

Spirit of division



Never have I observed such thick darkness pervading families, communities, and countries alike as I have in these days. This darkness sadly results in many fractured relationships. The two main dividing topics at present (among others) include politics and covid matters resulting in fear and pride. The situation is becoming so desperate that I consider that there is a 'spirit of division' at work! If that is the case then we need to come in the opposite spirit, that of love and kindness. Not just in attitude, but deed.

Bible Perspective

Scripture is full of commands to love; 653 times the word 'love' is mentioned.

Jesus prays:

'I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.' John 17:21

'May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.' John 17:23

Paul instructs: 'Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.' Eph 4:2

'Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.' Eph 4:32

'Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.' 2 Corinthians 13:11

My observations

1. Anger, even though at times is thinly disguised, is unfortunately expressed on both sides.
2. Fear through discussions and being glued to TV news and media outlets day and night doesn't help. This can lead to ill health, sleeplessness and depression.
3. If you are blessed with a good mind and are articulate in sharing your views, do so in an attitude of humility not pride. Do not however, use your verbal gifting to control and manipulate others. People on the receiving end of this approach, feel bullied and in a worst-case scenario will either explode or shut down.
4. When I think of issues debated today, I'm reminded of Gnosticism a heresy which infiltrated the early church. This word 'gnosticism' is derived from the word 'knowledge' which in this heresy presented itself in several forms. Part of their belief was that if people were 'spiritual' or 'superior' then they could obtain this 'secret knowledge' and find important answers to subjects like salvation etc. In time this heresy was rightly stamped out in the church. I notice some people today also talk about their 'secret knowledge' which they have acquired from behind the scenes and if we only listen to them, we will find the truth. However,

they mustn't treat people as if they are dumb as they may have in fact done more research than people espousing so called 'secret knowledge'.

5. Through the internet anyone can generally find a person (or many more) to support their arguments. The danger however is when media giants use algorithms, a powerful tool where it picks up on your searches which then feeds you the information you want to hear, but unfortunately filters out information you should hear, but can't. Some personalities, like to see things in black and white terms only, although we need to acknowledge that we do not always know the whole truth and that some issues are complex.
6. Most people initially respond emotionally to a given situation, rather than also looking at it rationally. However, over time their perspective may change as they see the larger picture. That is good.
7. There are people who want to be noticed due to poor self-esteem. To have people follow their ideas makes them feel important.
8. Some people are simply on a crusade regardless of its significance. It provides them with life's purpose. I had a friend in Sydney who met some attractive young homeless women in his work lunch break. As he got to know them, he discovered that they were indeed very needy, and he had the means to impart his faith and set them upon a new pathway. Even though he was cautioned about spending time with them he ignored advice and eventually died from a drug overdose. People on a crusade can lose perspective and alienate people.

Useful guidelines:

1. Be kind and respect people even if you disagree with them.
2. Decide according to your conscience your position even though it may not always be a popular choice. Most feel they have a legitimate reason for the stance they have taken.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for advice. Many want help in this area and others are willing to give it.
4. Have a fast from social media, it is refreshing!
5. Refuse to be manipulated and controlled by others.
6. Walk humbly before God and people and be open to ideas that may be contrary to yours. Apologise when your attitudes are not always healthy.
7. My main approach in talking to others on sensitive issues is to seek to discern a person's spirit. If they are insincere, divisive, controlling and out for a battle, then I'm not interested in dialoguing with them. For years I corresponded with a friend in a leadership position in the USA. At one stage my wife and I even visited him. Our friendship unfortunately came to an end when he sent me an article he agreed with, which stated that the writer hoped the current President would 'burn in hell!' I wanted nothing to do with that attitude which is strongly against Biblical teaching of love. Discernment is essential. It's possible to be right and wrong at the same time. Choose your company. A friend of mind wrote, 'The true state of our spiritual maturity is shown more in the way we disagree with a person than in the way we agree.'
8. Keep Jesus the 'Prince of peace' (Isaiah 9:6) at the centre of your life. This is best achieved through prayer and worship, acknowledging that He is sovereign and ultimately in control of world affairs.

Conclusion

I find it so enriching and a privilege to relax with friends of different political persuasions and different approaches to covid. Even though we may disagree with people, creating a spirit of goodwill does go a long way to overcome a spirit of division. Each one of us can do our part to honour the injunction to 'strive to live at peace with all people'.

Resources:

Life of the Beloved, by Henri Nouwen

The Father Heart of God, by Floyd McClung

What's so amazing about Grace? By Philip Yancy