

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
2080 West Grand Blvd.
Detroit, Michigan 48208
Nathan Johnson, D.D., *Senior Pastor*

Lesson 11: “Avoid a Contentious Spirit”
Scripture: *Romans 12:6 -21*

Goal: To embrace and fulfill our covenant relationship with God and one another.

Objective: To understand the impact a contentious spirit has on the body of Christ.

Church Covenant Segment:

“In case of difference of opinion in the church, we will strive to avoid a contentious spirit, and if we cannot unanimously agree, we will cheerfully recognize the right of the majority to govern.”

Introduction

With the aid of the Holy Spirit, we as a community of believers can be on one accord. God mandates that we love each another, bear one another’s burden, and live peaceably with one another (Galatians 6:2). Our relationship with Christ challenges us to be mindful to seek the good of all through the works of the Holy Spirit. “It is critical for us to distinguish the difference between expressing a clear difference of opinion and that which manifests a contentious spirit.”¹ A contentious spirit clouds sound reasoning with negative characteristics; pride and arrogance. Worse yet, a contentious spirit can threaten the harmony in Christian relationships and promote division among the church family in the same way the world promotes conflicts and dissension.

We are compelled to distinguish ourselves from the world’s negative behaviors because we have been bought with a Divine Price and belong to the kingdom of God. Jesus taught, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and be trodden under the foot of men.” (Matthew 5:13) Our Church Covenant obligates us to model Christian behavior for the world to see our commitment to our beliefs. The godly way to resolve conflict is to pray seeking the guidance of the Lord and instructions from the Word. Then, we should surrender our will and emotions over to the control of the Holy Spirit so that we might peaceably, lovingly, and humbly achieve common ground with singularity of purpose for the edification of the church. Thereby, we will glorify the LORD.

*For to God we are the fragrance of Christ among those
who are being saved and among those who are perishing.
[II Corinthians 2:15, Holman Christian Standard Bible]*

¹Turner, William C. (2002). *A Journey through the Church Covenant*. Valley Forge, PA. Judson Press ,
pg. 63

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Dialogue Web ~ Interactive Bible Lesson
Avoid a Contentious Spirit

Our Holy God is a God of relationship and He is concerned with the quality of our relationships with one another. A contentious spirit breeds trouble. Contention is often manifested as a perverse and wearisome tendency to quarrels and disputes. If one is not careful the outcome can be discord, strife, resentment, and bitterness, all of which are sinful carnal behaviors that can be totally destructive to the church body. The Bible says where there is strife there is every evil work (James 3:16). Moreover, we are to guard against any root of bitterness springing up which causes trouble and defiles many. Instead we are to pursue peace with all people and holiness (Hebrews 12:14-15).

In Romans 12:6-21, the apostle Paul describes how we ought to behave toward one another. He illustrates that the body of Christ will function effectively only if God’s spirit of love is the overriding influence. In presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, we ought to strive for the harmony that is needed for the spiritual gifts to operate fully. How often has a contentious spirit been a barrier to God’s divine purpose for the gifts—edification of the body of Christ?

Frequently in life we recognize a contentious spirit in others, but seldom do we recognize those same qualities or behaviors within ourselves. A continual examination of our motives when a disagreement arises certainly would provide a necessary checkpoint to aid in preventing a dispute from escalating into a situation that dishonors God and disrupts the body of Christ. We ought to be willing to learn and obey the principles the scriptures teach so that we can solve disputes in a loving and Christ-like manner. How do the scriptures guide us in times of disagreements?

<i>Guiding Questions</i>	<i>What the Scripture Says</i>	<i>Class Discovery Points</i>
1. What are some signs of a contentious spirit? Do you recognize any of these signs in your life? 2. Discuss some disputes you are aware of that got out of hand. How could this have been prevented? 3. List and discuss some good principles for resolving disputes in the church. 4. Who rules in the church?	1. 1 Corinth 1:10 1 Corinth 11:16 1 Corinth 12:25-27 2. 1 Corinth 3:2-3 Romans 16:17-18 3. Hebrews 12:14-15 Galatians 6:10 1 John 4:4 4. 1 Timothy 3:15 Ephesians 1:22-23 Matthew 16:18	Application (s) to the church. 1. 2. 3. 4.

Class Summary Statement

Avoiding a contentious spirit is essential because...

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Lesson Summary

Our Church Covenant acknowledges our commitment to *cheerfully* recognize the right of the majority to govern if we cannot unanimously agree. This principle helps us avoid a contentious spirit and enables us to submit to the will of God in all matters of the church. The use of this principle demonstrates our recognition of the destructive impact a contentious spirit has on the body of Christ. Obedience to this biblical principle is what distinguishes us as people committed to our relationship with God. It also brings legitimacy to the covenant we make with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Lord challenges us to overcome our natural response and reactions to disagreements. A contentious spirit leads to harmful and broken relationships among the people of God. Satan is masterful in using worldly attitudes to create dissension in the church. Maintaining a covenant relationship is not easy. God knows that we are human and many of our values and defense mechanisms are conditioned by experiences outside of the church. He promises in His Word that the power to fulfill our covenant relationship with Him and each other has been provided. *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)*. Our part is to yield to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and obey; it’s the only way we will maintain the unity of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the origin of unity in the church. This obedience brings glory and honor to God.

Going Deeper (Journal Writing)

1. Is it harder for you to be a gracious winner or a good loser? Why is that and how do you seek to change that failing?
2. Describe a situation in which a winner may actually be the loser.
3. What is God revealing to you in difficult situations about your pattern in handling differences of opinions?

Closing Prayer:

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Where we are in the Church Covenant... *

HAVING BEEN LED, AS WE BELIEVE, BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior; and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness; to give it a place in our affections, prayers, and services above every organization of human origin; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God has prospered us, towards its expenses, for the support of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us, the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. *In case of difference of opinion in the church, we will strive to avoid a contentious spirit, and if we cannot unanimously agree, we will cheerfully recognize the right of the majority to govern.*

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to study diligently the word of God; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be kind and just to those in our employ, and faithful in the service we promise others; endeavoring in the purity of heart and good will towards all men to exemplify and commend our holy faith.

We further engage to watch over, to pray for, to exhort and stir up each other unto every good word and work; to guard each other's reputation, not needlessly exposing the infirmities of others; to participate in each other's joys, and with tender sympathy bear one another's burdens and sorrows; to cultivate Christian courtesy; to be slow to give or take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, being mindful of the rules of the Savior in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, to secure it without delay; and through life, amid evil report, and good report, to seek to live to the glory of God, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When we remove from this place, we engage as soon as possible to unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

Each month we will include a copy of the Church Covenant and highlight the current lesson. It is our hope that this will give the larger context for the passage being studied.