

Greek Word Studies (2)

Advanced Level

Lesson 12

Lesson Title: Contention ‘Eritheia’

Text: Philippians 1:16-17, ‘Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention (eritheia), not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love (agape), knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.’

Introduction: Meaning of ‘eritheia’ (contentious).

‘Eritheia’ describes a contentious person who desires to promote self interest.

An ambitious; self seeking; and self elevating motive will produce strife and contention ‘eritheia’.

The word is derived from ‘erithos’ meaning ‘a hireling’ or one who is hired for labour. The association of ‘being hired’ and ‘contention’ comes through selfish ambitions.

‘Eritheia’ was used in Ancient Greek to describe one who sought to gain political power wrongfully.

- 1) It denoted a person who was led by a self seeking and ambitious motive.
- 2) One who was willing to use wrong means to gain political power.

In Philippians 1:15-17, Paul describes two kinds of people – one preaches Christ of contention (eritheia) and the other preaches Christ of love (agape).

One preaches Christ in order to promote self interest.

The other preaches Christ because the love of Christ compels them to do so. See also 2 Corinthians 5:14.

Examples:

Motivated by love

Romanian Prison Ministry

When we were in the prison a staff member asked us ‘why do you come?’

It can be hard for people to understand why we want to travel so far to do something that does not earn money.

The greatest joy in preaching the gospel is to see men and women come to new life in Christ. It is the love of Christ that motivates us.

Motivated by contention

In the western world a person who leads a local church with a large congregation will receive respect within the community.

The bigger the ministry; the greater the respect.

People can become envious and seek to gain this respect for themselves.

Leaders need followers. They will then seek followers out of the congregation.

This is how many local churches have split.

Contention in a church congregation will also arise when leaders ignore the needs of the people and use their position to promote themselves as leaders.

Leaders in local churches sometimes cause contention by criticising those who do not follow their self elevating plans of leadership

A person driven by self interest will produce contention.

‘Eritheia’ will elevate self and does not seek the glory of God.

Contentions arise when success is placed above truth.
‘It is better to be a failure following after truth than to be successful following error.’

Christian TV elevates personalities.

TV evangelists are regarded as celebrities.

Contentious personalities are followed because of Christian TV.

But following them can also destroy lives.

Money - large sums of money can be raised through the media by TV evangelists, and often this is done by a wrong interpretation of scripture.

Many Christians accept their wrong teachings because they preach salvation through Christ.

But when Christian ministry is a performance in front of a camera then it is easy for a person to be contentious off camera (in private).

God TV – Missions Week.

I remember watching God TV at the beginning of Missions Week (around 2005)

Wendy Alec gave a prophecy in which she warned against raising funds in a wrong manner.

I don’t remember her exact words but she referred to those who used scripture for the purpose of getting money.

She said she felt a tremendous anointing.

I wondered how God TV could do Missions Week (a fund raising event) after this tremendous prophecy.

A day or so later it was announced that Wendy Alec had to go back to the UK to finish writing a book.

God TV then appeared to do exactly what the prophecy had said not to do.

Christian television is a great blessing but truth will be lost when the desire for success is leading.

In contrast to being driven by ‘eritheia’, a Christian leader should:

- 1) Seek an eternal inheritance – ‘to win Christ’.
- 2) Live a life in the Spirit.
- 3) Follow the wisdom from above.
- 4) Preach Christ with pure motives in love.
- 5) Walk in humility

Main Points

1. Seeking an eternal inheritance – ‘to win Christ’.

Romans 2:7-9, ‘To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious (eritheia), and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;’

Contrast between those who seek eternal life from those who are contentious (do not obey the truth).

Patience – remaining steadfast under trial (hypomone)

Well doing – doing good works (agathos) without seeking any self benefit.

Looking to an eternal inheritance – glory, honour, immortality, eternal life.

Seeking the things that are eternal not because we earn it but because by grace we have received it.

Not elevating self – seeking the glory of the Lord.

Not suspicious of others – people who seek their own objectives are always suspicious of what others are doing.

Not motivated by the acclaim of people – seeking to be in His will.

Not competitive – resting in the plan and purpose of God.

Not covetous – knowing who we are in Christ. Trusting His promises.

Seeking an eternal inheritance

In the Christian life there is a place where we must turn around.

When I first became a Christian I sought to serve Christ with my life.

It was many years later when I learnt that serving Christ can be motivated by selfish ambition.

The goal of a successful ministry is a selfish ambition.

The goal we should seek is to win Christ..

The only thing that is important is to be in His will

Howard Carter (1891-1971) was one of the pioneers of the Assemblies of God in Great Britain.

He adopted these words as the motto of his life:

'Let me never lose the all-important truth that to be in thy will is better than success, and grant that I may ever love Thyself more than Thy service.'

Personal Testimony: Running for the prize of High Calling of God in Christ Jesus

Philippians 3:14, 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'

I will never forget one meeting when I preached on 'running for the prize' to prisoners in Romania.

I spoke on how it is not the things that are behind that are important now. We may have messed things up in the past but what is important now is that we run for the prize.

It was so exciting because the men were listening intensely.

There was a great response to the message.

One prisoner was eager to speak with me afterwards.

He told me his mum was a Christian. Then he said 'four years ago I began running for the prize'.

2. Living life in the Spirit

Contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh.

It is one of the works of the flesh – seditions.

Galatians 5:19-21, ‘Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions (eritheia), heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like:’

2 Corinthians 12:20, ‘For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and *that* I shall be found unto you such as you would not: lest *there be* debates, envyings, wraths, strifes (eritheia), backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:’

Seeking to live in the Spirit

The works of the flesh seek to gratify selfish desire.

Sexual desire to gratify lust – sensual pleasure

Spiritual desires that seek to promote selfish goals (for instance a football player making the sign of the cross (superstition)).

A good cause can also be motivated by the need to gratify selfish desires.

When a person is motivated by self then the works of the flesh will be controlling.

Social interaction

The desire for selfish ambition fulfilled through aggression - elevating self

The desire for pleasure fulfilled through intoxication.

Story: Prisoner strengthening his fingers using a rosary when we held our meeting.

When we held our meeting in a prison in Romania, I saw that during the meeting a man was using his fingers to move the beads on a rosary.

Not everyone who attends our meetings in the prison are thinking about spiritual things.

We always tell the prisoners that we do not come to preach religion or to promote a particular church, but to tell them about a person, Jesus.

I was later told that it was likely that the man was using the rosary to strengthen the muscles in his fingers so he could steal by pick pocketing.

When a person walks in the Spirit then love (Gr. agape) is in control.

Paul was motivated by the love of Christ. ‘For the love of Christ constrains us;’ (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Constrains (Gr. ‘sunecho’) means ‘to hold together’.

The love of Christ held everything together in Paul’s ministry.

He did not seek self glory or self elevation.

The love of Christ was guiding; leading; controlling.

Love will always seek the welfare of others.

Illustration: William Booth.

At the end of one year William Booth was asked to send a message for all serving in the Salvation Army.

Sending the message by telegraph was expensive and the charge was per word.

William Booth just wrote down one word to send.

The word was 'others'.

The only thing that is important is serving the Lord with agape love

Hudson Taylor wrote that if he had a thousand lives he would have given them all to China – motivated by love.

Charles Wesley wrote the great hymn ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemers praise’. Worship.

When the Lord calls someone to work in a certain area He will fill the person with love for that nation and people.

Love will grow and mature.

3. Following the wisdom that is from above. (James 3:13-18).

Earthly wisdom causes strife ‘eritheia’.

James 3:14, ‘But if you have bitter envying and strife (eritheia) in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.’

James 3:16, ‘For where envying and strife (eritheia) *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work.’

Self seeking is wisdom that is earthly, sensual, demonic. (James 3:15)

Earthly – wisdom based upon earthly things. (on the earth)

Sensual – wisdom based upon animal instinct (having breath)

Demonic – wisdom based upon things evil (demonic)

Church leadership that is based upon this kind of wisdom will produce ‘confusion and every evil work’ (James 3:16)

Wisdom that is from above

James 3:7 ‘But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.’

Pure (hagnos) – free from everything that is carnal.

Peaceable (eirenikos) – loving peace

Gentle (epieikos) – mild in manner

Easy to be intreated (eupeithos) – a person who is easily persuaded (willing to yield)

Full of mercy (eleos) – showing kindness to those in need.

Good fruits (agathos karplos) – good that is beneficial to others; fruit – produce. It is action on behalf others that comes from the life of Christ in us.

Without partiality (adiakritos) – without regard to persons

Without hypocrisy (anupokritos) – without pretence

Church leadership that is based upon this kind of wisdom will produce peace (James 3:18)

Illustration: Seeing the wrong side of Christian ministry.

It is so great to be with leaders that who are easy to approach and who do not get angry when questions are asked.

When I first became a Christian I expected all true Christian leaders to be like this. But when I began to be involved in ministry I saw that sometimes a completely different side of Christian leadership is seen. I began to realise that leaders can be motivated by the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit. It was confusing to me as a young Christian that someone could preach the gospel in a very professional manner and yet be totally in bondage to ‘self’. Leaders who are not led of the Spirit are not gentle or easy to talk to.

A disciple is ‘a learner’. A person who is learning to be like Christ.
We all make mistakes in the learning process.
Sometimes these mistakes involve the way we act and speak to others.
But we learn and we change.
Sometimes the Lord has to humble us to bring us to the place where we are willing to follow
the wisdom that is from above.

What I have noticed regarding the wrong side of Christian leadership is that leaders who promote themselves are not willing to change. They will always criticise others for speaking against them, but are never willing to listen to any form of constructive criticism concerning their leadership. Good leadership will listen, discuss and change when necessary.

4. Preaching Christ with pure motives in love.

Paul was in prison. ‘So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;’ (Philippians 1:13)

Paul did not have freedom to preach outside the prison but because of his imprisonment the Roman officials, soldiers, and people outside were hearing the message of salvation through Christ.

Paul’s imprisonment had brought great interest in the gospel and this had given the believers boldness to preach Christ.

But Christ was being preached by people with entirely different motives.

Same gospel – different motives.

Philippians 1:16, ‘The one preach Christ of contention (eritheia), not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:’

Philippians 1:17, ‘But the other of love (agape), knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.’

Preaching Christ of contention – pretence; without sincerity; elevating self
Preaching Christ of love – truth; sincerity; glorifying the Lord.

Paul’s affliction

His heart was filled with concern for the people.

His affliction concerned the ‘contention’ that motivated the preaching – they were not preaching in truth; they were not an example to follow; they were self seeking.

They sought to hurt Paul because he was not able to be there to teach the Philippians.

Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached.

Philippians 1:18, ‘What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.’

It is better that Christ is preached with a wrong motive than that Christ is not preached at all.

Personal Testimony: Sometimes it has been difficult to watch things that happen within the local Church.

Leaders can become so obsessed with leading that they do not allow anyone else to do anything.

Leaders should produce leaders and ministries should produce ministries.
But even if a local church which is evangelical is led by a person with wrong motives, if Christ is preached then we can rejoice.
We do not however have to follow the person's leadership.

5. Walk in humility.

The way of strife is overcome by the way of humility.

Philippians 2:3, '*Let nothing be done through strife (eritheia) or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind (tapeinophrosune) let each esteem other better than themselves.*'

Lowliness of mind

Two Greek words 'tapeinos' meaning 'not being raised far from the ground' and 'phren' meaning 'the perception of heart and the mind'.

Lowliness of mind means keeping a low perception of ourselves.

This goes against popular teaching today that always seeks to raise self esteem.

Yet for the Christian, it is the life of Christ who dwells in us (Colossians 1:27).

'Lowliness of mind' is to esteem ourselves in Christ not in ourselves.

I am nothing, Christ is everything.

I do not need to promote myself because in Christ I have everything.

This means I am free to take the lowest place because Christ has lifted me to the highest place.

Paul tells us to let the mind of Christ be in us (Phillipians 2:5)

The eternal Son of God was willing to humble Himself and become a servant and die upon the cross.

Now as Man He has been exalted to the highest place – Jesus Christ is Lord.

He represents me.

Now I am seated in heavenly places with Christ.

I do not have to seek for position; or praise of man; or success, for in Christ I have everything.

Summary:

Leadership must always be with right motives

- 1) Our eyes should be on our eternal inheritance
- 2) Our lives should produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) We must follow the wisdom from above that produces peace.
- 4) We must preach Christ out of love.
- 5) We must walk in lowliness of mind because in Christ I have everything.

An extreme case:

Story: The dangers of following a contentious man.

The Jonestown tragedy in November 1978.

A US congressman was murdered along with others when they investigated what was happening in Jonestown.

The followers of Jim Jones and their children (over 900 people altogether) died when they drank poison in the communion.

Jim Jones was a contentious man ‘eritheiā’. His followers were deceived by his words.