

# Cutting out Contention

by Peter John Schrock

*“But if you harbor bitter envy and strife in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and strife, there you find instability and every foul-smelling practice.”*  
James 3:14-16

Yelling and fighting has plagued the human race for a long time. People who are new to the faith or have simply not learned to walk in the Spirit, can easily find themselves controlled by their flesh (or earthly nature). Is there hope for these people? Certainly, but only if they truly come to see the depth of their own depravity and repent. For Galatians 5:19-21 clearly places quarreling, envy, strife, anger, and wrath on the same level as drunkenness, sexual immorality, and witchcraft. Those who quarrel and erupt with wrath are just as deep in sin as those who go have sex with prostitutes or who get drunk on the weekends. If someone continues in these things they will end up in hell (Galatians 5:21). Those who have not gained victory over such activities are neither esteemed beyond mere infants in the scriptures nor granted security in their eternal destination (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Nevertheless, an angry quarreler will find victory through broken humility and ceasing to compare themselves with others.

Those who are regularly taken captive by anger have great difficulty seeing how deeply entrenched in their sin they truly are (James 1:26). For by their very nature they are ready to defend, intimidate, and - or yell at those who try to help them see their short comings (Proverbs 9:7). Though many of them know that their sin is bad and that it hurts others around them, such individuals still destroy the stability in their relationship with others and God through their defensive behavior. Instead of recognizing the blessedness of reproof (Proverbs 12:1), they somehow have accepted a lie that if they are proven wrong about something or shown to be in sin that it is going to be a bad thing for them. Therefore they seek to save and preserve their reputation, authoritative status, and the love they receive from those around them through defen-

sive conduct. Nevertheless, they have not yet come to understand that their poor reputation, lack of authority, and rejection by those around them is a direct result of their carnal self defensiveness.

In their self defense, these unstable people blame others for their rejection and poor reputation, instead of recognizing that they have earned such things by their lack of Spiritual development (Matthew 12:33-38). They seek to save their life from correction through attempting to mask their weaknesses and insecurities by strongly defending their privacy while making sure that others know about the good things they do (Proverbs 18:1, Matthew 6:1-5). Such people have not come to recognize the blessed opportunity for growth by letting friends discern weakness and strength through personal experience with them (Proverbs 27:6, 9). Rather, out of fear they are constantly concerned about how people will perceive them when others learn new information about them. Instead of thanking someone for trying to expose their weakness, these fearful people scoff and seek to save their reputation. As a result, they loose their good reputation and are rejected by others because of how they respond to correction (Matthew 16:24-26). Nevertheless, being content to walk in their own immaturity, they accuse others of being nosy and attribute their problems to those who confront them. As a result, they walk around in suspicion, thinking that nearly everyone is conspiring together to lower their reputation and cause them to be rejected when in reality, the ones who love them the most are trying to help them confess and overcome their sin.

When faced with the depravity of their sin, these unstable people refuse to lower themselves in repentance

---

without seeing everyone else around them repent first. As a result, they do not deal with their own sin because they are too busy keeping a record of everyone else's shortcomings. They seek to be measured on a scale balanced by other people's faults rather than a scale balanced with Jesus' righteousness. Nevertheless, in their own near-sighted instability they tip the scales in their favor when seeking a just balance so as to make everyone else around them seem worse than themselves (Romans 2:1). Therefore, they stand blinded from the plank in their own eye claiming to have the clarity and skill to remove the speck from another's eye (Matthew 7:3-5). The spiritual state of the individual becomes evident when they try to bring correction to others with outburst of wrath and/or lack of self control. By their own actions they display that they are in the flesh and walking as a mere man (1 Corinthians 3:3). Anyone in such a condition is so devoid of the Spirit that the redirection that they attempt to bring frequently draws people away from God. They are self-condemned as they speak and like a drunkard or a prostitute, they too are unable to enter the kingdom in their present state (Galatians 5:19-21).

Nevertheless, no one must remain in this state of depravity. By taking their eyes off of those around them and turning them onto the Lord, such a sinner can begin the process of seeing themselves more accurately (Galatians 6:4, 2 Corinthians 10:12). A just balance will cease to be measured based on the actions of others around them and in turn will be measured with the scale of the righteousness of God. With this proper focus on Christ any self-righteousness that someone clings to becomes clearly seen as filthy rags and thereby they understand that they do not deserve any dignity or "rights" from God or men (Isaiah 64:5-6, Galatians 6:3). Anything good that happens to them is simply the mercy of God. It is never deserved nor a "right" that is due them. For if they were truly measured on a just scale, as they desire, they

would be condemned to hell. Such a revelation eradicates a fearful person's need to save their reputation or status. For when a person recognizes how bad their sin is in Jesus' eyes and are no longer comparing themselves to others, they have nothing to preserve (Habakkuk 1:13, James 4:30-32). When these people let go of their "rights", reputation, and own desires all fuel for suspicion is cut off because nothing is left to hide or defend (James 4:1). Finally, when the defensive wall is determined to be unnecessary all anger, wrath, and quarrelling cease because such things are what the defensive barrier was made of. Herein, with their eyes on Christ in broken humility the unstable abound unto rest from the earthly nature that plagued them.

Unfortunately, many people continue to wait for everyone else to repent and refuse to humbly turn from their own sin. Therefore they remain in their sin for years always blaming others for their depravity and the patient hopeful love spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13 fades into a bitter record of wrongs. Unable to turn from their sin without pointing their finger at others, these unstable people face rejection and fear wherever they go. They walk with people for a season until they are held accountable for their actions and in a fit of anger they depart adding a few more people to their record of wrongs.

Oh, when will the cycles cease and these hurt individuals find rest for their soul? Only as they come to the end of themselves and realize that other people are not their problem. It is their own lack of spirituality, their own bitterness, their own pride, and their own sin which they have never fully dealt with. Certainly, other people around them have problems too, but another person's sin is no excuse for anyone to be unrepentant. Nevertheless, anyone in the midst of the unstable, who deals with their own faults, will find victory despite others' shortcomings and walk in peace among the volatile.

*"Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret for it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace."*

*Psalms 37:3-11*