

Pest Control

Philippians 1:15-18

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connect groups

PATH

Every group—whether it's a club, a corporation, a homeowner association, or a church—has its share of problem people and detractors. Such people can be touchy, irritable, irrational, unreasonable, contentious, or legalistic. Their words may hurt us deeply. Their actions may confuse us greatly. So how do we handle these pesky folks? Most importantly, what should we do with those who name the name of Christ but act like pests? Pastor Skip identified a threefold strategy:

I. Identify the Troublemakers

II. Ratify the Truth-makers

III. Magnify the True Message

POINTS

Identify the Troublemakers:

- Paul referred to believers in this passage (see vv. 12-14), not unbelievers.
- It's important not to idealize the early church, because they were just like us.
 - The church in Corinth dealt with division over preachers, immorality, rampant divorce, arguments over spiritual gifts, and a lack of love. Sounds very contemporary, doesn't it?
- Why are these people in the church? Because, as John Trapp put it, "The devil loves to fish in troubled waters." Satan loves to amplify any conflict, disagreement, or issue in order to divide God's people.
- Paul identified them by their characteristics:
 - They were jealous (see v. 15). The word *envy* refers to those who create conflict and are argumentative.
 - They were selfish: those who "preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely" (v. 16); the idea is that they were like politicians, canvassing for votes, seeking office, promoting themselves.
 - They were malicious: "supposing to add conflict to my chains" (v. 16). They caused friction, deliberately looking to irritate Paul and talk down his mission. Remember, they called themselves Christians; they weren't anti-Christ but anti-Paul.
- **Probe:** Read Galatians 5:16 and 3 John 1:4. It's important to recognize troublemakers, but how do you avoid

becoming one of them? In the church, what should our ultimate motivation be? Where do we draw the line with troublemakers? How do we deal with them?

Ratify the Truth-makers:

- Paul didn't fixate on the troublemakers but instead found the silver lining in the cloud of controversy and contention—the truth-makers.
- Paul saw that some believers preached Christ "from goodwill" (v. 15). They saw that Paul was "appointed for the defense of the gospel" (v. 17), recognizing that his imprisonment was not a disappointment but a divine appointment—he was on duty to defend the gospel.
- Paul probably lost his life because of troublemaking Christians in Rome. Envy and selfish ambition led them to denounce him, and Nero executed him.
 - When Onesiphorus came to Rome, no one could or would tell him where Paul was; he had to search diligently for him (see 2 Timothy 1:16-17).
 - Paul wrote to Timothy, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them" (2 Timothy 4:16). Note Paul's forgiving attitude.
- **Probe:** When you look for people in the body of Christ who are looking for Christ, you'll find them. Think of people you see who are suffering for doing God's will. What are some ways you can ratify these truth-makers—supporting and encouraging them? How can you resist envy and strife in the church?

Magnify the True Message:

- As Paul sat in jail thinking about those who persecuted him and those who supported him, his conclusion was, "What then?"—or, "So what?"
 - He didn't say, "Shame on them! Don't they know who I am?" He said, "Christ is preached; and in this, I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice" (v. 18).
- Paul wasn't an unfeeling statue; in fact, he felt things deeply. He was determined not to let mean people rob his joy.
- Paul knew a great truth: the power is in the message, not the messenger.
 - He would agree that if someone tampers with the message, go at them (see Galatians 1:6-12), but if they attack the messenger, ignore them.
- Paul had comrades—partners in the gospel—and he rejoiced in them; he also had critics—dissenters in the gospel—and he rejoiced in spite of them.
 - As long as they preached the right message, Paul overlooked their motives.
 - His calling was not to protect or defend himself but to protect and defend the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- **Probe:** We must practice discernment and guard God's truth, especially in the church. What are some ways you can make sure that you are known for what you stand for rather than what you stand against?

PRACTICE

Connect Up: Pastor Skip noted that "God reserves the right to use people who disagree with you." What are ways that you can keep your focus on Him and His message, rather than letting yourself get lost in the frustrations of certain believers' motives?

Connect In: Pastor Skip said, "We often make too much over what divides us, and not enough over what unites us." Read verse 18. What was Paul's litmus test for deciding whether to stand against believers or to let God sort them out? What are some challenges you see in the body of Christ? Which ones do you need to confront, and which ones do you need to let go?

Connect Out: How does a poor witness within the church affect your witness outside the church? How does the perfection of the message offset God's imperfect messengers? Make a list with your group of what you stand for as a Christian. What difference does it make to be known for what you stand for rather than what you are against?