

Are We Fighting the Wrong Enemy?

In our fallen world, we always sense an enemy, but what happens when the enemy is not in front of us? What happens when our true enemy is not obvious?

We create an enemy.

In the earliest days of our nation, our enemy was Britain. Study the thirteen colonies separately, and you discover they each had a different focus and temperament, but they came together to gain our independence from a shared foe.

During times of war, the enemy is obvious. The enemy is *out there*. Two world wars gave us common enemies like Germany and Japan. Then we had the enemy of communism seen in Russia and China. After 9/11, we rallied together against Islamic terrorists.

But the enemy is no longer "out there," it can very well be in our own community. We see the enemy in our neighbors and those who disagree with us politically. No longer can one of us be red and the other one be blue. Cultural fashion now says red and blue clash; it's the political equivalent of wearing stripes and plaid together.

I'm not so naive to think America has known periods when we've gotten along. America has never been Walt Disney's fantasy of main street America, but when we needed to, we found a way to work together. We found ways to cooperate—you bend a little, I bend a little—and we moved forward.

The conservative and liberal ideologies are moving us further and further apart. We've lost the ability to work together and find a middle ground where we can work together. *If you're wrong about this issue, you're an idiot and wrong about everything else.* Both sides of the political arena play this game. Regardless of the issue, it's the other side's fault. *We're in this mess because of them.*

Are we too far gone to ever work together? I hope not, but consider this: When Abraham Lincoln entered the White House, he assembled a very strange cabinet. Five members of his cabinet were former adversaries, and they didn't particularly get along. He recruited cabinet members for whatever qualities he saw in them, even if they vehemently disagreed with him on some matters. Yet Lincoln faced the toughest term of any President, and he accomplished it with men who didn't always see eye-to-eye with him.

America may be facing its greatest danger. We have made enemies of one another.

Infighting within a nation is tragic. So is infighting within a family. But when infighting hits the church, I find it especially tragic. The New Testament writers used more ink addressing the dangers and fighting within the church than the attacks that came from without. The New Testament letters include a constant call for unity and for loving one another. We fight over non-essential matters—who gets to sing the Christmas solo, what style of music we prefer, whether worship is enhanced with the lights turned up or turned down—and pastors are forced out of office because of petty disagreements. Consequently, we have no time to address the real enemy out there: Satan's attack on the home, the ever-changing moral landscape, and the ways the message of Christ is suppressed.

When we rely on ourselves, we will fight. And when believers are fighting, they are grieving the Holy Spirit of God who takes up residence in them. "Don't stifle the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). By the very presence of God's Spirit in our lives, we have been given the supernatural ability to love and work together. Instead, we take a self-centered approach to life in the church and that is wrong. Seriously wrong.

"What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from your passions that wage war within you?" (Jas. 4:1).

When we submit to God and live under the lordship of Christ, His Spirit brings us together in a unity that our warring culture cannot fathom or understand. We might still disagree over something, but we do not let the issue divide us. We might still work to convince the other side to join our conviction in a matter, but we do so with grace and integrity. We don't walk away in a huff; we don't take people out the door with us. We stick together because of the gospel we embrace, the mission we share, and the Holy Spirit who makes us one.

Look at the emphasis on unity and oneness in the Spirit.

"Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:1-6).

Grace and unity need to start somewhere at your church. Let it begin with you.