

JANUARY 17, 2024 WEDNESDAY - DAY 10

PRAY THAT WE WOULD NOT PROVOKE ONE ANOTHER

GALATIANS 5:26

There were two classifications of Christians in the Galatian Churches. One group believed that they had attained a level of freedom from any restraint whatsoever. They were in danger of turning liberty into license. They were proud of their "freedom." The second group was more timid and scrupulous. The first group would "provoke" the second group to do that which the law forbids, implying that they were afraid to do so. The second group would be prone to "envy" the "freedom" of the first group. (See also Rom. 14:1 - 15:3 and 1 Cor. 8.)

PROVOKING WITH PRIDE

Having previously discussed the fruit that defines a spirit filled life, Paul now lists some things that detract from it, one of which is "provoking one another." It indicates an attitude of combat. One translation reads, "Challenging one another to rivalry." One Greek word translates as two or more English words vain glory or becoming conceited or boasting without basis. This not only leads to pride, but also causes one to provoke another. Such people have a haughty attitude, a holier than thou attitude based on the fact that they keep the law better or understand the law better than others. The legalistic attitude evident among many of the Judaizers would breed this kind of mindset.

When one bases his life on the keeping of a code of laws, he invariably measures his life by how well he behaves. When he does well, he tends to boast of his accomplishment. This attitude provokes others.

Someone has well said, "Conceit is the only disease that makes everyone sick except the one who has it." Egotistical pride seems to provoke everyone around us. That is why people loved to hate Muhammad Ali, who blatantly boasted, "I am the greatest." The story goes that Ali was on an airplane when some turbulence prompted the pilot to flash the "Fasten Your Seat belt" sign.



As the flight attendant asked the champ to comply, he responded truculently, "Humppff! Superman don't need a seat belt!" She responded, "Superman doesn't need an airplane, sir, now fasten your seat belt!"

The world is indeed a better place because Michelangelo never said, "I don't do ceilings" (the Sistine Chapel) or da Vinci did not object to painting church walls ("The Last Supper"). Aren't you glad John Bunyan did not insist on a cash advance before writing Pilgrim's Progress?

What if William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions, had insisted on union wages? What if Jesus hadn't been willing to, "humble himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8)

Leonard Bernstein, the famous symphony conductor, was once asked what was the most difficult instrument to play in the orchestra. Without hesitation, he replied, "Second fiddle, I get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second fiddle with as much enthusiasm, or second French horn, or second flute now that's a problem. And yet, if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

A conceited, vainglorious person is certain to provoke others to dislike and criticize him. It is thus very difficult to preserve brotherly love in a group where one or more persons is puffed up with pride, thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think (Rom. 12:3). "Let us not be" is a present middle subjunctive verb in the Greek, meaning "let us cease becoming vainglorious," a word used only

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here in the New Testament. "Provoking" means "to call forth, to challenge to combat."

UNDERSTANDING WITH PATIENCE

All of us have people in our lives who "rub us the wrong way," irregular people who irritate us. Someone has suggested the first question we will ask when we get to heaven is, "What are you doing here?" They may ask the same thing of us! Proverbs 14:29 states, "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding." The nature of understanding is linked with a patient spirit towards one another.

- Understanding how patient God is with us
- Understanding some of the life experiences that make people peculiar
- Understanding that the Father brings just such people into our lives to knock off the rough edges of our character so that we might better reflect the image of God's Son.

If everyone in our congregation were like us in thought, word, and action life would not only be boring, but also our own growth in grace would be stunted. Pray that we would not become easily provoked and that we would not provoke one another.

**Let us not become conceited,
provoking one another,
envying one another.
Gal. 5:26**



PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

1. Ask God to show you how to express special thanks to your associate ministers, the church secretary, and custodian. Let them know how you appreciate them.
2. Think of several people in the congregation who have "provoked" you in one way or another. Perform an act of kindness without their knowing who did it.
3. Pray that God would multiply a spirit of humility in your own heart and that of others in your congregation.
4. Pray that God will bless you with "thick skin" and deliver you from being easily hurt.

**Envy is the effluvium that oozes
From the constant comparison
Of oneself to others.**

**Where the fruit of the Spirit
Is manifested, provocation
And envy cannot dwell.**