

an essay:

ON SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND CONTENTION WITHIN THE CHURCH

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## I. A QUESTION ON CONFLICT AND CONTENTION ARISE IN THE CHURCH?

What examples and explanations of sources of conflict and contention in The Church do we find? We may answer this question by looking at those who are ordained into Church office to shepherd the people of GOD. If they have ungodly characteristics that lead to conflict and contention, we may expect the congregations under their charge to exhibit the same ungodly characteristics.

Paul gives instruction in I TIMOTHY 3:1-13 for the qualifications of those who would be ordained into Church office. We can look at these godly characteristics for Church office, which are the results of humble piety. The opposite ungodly characteristics will then give us a list of ungodly pride.

The first are vitally important for those who would faithfully serve The Church of CHRIST, for such men willingly serve, not themselves, but The living GOD. But the second in leaders in Christian Ministry are a sure recipe for conflict and contention in The Church, for those that possess them do not serve The living GOD, but themselves:

### I TIMOTHY 3:1-7

<sup>1</sup> This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

<sup>2</sup> A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

<sup>3</sup> Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

<sup>4</sup> One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

<sup>5</sup> (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of The Church of GOD?)

<sup>6</sup> Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

<sup>7</sup> Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

## II. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST BE BLAMELESS

First, the ordained man must not be a man of ill repute. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:2, he must be “blameless.” But if he is a man of ill repute, his pride will bring discredit upon The Name of CHRIST. And the devil is always looking to offer excuses to the lost to reject The Grace of GOD. And to weaken the fainthearted Christian to become unfaithful to The Church. Men will scoff, “This is a Christian leader? Here is my excuse to reject The Gospel and justify myself!”

Confront such a man and he will attack you will all the forces at his disposal. The world will look at the warfare within The Body of CHRIST and be neither impressed nor convicted. He will say, “You unbelievers! You judger of men’s souls! Can you not see that I am The LORD’s Anointed? Bow down to me, or I will have you cast out of the temple!” He will drive away the truly Faithful from GOD’s House, and will collect around him the weak and the hardhearted. Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

### III. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST BE THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

Second, the ordained man must not be the husband of many wives. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:2, he must be “the husband of one wife.” But if he is a man who is sexually impure and unfaithful, having more than one wife or staining his marriage bed with other women, his pride will turn the broken away from The Cross. It will invite sexual sin within The Church. And the more sullied The Church becomes, the more the world rejoices, that it may excuse itself from repenting before The Almighty.

Confront such a man and he will attack you, calling you unloving and judgemental. So will sexual sin overtake GOD’s people. Adultery will be seen as acceptable. Fornication will become a primary pastime of the people. Sodomites will invade and openly declare their abominations as normal. Divorce will become the first solution to all marital strife. Men and women will lose hope in The Faith and fall by the wayside in sexual sins, brokenhearted and crushed, wondering why they suffer. And The Spirit of GOD’s Presence will depart from that place, abandoning the people to the darkness. Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

### IV. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST BE VIGILANT

Third, the ordained man must not be lax against sin in his life, his family nor the lives of those under his charge. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:2, he must be “vigilant.” But if he is a man who does not defend righteousness and pure doctrine against compromise and error, his pride will weaken The Faithful in their walk with The Lord. He will open GOD’s people up to all manner of earthly suffering and even eternal damnation. Soon The Gospel of our Lord will be replaced in that congregation with false gospels. And the world will applaud, for the world loves the church that becomes like itself, rather than The Church that remains faithful to CHRIST. But the people will perish!

Confront such a man, and in his pride, he will seek to justify himself, rather than repent and be again a faithful shepherd of GOD’s people. He will say, “Come now, haven’t we become enlightened enough in this modern age, even in The Church, to recognize other sources of wisdom as equal with our Christian views? Haven’t we outgrown the archaic notion that The Bible is GOD’s unerring Word? Surely, you don’t claim that The Cross of CHRIST is The only Way to salvation!” Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

### V. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST BE SOBER

Fourth, the ordained man must not be unstable in judgement, decision-making and behaviour. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:2, he must be “sober.” He must be sound in his judgement, making decisions in a judicious, reasoned and godly manner. But if he is not “sober” in his mind, his pride will prevent him from keep him from seeing or confessing that his judgement is impaired. He will make bad and sinful decisions that

will lead GOD's sheep astray. Fingers will wag at him, both outside and within The Church, but he will not listen.

Nor will he receive correction and godly criticism, but will stir rebellion. In his pride, he will beat you with whatever sticks of authority you have placed in his hand, saying, "What I have written, I have written. And what I have written is written in stone!" And when one bad or sinful decision brings trouble and trials upon the people of GOD, his lack of soberness will lead him to bring forth more bad or sinful decisions. Fissures within the flock will rip the congregation. The walls will shake with the earthquakes of argument and bitterness. Hearts will be ripped, lives will be scarred and even souls may be lost! For such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

#### VI. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST BE GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY

Fifth, the ordained man must be liberal in giving and sharing what GOD has given and shared with him. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:2, he must be "given to hospitality." He must proclaim in both word and daily living that GOD gives us His blessings and gifts, so that as stewards of them, we may serve Him by serving others with those same things. But if he is not "given to hospitality" in his private and public Christian life, what example does he set for others in The Church?

His pride will cause him to lust after the things GOD has given him, and his pride will cause him to not let those things go in the service of The Lord. And when confronted, such a man will only harden his heart, as well as the hearts of others. Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

#### VII. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST BE APT TO TEACH

Sixth, the ordained man must be knowledgeable of GOD's Word, capable of teaching it, and doing so always faithfully. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:2, he must be "apt to teach." He must have both the learning and the ability needed to admonish sinners, strengthen the saints, restore the wayward and feed the hungry with GOD's Word. And he must, to do this, have a zealous heart for The Lord. His heart must rejoice in the high regard in which it holds The Sacred Scriptures.

But if he is not "apt to teach" The written Word of GOD to GOD's people, how cold will his heart be to JESUS CHRIST, The Word of GOD Incarnate? The saints around and under him will be starved for Spiritual Food, and will become weak. They will be tempted to go astray and fall into the snares of wickedness and apostasy. And when such a man is confronted, he will defend his lack of learning, ability and zeal for GOD's Word by poisoning GOD's people into even greater darkness! Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

### VIII. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST NOT BE GIVEN TO WINE

Seventh, the ordained man must not be a drunkard, not addicted to drugs or alcohol, nor any other idol. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:3, he must “not given to wine.” He must be always vigilant and single-minded in service to The Lord, The Church and the flock of CHRIST under his charge. But how can he do so if his senses are dulled, his appetites are inflamed and his discernment anesthetized by wine and other such things? But if he is indeed “given to wine,” what example will that show others? The flock, like the drunkard Clergyman, will be tempted to seek peace and strength in the bottle and not at The Cross. They will together become lax in duties of faith, family and work.

And when such a man is confronted, he will complain, “Come now, God made the fruit of the vine, did He not? What harm is there in a few drinks every morning, afternoon and evening? Come and bow down to my false gods of comfort with me!” His pride will cause GOD’s people will be found foundering in the gutters of the world, the flesh and the devil as drunkards, arm in arm with such an inebriated Clergyman. Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

### IX. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST NOT BE A STRIKER

Eighth, the ordained man must not be violent or quick to anger. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:3, he must not be a “striker.” He must be gentle with people, reserving his harshness for the times when he must stand upright to defend The Faith, rebuke the wolves attacking GOD’s people and keep safe The Church from her enemies external and internal. His wrath must be select, judicious appropriate and always coupled with CHRIST’s Mercy. He must never sacrifice GOD’s Truth in order to compromise with evil, but he must always stand with zealousness in one hand and Grace in the other. But if he is a “striker,” and always walking in anger, how will he be judicious in the application of righteous wrath?

Those around and under him will become withdrawn and close down. His constant sting of unrighteous wrath will break fellowship within The Body of CHRIST. It will set a model for others of constant anger. And it will lead GOD’s people to loose sight of The Divine Mercy at The Cross, focusing them only on The Wrath of GOD’s Law that convicts them. And when such a man is confronted, his pride will cause his full ungodly wrath to fall upon all who would question him, to silence and even destroy them. Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

### X. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST NOT BE GREEDY FOR FILTHY LUCRE

Ninth, the ordained man must not be a lover of treasures of this world, covetous of things of the flesh. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:3, he must not be “greedy of filthy lucre.” He must see their proper place, not as idols to be served that promise empty fulfillment, but as Divine means to further the Kingdom of GOD. His first love must always be The Lord JESUS CHRIST, Who is to rule over him in every corner of his life.

But if he is “greedy of filthy lucre,” he will be constantly occupied with obtaining worldly wealth, power, money and possessions to serve himself. He will not be found occupied with storing up for himself treasures in Heaven, nor serving The Lord, much less The Lord’s people.

It will set the example for GOD’s people to do the same, to worship the false idols of money and possessions, instead of The one true living GOD. And when confronted, he will accuse his critics of being overzealous for things of religion and form, claiming they are the ones who are untrue. Thus will he demand that GOD’s people join him at such false altars that lead to sorrow and damnation. Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention in The Church.

#### XI. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST BE PATIENT

Tenth, the ordained man must not be quick to give up on people for their good in The Kingdom of GOD. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:3, he must be “patient.” How long does it take for the lost to be converted in CHRIST? How long does it take for the suffering to find the peace of GOD, which passes all understanding? How long does it take to teach the basics of The Faith to the un-Churched within The Church? How long does it take to lobby those in secular authority for righteous laws? How long does it take to purge GOD’s people of sin? We see only in part, and only one point in time at a time. The ordained man must indeed be patient, trusting surely that GOD reigns in His Divine Sovereignty. He must be a faithful soldier of The Cross, his shoulder always at the wheel, even when the fruits of his labor in GOD’s vineyards are not always clearly seen by his eyes.

But if he is not patient with people and in his work, quickly giving up on the work he is called to by The Almighty, what example does he set for others in The Church? They too will quickly give up on the work of The Gospel. They too will be unstable in their faithfulness. And when confronted, he will counsel others to take the paths of least resistance, which lead only to a weak faith that is easily overcome by evil. Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention to The Church.

#### XII. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST RULE WELL HIS OWN HOUSE

Eleventh, the ordained man must not be an unwise ruler of his own family. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:4-5, he must be “one that ruleth well his own house.” His children must be in subjection to him with all due respect. His wife must happily honor him with all due obedience. And he must lead his home as a Biblical example of piety to all those around him. For if he does not know how to rule his own house well, how can he possibly rule The House of CHRIST well? But if he does not, his example to the sheep of GOD will be tempted to throw away GOD’s Standards for family and instead embrace the world’s.

They will see this man's contentious wife wonder if marriage is worth receiving, saying, "Better to cohabitate in sin, so that we can move on when ever we wish!" They will see this man's rebellious children and wonder if having children is worth the strife, saying, "Let us have the pleasures of the marital bed, but let us wipe out the fruits of marital bliss in the womb!" Confront such a man and he will chastise you in his own pride, "Don't bother me with things of my family or yours! Can't you see that I am busy wrecking The Family of GOD, The Church?" Soon all the families in the congregation will follow suit in strife and brokenness! Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention to The Church.

### XIII. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST NOT BE A NOVICE

Twelfth, the ordained man must not be a new convert to The Faith. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:6, he must not be a "novice." A new convert can not be grounded in The Faith adequately to learn the need for humility as well as knowledge; piety as well as proclamation; gentleness as well as boldness. Now we know that Satan is forever looking to rip down all those who would serve within The Church, unless they serve haughtily. Take a novice to The Faith and make him king, and soon you have a tyrant, not serving CHRIST but himself!

Confront such a man, and his pride will cause him to rebuke you, "Do you not see what a gift I am to The Kingdom of GOD on earth? Do you not see that I have all knowledge, all gifts and all wisdom? Do you not see that I AM THAT I AM? Surely you must, for you yourself elevated me into this office!" Those lifelong faithful servants of CHRIST in the pews will soon be offended and withdraw. And those just entering into The Church will clamor for like recognition of man, forgetting that we all must answer to GOD and not to ourselves! And when such a man falls into condemnation, the wicked and Hell will both rejoice, clapping their hands, at the injury done to The Church! Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention to The Church!

### XIV. THE ORDAINED MAN MUST HAVE A GOOD REPORT

Thirteenth, the ordained man must have a clean and respectable reputation outside of The Church in the community and in society. As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 3:7, he "must have a good report of them which are without." He must be seen by those outside The Church as someone who represents faithfully what a Christian is and Who JESUS CHRIST is, even if they do not believe. Even more importantly, he must be seen in this light by unbelievers especially because they do not yet believe! For if he is a man of ill repute, the world outside The Church will not trust him. Nor will they want to deal with him. Nor will they be convicted in their consciences of their need to come to The Lord.

Confront such a man, and in his pride he will condemn you for whatever your own sins are, that he might render you silent. He will say, "Aha! You yourself have sinned! You can not correct me! Nor is it even important if my offenses for my own wretched unrighteousness drags down The Name of CHRIST and His Kingdom. For we are called to be separate. Come, follow me, and we will build high walls around our



Church. Come, follow me, and we will retreat to a high mountain!” But when The Church is led by men of sinful lives and ill repute - whether they are so like the world that they are as the world, or if they lead The Church into total isolation from the world – how is The Church to influence the world to repentance and righteousness? Such a heart that walks in pride like this will only bring conflict and contention to The Church!

#### XV. IN CONCLUSION – THE CHURCH MUST ORDAIN GODLY MEN!

What examples and explanations of sources of conflict and contention in The Church do we find? The answer to this question rests in part in looking at those whom The Church ordains to be shepherds over GOD’s people. If the shepherds have ungodly characteristics that lead to conflict and contention, we may expect the congregations under their charge to show forth the same ungodly characteristics.

So as The Apostle Paul declares in I TIMOTHY 3:1-13 that it is vitally important that The Church ordain only godly men who show forth godly characteristics in their lives as faithful Christians: blameless of gross sin before GOD and men; vigilant in defending The Faith and The Church; sober-minded; given to hospitality; apt to teach; not given to wine; not given to violence and anger; not greedy for filthy lucre; patient; a good ruler of his own house; not be a novice; have a good report outside The Church.

This is in great part the answer to our question. What must The Church do to, in great part, avoid conflict and contention within herself? She must ordain godly men!