

PHILIPPIANS: OVERCOMING BROKEN DREAMS GOD'S WAY
"Part VI: Overcoming Errant Defensiveness Before Our Opponents"
(Philippians 2:12-30)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Though we learned last week that we should handle those who strive against us by trusting God's sovereignty over all involved, sometimes the problem comes from **within us**. The critic may have fingered an issue over which **we ourselves** have **doubts**, and our reacting **DEFENSIVENESS** causes us to "lose it" before others:

(1) Several times this past week, I have had believers in our Church approach me with the same, gnawing concern. They or a party close to them were opposed by another for a belief or action they hold, and were concerned that I supply my own feedback for their benefit.

What the parties often reveal is a lack of **confidence** in their **own** stand or activity that the **critic** has **fingered** in his opposition. The fact that the issue has **bothered** the opposed party reveals an **insecurity** in **themselves** over the issue that needs to be addressed!

(2) [I was clearly led of the Lord to include this illustration in today's notes though I was at first very reluctant to do so!] I have often faced this challenge myself. A number of times over the years, people have shared with me the view that I was either unfit for the Nepaug Church's pastorate, or that I would be doing God's people and myself a big favor were I to minister somewhere else. I was even told by a missions conference speaker we had several years ago that a group of believers had once approached him with the proposal to try and forcibly remove me from this pastorate and place the missionary here instead. The missionary told me had refused to go along with them as he felt such a move would be very ungodly. Yet, my even **hearing** of this from a man we have had as a missionary speaker at Nepaug had its effect, making me feel very troubled and insecure about my calling as pastor of Nepaug Church.

Well, in view of the fact that a critic may have pushed a button within US with criticism, and we either tend to react with harsh defensiveness, or just back away and shrivel up inside because we are UNSURE of the VALIDITY of our role in life, WHAT ARE WE TO DO -- WHAT CAN WE DO to SOLVE this NAGGING problem?!

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: *"I know God is sovereign over my opponent, and I must trust Him about this. But, part of the problem is in ME, for the critic's words finger a nagging DOUBT I have in ME about MY role or acts, so I REACT heatedly or stay mum with dread! Can you HELP me?!"*

- I. **When Paul urged his readers to do all things *without* STRIFE in Philippians 2:14, he alluded to Israel's wilderness wandering sins:**
 - A. The Greek word, *goggusmon*, used for "murmurings" (KJV) ["complaining" NIV] in Philippians 2:14 often appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Paul's Day (the Septuagint) for the murmurings of Israel in the wilderness, Lightfoot, *Philippians*, p. 117.
 - B. Also, Philippians 2:15 in the context alludes to a portion of that very Septuagint, to Deuteronomy 32:5, where Moses maintained Israel had acted *unlike* God's children in their wilderness murmurings, *Ibid*.
- II. **Well, IN this text, Paul noted DOUBT played a role in the STRIFE:**
 - A. While calling his readers not to murmur, Paul added that his readers avoid "disputings" (KJV) ["arguing" in the NIV].
 - B. A *preferred* sense for **this** word, *dialogismos*, would be "**doubt** or **questioning**", *Theol. Dict. of the N.T.*, vol. II, p. 98; *Ibid.*, Lightfoot.
 - C. Hence, *doubt* contributes to the **strife** Paul sought to stop in believers!
- III. **If we review Israel's wilderness wanderings, we see the cause-effect relation between her DOUBTS and the STRIFE of her complaints:**
 - A. Paying no heed to God's **precedents** in His leading caused Israel to assume her livelihood was at risk of failure. That left Israel **doubting God** and feeling insecure enough to voice her fears in **complaints**:
 1. God indicated He would *sustain* Israel en route to Canaan when He gave them Egypt's spoils **before** they **left Egypt**, Ex. 12:35-36.
 2. However, Israel **repeatedly murmured** about livelihood needs in the wilderness journey, revealing nagging **doubts** Israel had about God's *either* being **willing or able** to *sustain* them en route:
 - a. They complained about a lack of drinking water, Ex. 17:1-3.
 - b. At Marah they grumbled the water was too bitter, Ex. 15:23-24.
 - c. Then they complained about the lack of food in Exodus 16:2.
 - d. When God awesomely gave the people manna, some failed to take only what they needed that day for fear God either **would** not provide it the **next** day, so they **hoarded** it. Their stash of food spoiled overnight in judgment for unbelief, Ex. 16:20.
 - e. God next sought to get the people to store up manna on Friday so they wouldn't have to do servile work in picking it up on the Sabbath. They doubted God, feeling He could not keep it fresh overnight, and so they spent the Sabbath hungry, Exodus 16:27!

- f. After a while the people felt God could provide **only** manna, so they anxiously complained about their limited diet, Num. 11:4!
- B. Israel's **fearing** God would not or could not use their human leader, Moses **in the dessert** as He **had** in **Egypt** led to desert **strife**:
1. Before Israel left Egypt, God indicated He planned to use Moses to help Israel in his many miracles to get Israel out of Egypt, Ex. 5-12
 2. Yet, Israel **doubted** this **precedent** in the wilderness, causing strife:
 - a. When Moses led Israel to the Red Sea, they cried in fear as they felt Moses could not be used of God to deliver them, Ex. 14:11f.
 - b. When Moses delayed 40 days to come down from Mount Sinai, the people lost confidence in his leadership and sinned, Ex. 32:1
 - c. Their fear via the spies' report of Canaan's giants and resulting talk of getting a new leader revealed the people doubted God could use Moses successfully to conquer Canaan, Num. 14:1-4.
 - d. Korah's murmuring against Moses and Aaron regarding their role as worship leaders revealed doubts as to the spiritual authority and acceptance of these men before God, Num. 16.
- IV. **In CONTRAST, Paul named men whose CONFIDENCE in GOD'S WILL for THEM led them to do EXPLOITS under DURESS:**
- A. Paul spoke of his **willingness** to be **martyred** with **joy**, Phil. 2:16-18.
 - B. Paul alluded to Timothy's **selflessness** in Christian service in **contrast** to the **selfishness** of many other in the ministry, Philippians 2:19-24.
 - C. Paul reported his co-worker, Epaphroditus had **risked** his **life** out of **overwork** in support of Paul's needs as a prisoner, Phil. 2:25-30!

Application: *If we have nagging doubts about ourselves that cause us to act with errant defensiveness before our opponents, (1) we must believe in Christ for salvation from sin to become related to God, Jn. 3:16; 7:39. (2) As a believer, we confess our anxiety as unbelief in the Lord's revealing His will via precedents and what Scripture says, 1 Jn. 1:9. (3) Then, heeding Scripture and God's precedents for us, (a) we APPLY this insight to the issues at hand and (b) stick to that direction firmly regardless what the critic says to the contrary!*

Lesson: *As interpersonal strife that gets under our skin rises from doubts we have about OURSELVES, we cure it as follows: (1) note what Scripture and God's precedents in our pasts reveal are GOD'S will for us, and STICK to this view in PREFERENCE to our opponent's view(s). >*

Conclusion: *(To illustrate the sermon lesson . . . [Note: As was stated at this sermon's introduction, this illustration is included ONLY since the LORD clearly indicated I must use it, and that against my initial personal desire to the CONTRARY!])*

Something happened Wednesday evening, May 10th during the Prayer Meeting service in a **public** way that illustrates this message.

A storm came up just as we began the service. Don Ereminas had selected the hymn, "How Great Thou Art," and as we were singing the lines, "I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed," a flash of lightning lit up the sky. With it came a six inch spark glowing at the base of the metal cabinet in the Prayer Meeting room. I recall Michelle Slate twitched her head at the spark, and Nadine later said she noticed a glow from behind her at the piano.

The instant I saw this spark, I quickly, privately confessed my even having been **bothered** by the suggestions of those who over the years had repeatedly implied I should not be at Nepaug. Here is why:

Eighteen years before, I had been frightened by a lightening show as I was thought of leaving a pastorate in O'Neill, Nebraska to pastor in North Platte. I had then wondered if God had sent that lightning to make me hesitate making this move. This concern grew out of recalling that Martin Luther in Church History had been impressed through fear of a lightening display to heed God. I had later made the move to North Platte anyway, one that proved to be **harmful!**

So, the moment the spark lit in the Prayer Meeting May 10th, I recalled the lightening display of 18 years before in O'Neill, and was instantly convinced God was signaling I **dare** not heed others about **IF** I should be here, or **else!** That's why I made that quick confession!

On May 11th, I found a Hartford Courant article written by Dr. Mel Goldstein, author of A Complete Idiot's Guide To The Weather. He claimed Connecticut's May 10th storms had been **"impossible"** to predict, another hint **God** had signaled me in that lightening spark!

As a result, I am now even AFRAID NOT to believe that this pastorate at Nepaug Church IS God's assignment for me!