

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, January 22, 2019

Strife and Envy

Overview: Followers of Christ should be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, all of which are generally in contrast to our basic human nature. We often think of love, joy, peace, and so on. At the end of the passage, though, it says "let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:26 KJV). And in the contrasting list of the fruit of the flesh in the same chapter, we find things like wrath, strife, and envy. In addition to the other characteristics of Christ, we should also give some awareness to the change Christ is working in us to be identified by an attitude of genuine humility.

Hearing Our Stories: Peter Rumley

Segment Questions:

- Think of a time you picked up on someone else being a Christian before you ever talked with them about it. What was it that caught your attention about him or her and made you recognize Christ in them?
- Have you ever asked God for fruit of the Spirit in your life? Do recall being aware of how He answered? What happened?
- If you step back and observe your spiritual journey so far, were there particular periods of your life where you look back now and perhaps see Christ's work distinctly? Tell your group about a time that sticks in your mind; what was the catalyst of that work and what characteristic(s) did He develop?
- Over your spiritual journey, have you developed any ways of helping you stay aware of God's work in moments of pressure that you can share with your group? Any 'rules of thumb' to help you evaluate your actions/responses?

Action Questions:

- What are some things you are not already doing that you know you need to do to 'abide' in Christ so He can bear fruit in you? (John 15:4b NIV "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.")
- How can you be open to God's work developing fruit in your life at some point during the day today?

Personal Prayer:

"God, thank-you for working to conform me to your image. I want it. I need it. I don't always like it. But please use the circumstances of today to make me an aroma of Christ in my world, with the people I come into contact with. Let Him be seen, not Me."

Introduction

One thing that has struck me over time is how we can sometimes pick out another follower of Christ without ever directly discussing spiritual things... like something you can sense about them even before they say anything, in just about any setting and interaction.

There's something refreshing and encouraging about it, like an awareness that they're a brother or sister on the same journey with a common bond and an unspoken, but shared connection... because what we're observing in them is the work of Christ, and we recognize it because He's doing the same work in us.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 ESV – “But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?”

I can think back to every ‘era’ in my life and career and think of people I interacted with who stood out, and although I’m sure the essence of what we sense in others probably includes **all** of the fruit of the Spirit, one characteristic that I think really stands out as a mark of someone growing in Christ and first catches my attention before I really know for certain is humility in the form of a modest response to some sort of stressful outside stimulus.

Peacefully responding under pressure while being honest about their opinion and not trying to make themselves look or feel better in contrast to others is God’s handiwork, not the result of their own self-effort.

At the end of the passage on the fruit of the Spirit, it says “let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26 KJV). And, in the contrasting list of the fruit of the flesh in the same chapter, we find things like wrath, strife, and envy. So, in addition to the other characteristics of Christ, we should also give some awareness to the change Christ is working in us to be identified by an attitude of genuine humility.

Romans 12:3,16-18 NIV – “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

This is what I think I’m seeing in others that strikes me as God’s work – it’s as if they have an inner confidence so they have less to prove, and it allows them to think less about the benefit to themselves and their own status in a situation. And, it’s interesting that the Romans verse says ‘do not be proud’, and goes on to speak of associating with people of low position. That speaks to me of seeing ourselves as equals with those of more vulnerable position, and being aware of other people, such that we can show them respect and use our influence to give them a voice where they might not otherwise not be heard.

Strife and envy, by contrast, is self-promotion, striving to be part of the ‘inner circle’ with people of higher position, wanting something for our own status or ambition.

Proverbs 15:1 NIV – “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

1 Peter 5:5b NIV – “...clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.”