


Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies

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Background of This Article

This article was written by request for an issue of *Guardian of Truth* devoted to the subject of factionalism. It was published in the September 2, 1982, issue of the magazine.

My study book, *Flesh and Spirit*, has been out of print for some time and I don't know when or if I will have it ready for publication again. Perhaps this article will be helpful to those studying these ds. Even though the article was written nearly two decades ago, it seems most appropriate to the spirit of the day among brethren. Some of the warnings I gave are highly relevant.

Charts dealing with the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit are available for downloading at <http://bibleworld.com>

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The purpose of this article is to relate certain works of the flesh, named by Paul in Galatians 5:20, to the general subject of “factionalism.” A study of the works of the flesh is not easy. In most listings or catalogues of sins in the New Testament, there is much variation in the English translation of the Greek words. For example, “variance” in the King James Version (KJV) is “strife” in the American Standard Version (ASV) and the New American Standard Bible (NASB). “Strife” in the KJV is “factions” in the ASV and “disputes” in the NASB. It becomes necessary to study each word individually in the Greek in order to know exactly what is intended. Our procedure shall be to define each word and then to make applications to the subject of factionalism.

Variance (KJV); Strife (ASV)

“Variance” is from the Greek word *eris*. This word is defined as “strife, discord, contention” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 309; hereafter, Arndt). Vine adds that it “is the expression of enmity” (*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, see under the alphabetical listing). The word is used nine times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:29; 13:13; 1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3; 2 Cor.

12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Tit. 3:9). Most usages have to do with conduct within the church; variance is a real problem for Christians as they work together. *Eris* divided the church into sects and parties (1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20). It is even possible to preach Christ out of *eris* [Phil. 1:15]. Barclay's comments on this word are extremely good:

Here we are coming to the meaning of *eris*. *Eris* invades the church and becomes characteristic of the church, when the leaders and the members of the church think more about people and about parties and about slogans and about personal issues than they do about Jesus Christ. Here is our warning. Whenever in a church Jesus Christ is dethroned from the central place, all personal relationships go wrong. When a man begins to preach, not to exalt Jesus Christ, but to exalt his own personal and private view of Jesus Christ, that is to say, when a man preaches a theology rather than a gospel, when a man begins to argue to demolish his opponent rather than to win him, then *eris* comes in. No sin more commonly invades the Church than *eris*; none is more destructive of Christian fellowship; but *eris* cannot even gain an entry to the Church, if Christ be supreme there (*Flesh and Spirit*, 44).

Emulations (KJV); Jealousies (ASV)

“Emulations” is from the Greek *zelos*. The word is used in both a good sense and a bad sense in the New Testament. If my count is correct the word is used ten times in a good sense and eight times in a bad sense (see my *Flesh and Spirit: a Word Study* for details). Our English dictionaries point out that “emulation” means to try to equal or excel another. This sounds quite harmless because we often try to equal or excel another perhaps in sales, or grades, or athletics. This type of zeal is even needed in the church of the Lord as we emulate the lives of faithful Christians. But in a bad sense *zelos* means “jealousy, envy” (Arndt, 338). Thayer defines it as “an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy” (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 271). Many writers consider *zelos* and *phthonos* (envyings) as synonyms.

According to the Greeks, *zelos* was a good thing. If one saw another in possession of some good thing, he would be sorry that he did not possess the good thing. Envy, on the other hand, would cause one to be sorry at the other person's good fortune. "*Zelos* can be noble ambition; *phthonos* can never be anything else but ill-natured and embittered jealousy" (Barclay, 47). Trench points out that "it is only too easy for this zeal and honorable rivalry to degenerate into a meaner passion." He says that the zeal which degenerates may assume two shapes: (1) "...that of a desire to make war upon the good which it beholds in another, and thus to trouble that good, and make it less...", and (2) "...where, there is not vigour and energy enough to attempt the *making* of it less, there may be at least the *wishing* of it less; with such petty carping and fault-finding as it may dare to indulge in..." (*Synonyms of the New Testament*, 88-89). This word illustrates a point often made about the works of the flesh; everyone of them is a perversion of something good (see Barclay, 39).

Wrath (KJV); Wraths (ASV)

"Wrath" is from the Greek word *thumos* and is translated "anger, wrath, rage..." (Arndt, 365-6). The word is synonymous with *orge*, but the translations frequently fail to make a proper distinction. According to Thayer, *orge* denotes "indignation which has arisen gradually and become more settled," while *thumos* means "passion, angry heat...anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again" (293). *Thumos* is used both of the wrath of God and of the wrath of man. It can be used in either a good or an evil sense. The Greeks described *thumos* as a quality which is, as it were "always poised upon a razor's edge" (Barclay, 51). The New International Version (NIV) uses the phrase "fits of rage" to translate *thumos* in Galatians 5:20. The NASB uses "outbursts of anger." Either of these versions convey the correct idea. *Thumos* is violent but brief; great but transient; temporary, momentary; like fire in straw quickly blazing up and just as quickly burning out. This kind of violent temper leaves much damage in its wake.

Strife (KJV); Factions (ASV); Disputes (NASB)

The word *strife* in the KJV of Galatians 5:20 is from the Greek *eritheia*. In some circles it has been popular to think that *eritheia* is derived from *eris*. Others think it comes from *erithos*, which means a hireling. Arndt points out that while the former idea

cannot be excluded, the meaning in this passage seems to be "selfishness, selfish ambition" (309). Vine says it "denotes ambition, self-seeking, rivalry, self will being an underlying idea in the word; hence it denotes party making. It is derived, not from *eris*, strife, but from *erithos*, a hireling; hence the meaning of seeking to win followers...factions." The NIV uses the phrase "selfish ambition."

Seditions (KJV); Divisions (ASV)

"Seditions" is from the Greek *dichostasia*. The word means "dissension" (Arndt, 199) or "division" (Thayer, 153). Vine points out that "the root *di*-indicating division, is found in many words in various languages." The word is found in the New Testament only in Galatians 5:20, Romans 16:17, and 1 Corinthians 3:3. "*Dichostasia* bears its picture on its face; it literally means 'a standing apart', that is, a state in which all community, all fellowship, and all togetherness are gone. It is all too obvious that such a state is tragically common among men" (Barclay, 57).

Another word which describes division, but which is not mentioned in Galatians 5:20, is *schism* (Greek, *schisma*). The word may simply describe a rent or a cleft {Mt. 9:16}. It is translated "division" in 1 Corinthians 1:10 and 11:18, and "schism" in 1 Corinthians 12:25 (ASV). The word is used interchangeably with "heresies" or "factions" in 1 Corinthians 11:18, 19.

Heresies (KJV); Parties (ASV),

"Heresies" is the translation of the Greek word *haireisis*. The Greek word is another of those that can have either a good or a bad meaning and is so used in the New Testament. The word literally denotes a choosing or a choice which one makes for himself (Vine). The word then came to describe a school or a party made up of individuals who had made the same choice. It is used in the New Testament to designate the *sect* (party or school) of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17), the Pharisees (Acts 15:5; 26:5), the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5, 14). It is applied in the last reference to the church of the Lord, as it is also in Acts 28:22. This illustrates the view of the outsider toward the church; it was simply considered as one among several options available. Paul's reply, "that after the Way which *they* call a sect" indicates that the term had not been used in a complimentary sense (Acts 24:14).

The word *heresies* is used in a bad sense in only three places in the New Testament. Paul argues in 1

Corinthians 11:19 that there must be heresies in the church; Peter says that false teachers shall bring it damnable (or destructive) heresies (2 Pet. 2:1). Heresies are listed as a work of the flesh in Galatians 5:20. Some other translations of Galatians 5:20 help to convey the correct idea. George Swann uses “taking sides.” The Revised Standard Version has “party spirit.”

It Titus 3:10 Paul urges the brethren to refuse a “heretic” (KJV) or a “factious man” (ASV) after a first and second admonition. The Greek word here is *hairetikos*. Even though Thayer defines the word as “*schismatic, factious, a follower of false doctrine*” (16), I am not convinced that the idea of false doctrine is inherent in the word; that is an applied meaning.

George Campbell argued that neither *schisma* nor *haireisis* have any relation to erroneous tenet. He said that nowhere in the Scriptures, or in any of the writings of the first five centuries, “do we ever find the word *haireisis* construed with *didasko* [teach], *kerusso* [preach] or any word of like import, or an opinion, true or false, denominated *haireisis*” (*The Four Gospels... with Preliminary Dissertations*, pub. 1824, II: 126, 129). It is true that false teachers are sometimes guilty of heresy (2 Pet. 2:1), but a man may be right doctrinally and still be guilty of heresy, or be a factious man.

Campbell states that the person who is simply mistaken in his opinions is neither schismatic nor heretic in the scriptural sense. He says that “both terms, for they denote only different degrees of the same bad quality, always indicate a disposition and practice unfriendly to peace, harmony, and love” (41).

Regarding the necessity of heresies, the comments by Alexander Campbell on 1 Corinthians 11:19 are helpful:

Paul, in commenting on this most ancient schism, further observes, that there must, of necessity, be sects in such a state of things, that “the approved may be made manifest.” So true it is that all strifes, contentions, parties, and sects grow out of corruption. Sects are the egress of corruptions. The approved hold to Christ, and thus become manifest; the disapproved follow human leaders, and are also made manifest. There appears no other cure for a corrupt and mixed community than heresies or sects. It is as wise and benevolent a provision in a remedial system, that incurable corruption should work out in this way, as that law

in the animal kingdom which forces to the surface all unfriendly humors, and congregates into swellings and bites those *vicious* particles which would otherwise vitiate the whole system and fatally terminate in the ruin of the body (*The Christian System*, 801).

Some Applications

The six works of the flesh which we have examined above, and possibly others not examined, certainly do have a bearing on the factionalism which is all too common among our brethren. We will make a few comments to illustrate some of the ways these sins are practiced among us.

Emulation or *jealousy* is often at the root of a division. Many different things can be the object of the jealousy. It can be another’s ability, social standing, wealth, dress, education, success or general behavior which is the occasion of our jealousy. That rightful zeal which should spur us on to higher and better things often turns to jealousy. If it is not checked in time, this disposition contributes to and often leads directly to factionalism and division. Of course, *we always blame the division on some “doctrinal” issue*.

Wrath can be a contributing factor in factionalism. The untamed temper, which frequently is back of the unbridled tongue, boils with rage and leaves nothing but destruction behind. Even though a brother repents of his wrath and asks forgiveness, it often takes years, even lifetimes, for the damage to be healed.

Both the men and the women in a congregation can be guilty of these sins. The young people of a congregation may imitate their parents and hold personal animosities against older brethren whom they hardly know, but whose sacrifice and labor of love made possible the fellowship which has just been demolished.

The other four words in our study (*strife, factions, divisions, parties* — ASV) may be thought of as describing *the anatomy of division*. Variance, discord, contention, or strife arises among brethren. It may be over some business or financial affair of the church. It may arise over the selection of a regular preacher or a meeting preacher or a program of work. Maybe individuals differ on some Biblical question. This may lead to *factions* as brethren begin to line up with various leaders. The factious or self-willed person presses his opinions to the point of *division* within the

church. {Remember that he may be right in his position, yet be factious.} When any such group crystalizes itself about a specific point {negative or positive), excluding all others who do not share such views, the result is a *party* {sect, heresy). There is no general rule by which the *party*, sect, or faction can be detected. The one staying with the building, or with the elders (if they are not divided), isn't always the right one; sometimes {perhaps most of the time} the group staying and the group leaving are both guilty of having formed a party or faction.

Groups may be sectarian {factions) without being denominational. This later term implies that they name themselves after their emphasis or perversion of a point of doctrine (like putting the name of their project under their name on their sign or in their ads).

My brethren, we have serious problems. We are allowing personal differences to create factions among us. Some of these differences arise because we have come to different opinions over biblical questions. A brother may take between five and fifty years to reach a conclusion on some issues, then he suddenly wants to line up everyone to think as he does. And he doesn't give them long to make up their minds! Some of the preachers are the most guilty of this. They start problems, stir them and fan them. Older preachers may often be wrong in their views, but the young, inexperienced preacher, needs to study and pray a long time before he begins a wholesale slaughter of men with 40 or 50 years of preaching experience and of blameless character.

In June [1982] I completed 30 years of preaching the gospel. As long as I can remember, my brethren have differed over the covering, privately supported

human organizations, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the meaning of 1 John 1:7, questions concerning withdrawal, and a host of other *important* issues. Why must we now make them *tests of fellowship* and try to line up everyone to our way of thinking? It is sad that most of the religious periodicals come to be identified by their stand on a particular sensitive issue.

Problems seem to be carried from church to church. This is an indication that we may not believe in local church autonomy as strongly as we aver. Some preachers leave a troubled or divided church behind them each time they move. They are usually the men who do not have 18 years experience, but 18 months experience 12 times. Preachers who are known to be trouble makers should be allowed to earn their living some other way until they can demonstrate that they can edify a church rather than tear it down. Factious people tend to float from one church to another, thus creating untold problems.

One of our real problems is that we are not working to win souls to Christ. This leaves too much time to be used in detrimental ways. Many gospel preachers are no more than professional pastors who spend their time in the office (not *study*) writing articles about things concerning which they know very little, "editing" and printing bulletins, and running their side business, when they ought to be teaching the lost. I don't think our brethren are likely to rise above the example the preachers set for them.

May God help us to correct the factional spirit that is rampant about us before it is too late. "But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:15 *NASB*).

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