake of preserving truth, it seems that such disharmony would be the exception

and not the rule – and that it would be founded upon something besides pride, power, and the desire to exalt self. What is the difference between being factious and standing up for truth?

Factions Show Us Who is Real

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-19. In your own words, what is Paul saying in verse 19?

Was Paul encouraging factions by his use of the phrase, “*there must also be factions*”? (Consider Jesus’ statement in Matthew 18:7 and how it might relate to this.)

Destruction Awaits the Factious

Read 2 Peter 2:1-4. Consider verse 2. How would sensuality relate to the issue of factions among false teachers?

Consider verse 3. How would greed relate to such factions?

What would these factious false teachers do with their false words?

What awaits those who cause such factions?

Reject the Factious Man

Read Titus 3:9-11. Paul told Titus that in the church the factious man was to be rejected. How does he say this is to be done in verse 10?

According to Paul in verse 11, what is really wrong with the factious man?

How might this rejection of a factious man be carried out in an established church?

Wrap Up

- Faction is a serious issue. It is a work of the flesh and not the spirit.
- Factious people have deeper spiritual issues than wanting to stand up for truth.
- The church is not to tolerate factious people.