

## **Introduction**

Which comes first: Is it the innovators and their efforts to change the church the Lord built, or is it the members, who look to please their neighbors just as the Israelites in the flesh who cried out: "Give us a king to judge us." 1 Sam 8:6? The answer is probably *both/and*, not *either/or*. Our thematic text tells us of enemies of the cross of Christ and exhorts us to live according to the pattern that the apostles gave us:

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. Phil 3:17-18

Paul describes such situations as listeners who gather around them teachers to say what they want to hear. Paul speaks to Timothy about how these listeners will not put up with sound doctrine:

3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. 2 Tim 4:3-5.

The command to Timothy was to keep your head, endure hardships, do the work, and discharge all duties. Our directions for a response to the tidal wave of change could not be clearer or better stated. And the inspired writers reiterate the instructions over and over: Paul tells the Ephesians in Eph 4:14-15 in words just as pointed:

4 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, *by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming*; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, . . . [emphasis added]

The exhortation is the same to elders, giving them special charge to stop these enemies of the cross of Christ:

9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. 10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. Titus 1:9-11.

The struggle is on. The faithful must enjoin the enemy. We dare not see the enemy, fold our camp, and run. We must not shirk as the spies of old, but stand resolute as *new Calebs* and *new Joshuas* ready to possess the promise of our Lord. We are clothed with the armor of God as described in Eph 6:13-17. We have nothing to fear:

13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of god.

In the fight to come, the true believers may become as sinful as the false teachers by showing a bad attitude. For if we have and defend the truth but lose the mind of Christ, we are doomed by our own conceit. Many of the sins of Gal 5:19-21, listed as deeds of flesh, are divisive sins:

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: . . . enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, . . . and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the

kingdom of God.

Enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, all of these—if permitted to dominate our spirit in the battle—will allow Satan to win. Therefore, in all our dealings with innovators and change agents, we must allow the fruit of the Spirit to dominate us: “. . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

In the end we will have victory in Jesus:

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:37-39.

The Lamb of God will be victorious and those with Him will be called, chosen, and faithful.

"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."  
Rev 17:14.

Let us stand with the Lord Jesus in this present hour! Amen.