

Debate

War with Words

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 20-Nov-99; Tape #421

Have you listened to America lately? I mean really listened to America? Have you turned on the radio or the TV, or scanned the pages of our newspapers and magazines and our books to see what is happening in America, to hear what America is saying, to hear what is going on in America?

What do you find? Sure, we find a lot of immorality. That jumps out at us. There's a lot of sex and violence on TV, and even on our radio waves there is lots of vulgarity. There are just a lot of despicable things that are going on there.

What we're really seeing, or maybe what we're hearing, is conflict, strife, contention. This seems to be the way things are going in America. We're always at each others' throats about something. There is always a fight to be had out there.

What is happening in America is that there are two major world views that are vying for popularity. They're in a life and death struggle with each other. The one is what we would probably term *progressive*—a progressive world view. The other is a traditional world view.

Both sides have good and bad points. You don't want to live in the past, but on the other hand you don't want to get so far out on the cutting edge that you're ahead of the curve. Neither way—the progressive way, nor the traditional way—is what we in the church would call *godly*.

We tend to side more with the traditional side of things because it at least contains a modicum of biblically based values. We tend to side more, let's say, with the conservative Southern Baptists than we would the progressive Lutherans and Methodists. Like I said, neither side is really right because neither one of them is totally biblically based.

Politically and socially we would call the traditional side "conservative," and the progressive side we'd call "liberal." The church of God belongs in neither camp. We are neither conservative *nor* liberal. We're not moderate. We're not even on the scale, because we have an entirely different way of life, an entirely different way of looking at things. The point of all this is that sometimes we can get pulled or dragged into this great debate between progressive and traditional, liberal and conservative.

I listen to talk radio in my car. The main station here in Charlotte is WBT, and they are a talk-radio station. If you want to get any news off the radio you have to listen to them. Sometimes you bleed over into one of the shows after the news.

If you listen to talk radio you know it's hard not to pull for one side or the other in their arguments. Sometimes it's even hard to resist calling in and making your two cents worth known, because these numb-skulls here that are hogging the air waves don't know a thing about the way things really are, or should be. It's so uneasy to find ourselves involved, if

nothing else, just mentally, in these arguments that are constantly going on. There is constant conflict, constant contention going on out there in the world.

Now Americans debate social problems. They debate politics. They debate international relations. They debate the military, law, immigration, criminal justice, sports, education, environmental issues, religion, food, wine, tobacco, art, music, literature, history, architecture, science, technology, entertainment, public works, charity, clothing, transportation, communication, language, hobbies, exercise, commerce, finances, economics, landscaping, home-improvements, auto care, race, ethnicity, health, medicine, child care, sex, youth, senior citizens, death, taxes, and safety. Did I leave anything out? You get the point. We debate everything. We will take *anything* and make it an issue for a quarrel, for an argument, for fisticuffs, for war.

In the church unfortunately, we are not immune to debate. Lately doctrinal, governmental, and methodological issues have been debated very heavily and hotly and endlessly within the church. Some think this is very healthy for the church, that we should get everything out in the open and debate it like men, and come to some conclusion. But I would like to show you today that the Bible takes a very dim view of debate, argument, discord, and strife. And we should be striving ourselves to put ourselves above the fray.

There are a lot of people out there that just love these Church of God chat rooms. I don't want to put them all down just flat because some of them are fine. There are very few that are fine. Most of them end up (if they are open to more than people who are of like minds) in arguments. To use some computer ease, they end up flaming each other pretty badly on these things. It's not a good scene. It's not a good place to be.

About 1992-93 I belonged to CompuServe. That was my Internet service provider. I would go in every once in a while to check out the Worldwide Church of God area on CompuServe. (I should say "Contra-serve," because that is the way it ended up.) You would go in there and there would be several strands of argument that you could jump in on at any time. They ranged from the nature of God to makeup, to government, to new moons, to calendar issues, ...you name-it. One of the main strands was Herbert W. Armstrong, and what a scoundrel he was. There was almost always one there that somebody was trying to take Herbert Armstrong to task for something.

What we found was that there were basically two or three camps, and they would sit there and slug it out verbally, flaming each other right and left about the way they believed. They usually ended up abbreviating everything. There were the people who believed the *new way*, which was the way that the Worldwide Church of God changed things into, and there were the ones that believed the more traditional way. Usually you got somebody who was on one side, and they would say something inflammatory, and then the other side would have to jump in there and just slam the guy for saying what he said.

If you looked at it in any objectivity, you'd say, ... "And these people call themselves Christians?" You wouldn't think it from the way that supposedly "converted church people" were talking with

other converted church people, giving them all the benefit of the doubt.

I'd like to show you that God is not necessarily on the side of anybody who stoops to debate. Isaiah 58 is on the context of fasting. If you know anything about Isaiah 58, the first part of the chapter is about the way NOT to fast. The last part of the chapter is about the way you SHOULD fast. Well, this thing about debate is in the first part of the chapter. So already it's linked up with something that is negative—fasting that is not godly. Isaiah 58: 3 is a question that the Israelites are asking God.

Isaiah 58: 3 Why have we fasted, they say, and You have not seen?
Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?

The obvious answer to that is because you are fasting wrong.

Isaiah 58: 3-4 In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.

Isn't that interesting, that in this context of fasting God links debate with strife and striking another person with your fists—fighting. It's taking the guy's nose and hitting or punching it. That's what He thinks of debate. What it is, He says, is using these methods to get your own way. The last part of verse 4 says, "To make your voice heard on high." They're trying to get God, in this case by the way they were fasting, to do *their* will. If we just take that principle out, debate is a method that we use to impose *our* will on other people.

I want to help you understand here that there is a great deal of difference between stating your case, let's say, in a legal way, or discussing an issue with one another. That's fine, but the difference comes in when we let it flare into an argument, or when we take on an attitude where it becomes a competition. Debate involves competition. It involves pitting yourself against the other guy. The attitude comes in when it is a desire to beat the other person, either mentally or physically, or in a sense of competition, to win out over them.

The thing that God hates about these contentions, about debate when it reaches this point, is the attitude behind the disagreement. Debate, as I'll use it today, is nothing more than verbal war. God hates the kind of discussion or argument that escalates into verbal war where two sides have pitted themselves against one another and have this desire to win, to beat the other person down, or to raise yourself up over them.

Debate is war waged with the pen or the tongue, ...or maybe in this day and age I should say at war with the keyboard. War, at its very heart, is nothing more than fighting to defend or advance one's self interest. We can see that in James 4: 1-3.

James 4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you?

James asked the question: "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" Listen now to what he says. He asks them this rhetorical question whose answer is obviously "yes."

James 4:1 Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

People do get pleasure out of beating other people, about being the victor, about having yourself a leg-up on the other guy.

James 4:2-3 You lust and do not have. [That's the desire there that's not good.] You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

He is saying here that war at its heart is trying to defend or fight for, to advance one's self-interest, and it is begun because somebody wants something for himself that maybe another person has. It can be a thing, it could be a piece of land, or it could be somebody's position. I'm thinking of it in terms of a position *above* another person, that somebody holds the high ground and the other person wants it so that he will get all the glory to himself.

So what is war but rank selfishness. This is the same kind of selfishness that led Satan to try to attack God on His very throne. It was his self-interest that led him to do that, and he chose to go to war against God, taking one-third of the angels with him. He did not submit to God in the fear of God. That's the standard, isn't it—submitting to one another in the fear of God? That's what we should be doing toward one another rather than going to war.

When we go to war, when we debate like this, when we engage in verbal warfare, we're not showing meekness and humility and gentleness and kindness and forbearance and self-control, or any kind of godly virtue. We're trying to win. We're trying to put ourselves over the other person.

Let's go to I Timothy 6 and start looking at some of the ways that Paul especially looks at this issue of debate. God's disapproval of debate is not only in the Old Testament, but it's very evident in the New. Here it is in I Timothy 6: 3.

I Timothy 6:3-6 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

Not "godliness with contention," but "godliness with content-*ment*" is going to get us further along in the long run. The word "debate" you noticed is not in here. The words *disputes*, *arguments* and *wranglings* however are good synonyms for it.

Notice the carnal attributes linked to this idea of debate. The first thing he mentions is "pride." When we engage in a debate, pride (other than self-interest, which is all a part of the same thing) is what drives us to want to win. We don't want to be seen by others, or even by ourselves, that we came out with less than we went in with, that we may have lost.

The next set of words he adds here is "knowing nothing." Ignorance. Paul calls it like it is, that such a person who is always engaging in debate, in disputing, in arguments and quarrels, really doesn't know anything, ...not the way God understands things. They may be very knowledgeable in other areas, but God says when it comes down to it, a person who is doing this really doesn't know a thing about His way, about what's right.

Next he mentions envy and strife and reviling and evil suspicions and vanity. And finally, without using the word, he talks about covetousness, ...thinking about making great gain.

In America and in the world in general, the ability to debate is considered a virtue. It was one of the big things in my high school where I graduated in Indiana. You were somebody if you were selected for the debate team. For some reason Indiana was big on debate teams. The guys and the girls that were selected for the debate team wore it like a badge. It was a great honor. Wouldn't you know it (from what I've heard, especially in my class) that a couple of those guys came out of college as lawyers. They were very good at arguing.

In this world debate can get you a long way, but to God it is compared to the works of the flesh. Isn't that interesting? Mr. Armstrong used to always say, "If the world builds something up and makes a big deal out of it, you could pretty much guarantee that God's agin' it, that it's wrong, that it's bad."

Notice the context of this passage is "true doctrine." Paul calls it "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is what they were debating. They wouldn't even take Jesus' word for it, but they had to have some sort of argument. This is why He says they don't know anything, that they're debating Jesus' own words. It really shows their ignorance. A debating disputing attitude, he says, opposes the truth. A spiritual mind accepts and devours the truth.

Remember, we hunger and thirst after righteousness, don't we, if we're converted? But the carnal mind is constantly seeking to *disprove* it, coming up with arguments (both clever and ignorant) to believe otherwise. See, they don't want to believe it. The carnal mind is what? Enmity against God. It's fighting God all the time. It is this enmity that's driving them to debate because they really don't want to believe it. So they argue. They don't argue to God. They know they can't win. But whom do they argue with? Well, the minister, and all the brethren, ...as many as they can get to.

They'll drag you into a corner, and they'll talk to you and try to convince you that what they believe is right, even though those pure wholesome words spoken by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are very plain. They'll chew your nose off if you dare tell them that they're wrong, and give them a Scripture that refutes it, because they are driven by enmity, hatred, hostility.

That's just the way the carnal mind is made up. It's at war with God, and debate is war with words.

Notice he says the carnal mind is obsessed with debate, with disputing, with arguing, ...and he says over words. Haven't we seen that? "Oh, this word in the Greek means this, and if you go look in the works of Socrates you'll find out that he used it this way, and so what it means is our doctrine has been totally wrong. The works of Socrates prove it." I don't know of anyone who actually has done that, but that is the sort of thing people do. They'll make some way-out connection with something else that seems to prove their point in order to cast doubt on the very plain language of Scripture, because at their heart they're hostile toward God. And that is the problem with debate.

Notice what Paul suggests that we do. Does he say that we should seek to dispel their doubts? Does he say that we should engage them in their dispute? Does he say that we should give them in return as good as we took? No. What does he say? He's put it very simply and makes it so very easy for us to understand that we can all do it. He says in verse 5, "From such withdraw yourself." "Don't get involved in it," he says. "Turn your back." "Walk the other way."

Now there are ways that you can do this nicely and civilly, but basically he says shut their mouth by not listening to them, not engaging them in debate. It's worthless to us. You shouldn't even put up with it. Don't square off with them. It won't work. They're very cunning. They've been doing this a long time, and they have a very powerful human nature behind them that just looks for chinks in the armor. They find their way in and they make those holes as wide as they can.

Most of us are not smart enough, or quick enough, to defend against those things. So don't stoop to their level. Don't argue with them. You will not convince a carnal minded person to accept the truth because God has not opened his mind to understanding spiritual things. It's very plain from I Corinthians 2 that a carnal mind only understands carnal physical things. It takes an act of God, an act of His grace, to open our minds to spiritual things, and only when that happens will the debating stop.

The English word *debate* means *a contention by words or arguments*. Very simple. It's pretty easy to understand. It's kind of interesting where it comes from. It's etymological history came from the French before it came into the English. It meant *to beat down*, like you would take somebody you didn't like and with your baseball bat beat them down into the ground.

The French got their word from the Latin. The French got their whole language from the Latin. But do you know what the word means in Latin? It means *to battle*. I believe it's *battere* in Latin. It means *to war*, to battle, to fight. That's where we get our word *battle*. That's all debate is, except they added the prefix *de*, which could mean *from*, *down*, or *out*. You're beating another person down. You're going to battle when you debate.

Modern English has cleaned it up. Now it means *to argue*. It doesn't have that edge to it that *to beat down* has. The Greek word that lies behind the New Testament idea of debate is *eris*. This means *a dispute, a quarrel, strife, discord, an argument*. The apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer to use this word *eris*. It's very interesting, it's always negative.

It's always in a bad sense. It's always in connection with actions that endanger the church, ...not just individual members, but the church too as a whole. Remember in the sermon last week he said that we need to learn to think objectively and not subjectively. When we're thinking subjectively we're thinking inwardly, to ourselves, as to how it affects us. But when we're thinking objectively, we're thinking more broadly.

In Ephesians 4, Paul says that we need to think first of all of the body of Christ, the church, (a more objectively way of thinking), because if one member suffers, they all suffer. And if one member rejoices, we all rejoice with him. That's the way we have to think as members of God's church.

The underlying meaning of the word *eris* (strife, debate, variance, contentions—those four ways as it is translated in the old *King James*) is primarily verbal controversy that has escalated to pitched battle. There's nothing wrong with verbal controversy. You can work that out in a spirit of a sound godly mind. But when it escalates to the level of a pitched battle, then you have *eris*. Mostly in modern Bibles it's translated *strife*, or *contention*—battle, war.

It is my opinion that *eris* is a chief cause of the church's disunity in this time, because we've not been trying *not* to debate. We have not been watching out whether we've gone to this point where we've engaged in pitched battle with our brethren over words, over doctrine, over what have you. Too many people in the church, or those who have left the church, have opinions about church doctrine and almost always about some very picky twiggy matter that doesn't have much at all to do with salvation. They would rather argue about these things than accept the simple truth of God's revelation.

We in the church have to learn to discern this attitude of debate, and as Paul advised, withdraw from it, whether it's in ourselves, or whether we see it in another. Don't give it a chance to grow. Cut it off at the pass. Stop it right here and begin to grow in unity, because you know that war, whether it is physical war with swords or bombs or bullets, is destructive.

That's the reason for war. Rush Limbaugh says the reason for the army is to kill people and destroy things. A very simple understanding. And that's the reason for war, because somebody wants to kill people and destroy things. If you get two people in the same room who want to do it to each other (but with words), you have debate, and that should not be in the church.

Go now to II Corinthians 11:1-4. Paul was very concerned about this attitude of debate in the church. And in Corinth he was very very concerned about them, because remember this was a church that tended to be pretty raw.

II Corinthians 11:1-4 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel

which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it.

Very interesting. What he is saying here is that those who are crafty enough, skilled enough in debate, can deceive us or corrupt us into leaving the purity of the faith once delivered. What he says here is that God's word is not very hard to understand. Mr. Armstrong used to say that a grade school child could understand God's truth. It's not that difficult if you just take things pretty much at their face value. It's pretty easy to understand.

But debaters always want to complicate things. That's one of the rules of debate—complicate matters, argue over trivialities, side track the issue into some little twiggy matter which they say is the keystone to the whole argument, and if this domino falls, all the rest will fall, and the argument, the doctrine, or whatever that you're talking about will fall like a house of cards.

They also dwell on exceptions. "Oh, it's the exception that proves the rule," is one of their favorite sayings. Or they do a lot of "what ifs." "What if you had this situation, and you were walking down the street, ...and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, wouldn't you feel, ...blah, blah, blah, blah, blah?" Pretty soon you're saying, "Well yeah. That sounds like that's right. I'd probably act just like that." Pretty soon they have you convinced into disagreeing with what the Bible says. Debaters normally have been doing it for a long time and they're very skilled, and whether they acknowledge it or not, they know all the tricks. They've learned them by sheer practice.

Now Paul warns that if we listen to this, we just might buy into it. We just might be persuaded that they're right. Mr. Armstrong said, "Don't you ever think that you can't be deceived," ...and he was right. Do you know what God says through this same Paul in I Corinthians 1, right at the last few verses? He says, "God chose the weak and the foolish of the world to confound the wise and the mighty." That's you and me—the weak and the foolish.

God laid out His way of life very simply so those of us who are weak and foolish could understand it, but debaters and Satan are not playing by those rules. They are cunning. They are tricky. They try their very best to confuse us (the weak and the foolish). And they succeed more than they should because people listen. Paul says if you just don't listen to it you'll be so much the better. And please don't try to argue against them, because you're just egging them on. You're stooping to their level. The best thing to do is to withdraw yourself.

It is only by the grace of God that we grasp what that simple way of life is anyway. Do we think that we're strong enough to go toe-to-toe with somebody who may just be backed by Satan the Devil himself, trying to wrest God's spirit away from you by destructive heresies, cunning words, arguments over trivialities, endless genealogies (he says in one place), little things that don't matter.

Do you want to take Satan on? His ministers appear as angels of light he says in another place. Are you able to match Satan and all the trickery and cunning that he has developed over how many thousands or maybe millions of years? He convinced one-third of the angels who should have known better. Do you think you would fare any better with one of his ministers? That's an interesting way to think about it, isn't it, especially if you're humble and you remember that God chose the weak and the foolish.

It's the fact that we don't allow Satan to deceive us that will confound the wise and the mighty. They'll say, "How in the world did these people who hardly had any education, didn't have the background, didn't know all this stuff from Socrates to Descartes to Einstein, but still they grasp the truth, simple as it was, and held onto it and didn't allow anybody to wrest it away from them?" That's what's going to just blow them away—that the great minds rejected it, and the simple minds took it for what it was worth and ran with it and entered the Kingdom of God ahead of them.

If we're not guarding the truth by living it, it will probably begin to slip from us and make us an easier target for Satan. One of the ways we can stop guarding it is to engage the debater, because we're allowing him to attack us, ...and that's not very smart.

Let's go to Titus 3 and we'll see some more. Paul talked about this quite a bit because he was very concerned. You've got to remember that he was dealing with a culture, primarily in Asia Minor and in Greece, that had grown up for hundreds of years as centers of philosophy. He himself had to go up against some of these people. Remember how he had to go about talking to the people in Athens because they were so steeped in philosophy. The people that God called out of the world were in this culture, and so Paul had to constantly help them to face this.

Titus 3:9-11 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Wow! That is hard harsh language. If I could paraphrase what he says here, he says, "Stay away from stupid researches, from genealogies that you'll *never* be able to figure out, from argumentative debates and fights over the law, because these things will get you nowhere, and are absolutely empty."

What he says is these debates are a waste of your time. They're worthless to you. I know some people think that they enhance their Bible study by hearing the opinions of others. But Paul says, "Don't do it." It's worthless and useless. It doesn't help. You're being corrupted from the pure word by hearing all these carnal arguments. It's not helping.

He's writing this epistle to a church pastor, Titus, and debate is a good part of the instruction. This book is only three chapters long. In other places he says, "Cretins are always liars." Evidently on Crete there was a problem with this. There was a lot of debating and disputing and philosophizing, and so Paul had to warn Titus, ..."Make sure you teach your people about this because they need to be guarded from this. They're surrounded by it all the time."

So he instructs Titus in verses 10 and 11 what to do when faced with a "member" who continues in these practices. He says, "Get rid of them. Don't let them in the door." He really uses strong language in this condemnation here. He says such a person is divisive. That's one of the main reasons why a church pastor will ever disfellowship a person—because they're causing division. A debater, an arguer, a quarreler—one who is doing this unprofitable and useless activity of stirring up the brethren—is divisive. We shouldn't have anything to do with

such a person, so he says, "You, Titus, as the church pastor, show him the door. It's not doing anyone any good."

He also calls this person "*warped*, and sinning." The New King James calms this word *warped* down a little bit. It means *perverted*, *twisted*. This person's mind isn't right. It's off kilter. It's off balance. That's why he uses such strong language and tells Titus, "Get rid of the fella if he continues in such a thing after two admonitions, because this warped character will begin to affect the rest of the church, and he also calls himself condemned." It's like he himself passed sentence on himself, and said, "I need to be kicked out of the church."

He's going to blare it out to everybody that he's a debater. Everybody in the church is going to know, because everyone in the church has probably been backed into that corner before and held captive while this guy gave his argument over such and such a trivial matter, ...or maybe a big matter that he really disagrees with. The church will have peace after that person is shown the door, which is what we're after, isn't it?

I get from this that a debater is just as dangerous to the congregation, and maybe even more so than someone who is committing more obvious sins like fornication and stealing. You want to know why I think that? Because normally fornication and stealing is between the church member and God, or maybe between one or two other people. But debate sucks in the entire church. Anyone within the sound of that person's voice could be corrupted and deceived, and it could cause the church to divide. So Paul says, "You've got to make a stand against these people. Show them the door after the first and second admonition. Give them a chance to repent, but if they keep it up, it's best to withdraw yourself from them by asking them to leave."

Paul followed through here. He didn't just say that the church member should withdraw himself from debaters, but also the church pastor should get in there and say, "Enough is enough. We're not going to give you any more chance to deceive the people." Debate causes division and disunity, and aren't we all trying to come back into unity, to return to that unity that we have with God and with one another? Debate is not going to cut it.

Let's go to Galatians 5. I want to show you this. I've used this term in the past in this sermon, but I just want to let you see it in black and white.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, [We would expect all of these to be works of the flesh, wouldn't we? These are obviously carnal things to do.] sorcery, hatred, contentions, [Contentions is the word *eris*, elsewhere translated *strife* or *debate*. I think the *King James Version* has *variance*.] jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Does that nail in the final nail in the coffin of debate? Contentions (*eris*), strife, debate, are

works of the flesh. Those of us who have them will not inherit the kingdom of God. Pretty straight shooting by Paul.

We tend to think of debate as a benign sin, if we even think of it as a sin at all, but to God, He calls it a work of the flesh. It is definitely "missing the mark" (*hamartia*)—sin.

This is in another of Paul's list that he gave here in Romans 1. He had just been talking about how most in the world rejected God, how they had shown their enmity against Him, and He gave them over then to a debased mind. Remember all that?

Romans 1:28-30 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; [These are things that that he's going to name that don't fit within God's way of life. They are not proper.] being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife^{eris}: contentions, also translated *debate*], deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, ..."

Do you see the class that this sort of attitude and action is in? It's up there with some of those big sins we normally think of, like adultery, fornication, murder, idolatry, debate. Isn't that interesting. God takes a pretty dim view of it.

Ephesians 5 doesn't use the word *eris*, but it's got some interesting synonyms

Ephesians 5:5-7 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, ... [This is the result of people being deceived by empty words] ...for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.

"Withdraw yourself," he says.

Now this is a very serious sin. We don't normally think of it as a serious sin, but it is. It just creates division and disunity, and it pulls people away from God, ...and he says this shouldn't be among us. This is the sort of thing that gets God's wrath up.

In Jude he's talking about these apostates that will come in the end-time.

Jude 16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts;

It's very interesting that the word *lusts* has come up again and again when we're talking about people who have this sin.

Jude 16-19 ...and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons who cause divisions,*not having the Spirit*.

Very interesting. You could take from that, that those who are engaged in debate (they do it as a habitual practice), don't have God's spirit. They are unconverted. They're carnal as all get-out. They are probably tares, we would call them. And what does Paul think? Avoid them. Withdraw from them. Don't get in a pitched battle with them.

It's time to begin to look at how we should react when a dispute arises. This is the example of Michael the Archangel and his dispute over the body of Moses with Satan.

Jude 8 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries.

I wanted to bring that in because the main source of debate these days is Herbert Armstrong, or any one of the leaders of any of the splinter groups. These debaters always seem to find something disagreeable about any one of them, and they will press that. They reject authority. That's very interesting too, because one of the major points of debate these days has been government.

Jude 8-9 ...[They] reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke you!

You might say, "Well, doesn't it say here that Michael the archangel engaged in a contention?" It's not *eris*. That's one of the bad things about translation. They'll often take two different Greek words and translate them into the same English word. This is not *eris*. The Greek word here is *diakrino*, which means *to judge through*. This is the literal translation. What this word *contention* here comes down to mean is that he had a *difference of judgment*.

Michael judged that Satan should not have the body of Moses because he would make use of it to his own ends. Satan had a different judgment. He wanted to get the body of Moses to use for his own end, and so they had a difference of judgment. In this case Michael was absolutely correct that the body of Moses should be hidden, ...even from Satan, and so he disputed about the body of Moses with Satan.

Now Michael is a lot stronger than you and I. We could not dispute with Satan over something and win, but Michael can, especially when he did what he did. He said, "The Lord rebuke you." He put the battle in God's hands. He didn't take it into his own. That's Michael's example. "Let God do the rebuking," is what we can get out of that. Even if you have a difference of opinion,

it's not your position to rebuke, to get into a fight, to be the rod of God. Michael said, "I'll let God handle this."

Let's go to Ephesians 6 and look at the armor that God has given us for this fight. Remember, we're fighting not against flesh and blood—other people. We're fighting against the Prince of the power of the air, ...so God gives us armor.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Notice that just from the standpoint that if you put on God's armor you will be strong, but you'll be strong in the Lord. You won't be strong in your *own* might, you'll be strong in the power of *His* might. Remember, we're still the weak and the foolish, and it's only because Jesus Christ stands in for us that we have any strength whatsoever.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Notice he didn't say "attack against the wiles of the Devil." He says, "to stand."

Ephesians 6:12-13 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Notice Paul's thrust here. It's all defensive. When you "take a stand," normally that means you are outnumbered, outgunned, and the area you have control of is very small. You take a stand to defend that last little bit of ground. Paul says that when it's all said and done, what Christ wants to see is that you stood, ...not that you took the fight to the enemy. All He wants to see is that we stood.

Ephesians 6:14-16 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith,

Notice what he says "*above all*." We take a *defensive* piece—the shield—and we stand behind it because it's our faith in God's truth, in God Himself, that's going to give us the most strength. If we really believe these things, then that will give us the strength that we need to stand.

Ephesians 6:16 ...taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Look who's attacking... It's the wicked one, and we're to stand there with our shield held out before us so that it will soak up all those darts, those arrows that are slung at us.

Notice he doesn't say, "Make sure you have your bow ready to throw some more darts back."

Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation [protect your head], and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

So he says, "Ah-ha! There's an offensive weapon!" But you know what, a sword is also a defensive weapon. Not only can you attack with a sword, but you can also defend yourself with a sword. That's on the other hand. You have a shield on one arm, but your other arm and hand is holding that sword to protect that side of your body.

Ephesians 6:18-20 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that in it, I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Who does the offensive work in the church? The apostle, and maybe the ministry in a smaller way. But he said, "Do all these things, and pray for me that I may go out and speak boldly." It seems kind of funny. Here he was in jail, and he was asking them to pray that he would still be able to accomplish this mission that God had given him to do. He's the one that goes out there and does any of the offensive maneuvers.

It's kind of interesting that these are not attacks. They are proclamations. You didn't see Mr. Armstrong engaging Billy Graham or the pope in a debate. Mr. Armstrong went out, and he spoke the gospel. He proclaimed God's word. He didn't stand there toe-to-toe with the so-called great religious people of the day. He didn't engage in debate; he proclaimed God's way.

We can't go before we see our Standard's reaction to this. We've got to see what Christ did in this situation. I just want to set the stage here. Jesus had just said some very strong things about the scribes and the Pharisees and the lawyers.

Luke 11:53-54 And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.

I just wanted to show you that the scribes and the Pharisees and all these fellows back there in the first century were in the attitude of debate.

Matthew 16:1-4 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing

Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, When it is evening you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red; and in the morning, It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening. Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the sign of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. [And what did Jesus do?] He left them and departed.

He did what Paul said we should do. Did He answer their question? Did He accede to their request? He said, "No, you're wrong. You don't know how to discern the sign of the times. If I gave you a sign, you wouldn't understand it. The only sign I'm going to give this wicked generation is the one that came out of the Old Testament, which you should know already." And He turned His back, and He left. They didn't get in a tit-for-tat. They didn't argue, because Jesus didn't let them. He was very bold. He said what He wanted to say, and He turned around and He left.

Luke 20:20-26 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. And they asked Him, saying, Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? but He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have? They answered and said, Caesar's. And He said to them, Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.

Now we might not have the smarts to be able to do this, but I wanted to mention it to you. They presented Him with a question for debate, and what did He do? He immediately took control of the situation, and He turned to them, and He gave them a principle. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." He didn't get down into the nitty-gritty and give all the reasons *why* in the law that they should *not* pay their taxes to Caesar, or that they *should* pay their taxes to Caesar. He gave them an overall principle that was fitting for the situation, ...and He shut their mouths, because they couldn't fight the principle.

If you have to say something, dwell in principles, not in technicalities. Make sure you control the situation so that it doesn't become an argument. Most of us are not going to be bright enough to confound these people. Most of us, (and I include myself), are very slow when it comes to coming back with that zinger that will just shut their mouths, and you probably should not even want to do that. Jesus was the best at this sort of thing. He knew everything about

God's way, and He could immediately see the flaw in their argument and come up with something that would just shut them up and make them sit down. We're probably not that bright spiritually. The best thing for us to do is withdraw from them.

But if there is a principle that you think the person has not seen that you think might open their eyes, it's okay to say it. Don't say it in the attitude of debate though. Say, "Well maybe you don't understand, but the principle is that we should be loving toward one another [or whatever it happens to be], and this doesn't show love." Leave it general and broad, because if you get into specifics, that's where they make their money. They love those little trivialities and can twist them all around and make our head spin. So don't engage in a debate. If you have to say something, leave it on the level of a principle, but the best thing to do is turn around and walk away.

Let's go now to Romans 13:11-14. This is interesting because it's said in the context of the end-time.

Romans 13:11-14 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in [*eris*] strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Romans 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

Put on Christ's way of approaching these things, and if there is a weak member of the faith, receive him. But if he is disputing doubtful things, Paul says leave them at arm's length, not to disputes over doubtful things.

Romans 14:10-11 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? [That's what we're doing when we engage in debate.] For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

God is the One who's going to be judging these issues.

Romans 14:12-13 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Romans 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for

peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Debate is destructive. Debate is war. Paul here says that what we want is peace and edification. If our discussions with one another are not producing peace and edification, then we should withdraw ourselves from them. Debate is war with words, and it will not produce peace, and it will certainly not build up, which is what edification means. Debate tears down.

So if you will remember this—debate hides "de hook," and we don't want to be reeled in.

Have a wonderful Sabbath everyone!