

BITING AND DEVOURING ONE ANOTHER

by Tom Wacaster

Before I am branded as being soft on the truth, or compromising the faith once for all delivered to the saints, let me point out that "biting and devouring one another" is NOT to be equated with a strong stand for that which is right. It is not exposing error or false doctrine. Having preached for almost four decades I am saddened to say that the Lord's church has yet to overcome the strife and party spirit that plagued the church of the first century. When Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia he warned, "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:15). A.T. Robertson points out that the original words here translated "bite" and "devour" are two common verbs often used together to describe wild animals that seek to devour one another. Here in east Texas folks are fond of saying, "They fight like cats and dogs." Paul was saying, "If you keep fighting like cats and dogs you are going to destroy one another" (if I can be permitted to paraphrase).

The churches of Galatia were in danger of destroying the church from within. This was not just a local isolated problem. It was evidently affecting the church throughout the region of Galatia. Biting and devouring one another is the result of letting the flesh control one's emotions and thinking. It fosters hatred among brethren, zaps a congregation of its enthusiasm, and alienates brethren one from another. When biting and devouring spills over into neighboring congregations the result is a negative impact on the church's ability to be the salt and light God intended it to be. Too often the fleshly spirit within congregations manifests itself in the contentious nature of its members and leadership. If this fleshly spirit goes unchecked, those who envision themselves as stalwart defenders of the faith only contribute to the problem by using unkind and cutting words; slander, gossip, name calling, and impugning the motives of others can only alienate brethren. At worst it will drive brethren into a corner where pride and haughtiness keeps them from honestly looking at the facts; something that can happen to either party on a particular side of a controversy.

It has been eight years since Alan Highers wrote these words in an editorial in the Spiritual Sword: "Surely there is a way that we can engage in self-criticism when needed, and exposure of error in the church, without rendering asunder the body of Christ and alienating brethren into separate, warring camps, and cliques." Ignoring the problems in the brotherhood is not the answer; yet some seem to have taken this position. Like the proverbial ostrich that buries his head in the sand, some have ignored the mountain of evidence that is presented regarding the root of the problems. But brethren, attacking a faithful brother and suggesting that he has somehow become "soft on the truth" because he is fighting the battle on a different front only contributes to the problem. Because a brother chooses not to become embroiled in a certain conflict in the brotherhood does not mean that he has compromised the truth; nor does it suggest that he has somehow aided and abetted the enemy. The following scenario would actually present a problem of fellowship to some: Brother "A" was on lectureship "X" with brother "B" who himself appeared on lectureship "Y" with brother "C," who last year appeared on lectureship "Z" with brother "D," who has taught error concerning marriage and divorce. Conclusion? Brother "A" has become soft on the truth because he was associated with brother "B" who

himself fellowshipped brother "C" who evidently was not concerned about what brother "D" teaches on marriage and divorce!

Here is another scenario that has caused good brethren to "withdraw" from another: Brother "A" serves as a missionary in the church. But this brother has never once publicly said anything about Dave Miller or the AP controversy. Hence, this brother has been accused of being no better than "Max Lucado" or "Jeff Walling" - in fact, he is even worse because at least the flagrant false teacher is more easily recognized.

What has happened to the spirit of kindness, gentleness, and longsuffering? "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32). "And the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves" (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Perhaps our readers have never read the poem by Eugene Field. Here it is for your consideration:

The Duel
(The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat)
by Eugene Field

The gingham dog and the calico cat
Side by side on the table sat;
'Twas half-past twelve, and (what do you think!)
Nor one nor t'other had slept a wink!
The old Dutch clock and the Chinese plate
Appeared to know as sure as fate
There was going to be a terrible spat.
(I wasn't there; I simply state
What was told to me by the Chinese plate!)

The gingham dog went " Bow-wow-wow!"
And the calico cat replied "Me-ow!"
The air was littered, an hour or so,
With bits of gingham and calico,
While the old Dutch clock in the chimney place
Up with it hands before its face,
For it always dreaded a family row!
(Now mind: I'm only telling you
What the old Dutch clock declares is true!)

The Chinese plate looked very blue,
And wailed, "Oh dear! What shall we do!"
But the gingham dog and the calico cat
Wallowed this way and tumbled that,
Employing every tooth and claw
In the awfulest way you ever saw-
And oh! how the gingham and calico flew!

(Don't fancy I exaggerate!
I got my news from the Chinese plate!)

Next morning where the two had sat
They found no trace of dog or cat;
And some folks think unto this day
That burglars stole the pair away!
But the truth about the cat and pup
Is this: they ate each other up!
Now what do you really think of that!
(The old Dutch clock, it told me so,
And that is how I came to know.)