

Works of the Flesh / Fruit of the Spirit

Part 9

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-26

Scripture Reading: Acts 15:36-40

INTRO:

There is a saying out there that says ‘you can tell a lot about a woman by her hands, for instance, if they are placed around your throat, she’s probably slightly upset’.

Well, we have come to something we have all done somewhere, sometime in our past, and we very well may succumb to some form of it in the future. And we are talking about contentions. It can be the destroyer of friends and relations; it can be the destruction of families. It has the potential to divide churches and has ruined many marriages. It can be found in the work place, in government, in almost any place in the world and can even be found in the aisles of the grocery store. Contentions, some people are characterized by it, others somehow seem to lack it naturally. The good thing is that it can be overcome and not become part of you or your life or character, the sad thing is that many people let it control them and define who they are.

H. CONTENTIONS

It can start as something small as giving your toddler a blue cup when they wanted a red one, it can be as big as the conflicts we are now seeing in the world, as in Europe with Ukraine and Russia or with Israel in the middle east. It can be a tiff of opinions between two people or as a global conflict involving the entire world.

There really is no person on earth that is not or has not been affected by some form of this ‘work of the flesh’ which Paul calls contentions.

Paul addressed this problem within the Corinthian church, exposing them in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 11 where he says;

For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.

And even Paul himself became caught up in such disagreement with Barnabas over John Mark, in Acts chapter 15 as were the verse read for us, starting in verse 37 it says;

Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.

38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.

39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.

Even the apostles were subject to this as recorded in Mark chapter 9 verse 33 and 34 saying that when they came to Capernaum;

... He (Jesus) asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?"

34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

You see, no one is immune to this thing called contentions not Paul, nor the apostles. But we know that such reactions or character traits ought not to be in Christians, just as Paul says in Titus chapter 3 verse 9;

But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law;

Here in this verse of Titus 3:9 and of 1 Corinthians 1:11 and verse 20 of Galatians chapter 5, we have the Greek word eris *er'-is*, Strong's number 2054 and it is translated as 'contentions' in the New King James Version.

In the King James Version it is translated as variance, in the Diaglot bible it is quarrels, and in the ESV, RSV, Holman's Christian Study Bible and Young's Literal Translation it is translated as strife's.

And all these different words are the words which the Online Bible Greek Lexicon dictionary defines eris *er'-is*, as saying it is;

contention, strife, wrangling, debate or variance.

Vine's dictionary also says it is;

strife, quarrel, especially rivalry, contentions, and wrangling...

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the English word contentions as;

A point advanced or maintained in a debate or argument.

Now all these definitions give us a bit of a ‘broad range’ of interpretation or understanding of this word. And when you have a broad range or term it becomes difficult to put the whole aspect of the word into one definite definition or category. Because it is not like the word uncleanness, which we have looked at in a previous message, because with the word uncleanness, it was used to cover a variety of different sins, but even though it covered a variety of different things into one group, the different things in that group can still be individually defined.

The problem I found with this word is that even though it sounded like a broader term when looking at the dictionaries and lexicons, the word itself was used as something narrow.

Like the Online Bible Greek Lexicon and Vine’s dictionary defined the word we are looking at as; contention, strife, wrangling, debate, variance, quarrel, and rivalry. And we ask ourselves ‘are these all the same’? Well, they all have something’s in common but they cannot be the same, if they were the same then there are words that are redundant in the English language. And even if they are all a little bit different, can the word contentions be used to cover them all? As the way uncleanness did with a host of other sins?

Well, I didn't think so, but what I did find, is that instead of it being a collection, or a broad term or, a group of things within this thing called contentions, I found there is more of a pattern or a process that involves all these words and others like it. A process in which when looked at the whole would include most of the words in the definitions we looked at and yet at the same time keeping them separate.

And the verse I will use to show concept is a verse from the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, Proverbs 17 verse 14 says;

The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.

From this verse, there are three words that I want to look at and they are the words strife, contentions, and quarrel. As I noted earlier the definitions of some of these words want to overlap others making it difficult to explain them individually.

And I will use parts of their original definition to define and explain this as we go, and illustrate how these words go together. I will again be using slides to show us this and I also put the empty chart in the back of your outlines for you to fill in for your own reference.

In Proverbs 17 verse 14 we have a process or a pattern of steps. And I will liken these to the steps of a traffic light,

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As we know, a traffic light always goes from green to yellow, from yellow to red and from red back to green and then the pattern repeats. And if we look at the verse, it starts with the ‘beginning of strife’, this is where it starts.

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This is the caution of yellow, I know you maybe thought I would start with green but not in this illustration, because we know that green means go and red means stop... and yellow is what ... caution.

And if you are filling in chart in the back of your outline, the proper word for each place will come up on the overhead so you don't need to guess which word goes where.

And as I noted earlier some of their definitions want to overlap so I will give you the definitions that best fit this illustration to avoid any overlapping. And we begin with this yellow circle of caution, and as the verse says is ‘the beginning of strife’. This word strife is the Hebrew word *maw-dohn* Strong's 4066 and in definition 1b of the Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon is the;

Slide 2 - (object) of contention

Object of contention

And just a note here, all the rest of the definitions will come from the same lexicon so I will not be naming it continually for the rest of the message. The object of contention is at the start of this whole process and is central to every argument.

Anything, listen, anything in this world can be that object, it can be immaterial like an idea, thought, or expression of any kind, it can be a preference, an opinion, a decision or desire. It can be any physical object or tangible object in our physical world, anything created or natural, anything in our world seen or unseen can be the object of this contention. And if that is too big of a thought, I'll simplify it for you with a very easy illustration;

All of you who think that coffee is gross say amen... well I kind of knew I would be alone on that one, and right away you know I'm picking for a fight. Now all of you who think that coffee is the best, most delicious, most soothing, comforting, satisfying, wonderful drink that man has ever invented, then nice and loud say amen... see I knew I had a church full of addicts. And right here we have an object of contention.

What is the object... coffee. You either love it or you don't, and in this case, it has nothing to do with anything moral or ethical or even legal. But this is where strife can begin, over an object, or as Solomon said in the verse 'the beginning of strife is like releasing water', if you allow the object or the different opinion of another person over this object affect you, have begun the process. This is where it begins. And as I said earlier it can be anything.

Even when we are young we have these things that are made the object of strife. As young boys we would say things like 'Chevy is the best and Ford is the worst, and if you look up Dodge in the dictionary it means "to avoid".' Well who am I kidding, even grown men still do this.

You see anything can become the object of contention, something that rubs us the wrong way when presented in favor by another, and this is why this one is yellow, the caution, because here we have to make the decision whether we want this to bother us or not. Whether if we will allow this object, this difference in opinion to affect our relationship with the other person. Because how we view or react to this object, or another person's opinion of this object, will determine how we view the other person. If we both like the object we will be friends, if we both hate it we will still be friends, but with a common enemy.

If one person likes it and one doesn't, we may become at odds with the other person. Even if it is over the like or dislike of coffee or what brand of pickup is the best.

And as I said there are so many things that can be the object and the one thing we must determine first before we do anything is check and see, is the object something moral, ethical, lawful, biblical or scriptural, or is it simply something that is preferable or just an opinion? All of these play a factor in our mind of how we view the object and we must proceed with caution and I will note back to this a little later on in the message.

Because the next step and next word in the verse is contentions.

The beginning of strife is like releasing water;

Slide – 5 Therefore stop contention...

The Hebrew word here is rib *reeb* Strong's 7379 and part of its definition of is to dispute. This is the stop sign, this is where the verse says we are to stop, when we get to the yellow, we take all things into consideration about the object and about the other person. In contentions we 'open our mouths' for lack of better words, we may give our opinion, our view, our angle of attack, our scriptural views and verses that support such.

And we can do this in a controlled manner with the other person, or do it in a friendly way, and we can have what would be called a...

Slide – 6 ...discussion

Slide – 7 or reasoning, but we do so with caution.

Because if we do not stop ourselves at contention, or have a controlled discussion or reasoning over the object, we will continue onto the final part of the verse which is...

Slide – 8 quarrel.

The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.

The word quarrel here in the Hebrew is the word gala‘ *gaw-lah’*

Strong's 1566 and in definition 1a2 says;

to break out (in contention)

The idea is to come out with it, to lay it all out there, and the reason I made this one green, is, not because it is good, but it is where we go for it, if we did not take caution at the yellow, or stop at the red where we are told to stop contentions, then just as the pattern goes, green follows red, we go head strong into the argument and we go all

out or in some case we go all in, depending in which way you were going in the first place, and we engage in a quarrel with the other person, and 99% of the time we achieve very little.

Remember this is not discussion or debating, no, that happens when it is a controlled and calm setting.

No, this quarrel is when we pull out all the stops, we pull out all the accusations we can find, we find all the mud we can sling in the heat of the moment. This is when we become obstinate, stubborn, unmovable, or pig headed, and most often what ends up happening is that we say things we don't really mean, we act in ways that we normally would not act.

This is why James said in chapter 1 verse 19 and 20;

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

But you see, Paul is not talking about quarrelling, he addresses this in other places of scripture as in 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 24a which says;

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all,

And in the requirements of a Pastor in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verses 1 to 3, requirements in which one sense, apply to all of us;

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

Now we will cover some of these in a future message.

Slide – 9 But quarrel is not the word we are looking at.

Paul says that the work of the flesh is contentions. And if we go back to our chart we began with the object of contention, the strife, the difference of opinion amongst people, and I will say it again, it can be anything in this world, anything can be the object of contention, but we must remember...

Slide – 10 it is not these objects that Paul is talking about.

He is talking about contentions, and as I said earlier, we have the two options that can come out of contentions which are discussion and reason, and these are not bad things, for even the Lord Himself said through Isaiah in chapter 1 verse 18;

"Come now, and let us reason together,"

And the author of Hebrews, in chapter 6 verse 1 says;

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

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but these are not what Paul is talking about either, these two are not what Paul is addressing as being sins of the flesh.

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He's talking about contentions, that middle step in the process, that red light where we are to stop according to Proverbs 17:14.

So what then is this middle step? What does this thing Paul calls contentions look like when he lists it as a work of the flesh?

In the introduction of this series I said;

Paul calls the first list 'the works of the flesh' and are the things that come out of man or the things that are done by the body of man. They are the things that 'are evident' as Paul says, they are evident or proof of the workings of the flesh in their physical form, evidence of what has taken place on the inside. Because the real problem is on the inside; the problem is actually, internal to the person. And it is what that unseen internal part wishes and does, that then becomes evident on the outside to others.

EOQ

That unseen part is what is on the inside of your soul. If you remember that empty chamber where things get mixed in and ignited, well this contention, this Greek word *eris* *er'-is*, is that wrangling of opinions and the Hebrew word *rib* *reeb* which is to dispute, is one of those sinful elements we mix into our hearts and then when let it come out it becomes an outward work of the flesh. It is that mixture in our soul to always dispute, to always add that negative opinion of the object, to always be of the different persuasions of the other person, no matter what the object is.

It is the one who always picks the other side of the issue, not that they even believe the other side but are one who always picks at the issue, that negative person in the room who simply has to disagree with everything and everyone simply to be controversial or always open that door that leads to a quarrel.

You know these people; nothing is ever to their satisfaction or standard, not just as their opinion, but an opinion that is always expressed in such a manner to lead to a contention or dispute.

Sometimes it is subtle sometimes it is out right blatant, but always with the intent to raise contentions to the next level, that place we are to stop before it has the potential to escalate. And remember I'm not talking about discussing something or reasoning through something, and not even about standing on our opinion on things, that's not what contentions is about. It's about the deliberate act of contending with the other person and not leaving the object of opinion alone.

And just as I have mentioned previously that chamber of our heart, where we mix things together with temptations, enticements and desire, contentions is more like a cooking pot in that place of the heart.

Most of these works of the flesh get mixed in and ignited and turn into sin from within our heart, this contentions is more like a simmering pot, that with each issue that arises or encounter that comes up they just take a scoop of this out of their heart and apply it to the conversation. Always cultivating that area of strife over the object, any object, no to simply to disagree or give opinion as in discussion or reason, but to put it out there as a jab, as a pointed stick in the side, often not only to express their opinion but simply to let you know that your view is invalid, wrong or immaterial, no matter which side of the argument they take.

It is as one internet article wrote;

These people never let anything go. They feel compelled to explain, defend, convince, convict, or just simply have the last word.

And before I get to showing us how this fits into your life, into your application of this piece of the bigger picture, I first want to give you a little illustration or warning of what it looks like when you try to catch or corner a contentious person about their contentions.

How many of you have ever worked with or handled pigs... some of you, it can be a challenge of both mind and body and a test of faith at the best of times.

When working with pigs or herding pigs you already know they are going to be stubborn, you know they are going to resist, and for every action you want them to do they will find a dozen other ways not to do it. That is where the term pig headed comes from.

With pigs, if you want them to go left, they go right, and if you want them to go right they go left, and if you want them to go forward well you soon learn that you're not going anywhere, pigs have like a 4 hooved ultimate parking brake system when it comes to not wanting to move forwards.

And if you do get the off chance of catching one of them by the hind legs and you think you got'em... you will be in for a real surprise.

Trying to catch or exposing contention in another person is something like trying to catch a pig, just when you think you have cornered it or caught there will be a lot of noise and the whole conversation will all go off in a different direction. And no matter how much you hold onto it or try to corner it, it always manages to slip out of your grasp, and you are left with nothing but the losing end of some quarrel that was your fault in starting. Oh it is an obvious thing, and everyone in the room knows it's there, it is right out there for everyone to see but to catch and deal with it is almost impossible coming from another person.

As the quote said, these people feel compelled to explain, defend, convince, convict, their view or just simply have the last word, even if it has to do with their own character of being contentious.

And the reason for this is because, I believe, a contentious person has other underlying issues in their heart. You see our tendency is just to call such a person a negative person or an argumentative person, but it's usually deeper than that, there are usually other underlying issues in that simmering pot of contentions. Things like bitterness, oh the vial poison of bitterness, it is the gall that can affect everything in your life and the lives of those around you, it is like a corrosive acid that eats every relationship around you. There can be things like anger in that pot, not that it comes out so much in their emotions, but alongside bitterness it remains a hidden anger and it usually it works in the background of their contentions.

Remember that contentions are that dispute or controversy over an object.

Other things like envy and jealousies which we will cover in a future message, can be a contributor to contentions, things like malice, discontentment's, and not least of all pride. All kinds of things in this mixing pot of the soul can be the brewery of contentions.

And if you try and expose someone of this internal sin, well you just might end up having a pig rodeo on your hands.

That is why we are to look to our own soul in regard to this sin, and to the word of God regarding this work of the flesh. To see myself in my interaction with other people in conversation. Do I always make my point paramount, do I make my opinion obstinate, must my view always be validated in the hearing of all; do I always have to put in my two cents when the conversation only needed half a penny?

There are some very vivid verses in the bible that show us such a person, and just a quick note here, when the bible talks about a wife or a husband in a certain light or aspect can apply both ways.

Proverbs 17:1;

Better is a dry morsel with quietness, Than a house full of feasting with strife.

Proverbs 25:24;

It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

And that goes the same if it is a contentious husband.

Proverbs 21:19;

*Better to dwell in the wilderness, Than with a contentious
and angry woman.*

This is where we can see that anger can be in that pot of contentions.

Proverbs 27:15; and 23:29

*A continual dripping on a very rainy day And a contentious
woman are alike;*

And the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping.

And lastly Proverbs 13:10a in the King James Version;

Only by pride cometh contention,

And why are these things written like this in the bible... because they are real, this is what a contentious person dose to other people, it drives them away, it detaches the relationship, it makes it hard for anyone to have a normal conversation because the argument or the quarreling potential is always present in the conversation with the other person.

So how do we fix this or avoid this, well to fix it very seldom will it ever work from someone from the outside, you are probably better off handling pigs. Unless you are someone who is very close and intimate with that contentious person, all the outsider will get a hold of is a hind leg pig and then it 'whoop' it's gone again and you are left with a quarrel that went nowhere.

No, this kind of thing can only be eliminated from within, and with great humility, and workings of the Holy Spirit. Because it is only we ourselves that can dump out that simmering pot of contention that is in our heart and get rid of the poison of being that contentious person.

And here is the sharper piece of that picture if you want to rid yourself of this sin called contentions, ask yourself, honestly ask yourself, am I a contentious person, and the way you answer is by looking at how I address the issues in my life, how do I address the objects in my life, how I respond to other people's opinions. What am I thinking when someone else's opinion comes to the conversation, do I think I have to put in my ore, and put down the other persons view and if I do, why?

And if you are very willing, ask someone you trust, and I mean really trust that they will be honest with you, and ask them in all humility, do you think I'm a contentious person? But before you ask them make sure you take all the fight out of the pig. And that means you ask in all honesty and humility, not with some back door to back out of the conversation if you start hearing things you don't want to hear.

And if you are the one being asked, be very very careful and treat the situation with utmost dignity and respect for the other person.

In the fornication message I talked about when children open their hearts to you as parents, in how we have to be very careful when they let us in. the same goes for any relationship in this situation, parent, child, friend, be honest and every careful.

And if what you find or are told that 'yes, this is in you, you are a contentious person', then ask the Lord to show you what it is in me that drives this thing, what is in that pot the makes me be like this, is it bitterness? Am I a bitter person? What is it that I'm bitter about? Is it anger? Am I angry? Is it through anger that for some reason I must oppose every thought or every opinion of others? Is it jealousy, envy, or just a bad case of self, putting me first in everything?

Because very seldom, I think if ever, are contentions just a trait all their own, saying ‘oh such and such is just an argumentative person’, or ‘they are just opinionated on everything’. I think there is always something driving this thing of contentions and it is up to you to find out what it is.

Check your heart, go to the word of God and ask Him for wisdom in showing you if there is anything in that chamber that drives your contention. Because I think once that invisible chamber of your soul is actually empty of things that drive contentions, contentions will cease. Just as Proverbs 22 verse 10 says;

Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; Yes, strife and reproach will cease.

The scoffer here we could relate to the many other bad things in our hearts, and also the devil that hinders us in our Christian walk, and when we deal with them and remove them, remove that evil spirit, remove the bad things from our hearts, contentions and strife and reproach will cease.

Now granted there are times when we need to speak up, and set things straight. Especially when it comes to things of doctrine or of scripture, but even these are to be done in love.

And if you want a simple tool for your life, one to get you started and live by, I have one that I have tried to follow myself as much as possible, not always successful because all of us are prone to weakness.

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But if you want a simple all-round help against this bad habit and tendency of contentions, then here are three steps or questions you can ask yourself when faced with almost any object and apply it to any potential argument or disagreement or conflict in view. As a rule it will help you but if nothing else it will make you stop and ponder the situation more thoroughly.

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Step 1; Does it have to do with righteousness or godliness?

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Step 2; Is there a moral issue or sin at stake?

Slide - 16

Step 3; Does it contradict or deal with scripture?

If the answer is ‘no’ to all three of these, then there is a good chance you do not have to be part of the argument or entertain that object of contention that is at hand. I know it’s not a hard fast rule and that it will probably not cover every situation in your life, but if you can run these three questions over the object of contention and it passes with a no on each of them, then you can probably safely say I don’t need to get involved or put in my three and a half cents worth.

As with the question I asked earlier, if coffee is the best, most delicious, most soothing, comforting, satisfying, wonderful drink man has ever invented... well it has nothing to do with righteousness or godliness, there is not moral issue or sin at stake; it has nothing to do with scripture. So the good or bad of coffee is really not an argument one needs to get into. Now we may joke and poke at such things with each other but it should never be anything that should lead us into contentions.

Oh and as a forth one just as a bonus step it would be this;

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Step 4; Can it be checked out on Google or the internet,

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if yes,

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Then, DO IT.

I used to work in a place where there were a lot of people who liked to argue over various things and often, silly things, and many of them could be resolved in one simple internet search, but some people simply argue for argue sake which is not really a good character trait or edification to others. Remember.

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Step 1; Does it have to do with righteousness or godliness?

Step 2; Is there a moral issue or sin at stake?

Step 3; Does it contradict or deal with scripture?

And if the answer is no to all of them, then let it go. Unless you are entering a discussion or reasoning through things, let it go.

As the article I quoted earlier said; it is...

these people never let anything go. They feel compelled to explain, defend, convince, convict, or just have the last word.

Regardless of purpose or reason or of it having any factual bearing in their lives.

If it does not have to do with righteousness or godliness, if there is no moral issue or sin at stake and it does not contradict or deal with scripture, you can just let it go and walk away from this thing called contentions.

For we as Christians are called to build each other up, and to edify one another to life one another up, and not be caught up with useless wrangling of men, but rather we are to be as Paul said in Colossians 3:15 through 17 where he says;

...let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

If you want to overcome this thing it has to start on the inside, with a good pot scrubbing of the heart, a good pig penning of the soul, because no one will ever overcome this sin if we do not work on the inside of our soul first. If we do not take care of these issues of the heart on the inside first.

Because if we don't, if we do not take care of these things called contentions, our life motto will be that of a quote by American writer and poet Dorothy Parker who said;

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'the first thing I do in the morning is brush my teeth
and sharpen my tongue'

But in conclusion,

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We have looked at contentions, that thing that sits between the object and the outburst, the mid way point between the strife and quarrel, and we know from scripture, from the Proverb that we are to stop contentions before a quarrel starts. And that a servant of the Lord must not quarrel be gentle to all, able to teach, be patient, and in humility correcting those who are in opposition,

That we must root out this thing of contentions from our hearts and cast it out from within us, so that we are not that contentious person or spouse that no one wants to be around, that kind of person where others would rather live on the house top than next to us.

That we are not that boss that is always argumentative over everything in the business, or the employee that must correct or address their opinion to others all the time. As Christians we are not call to these things but rather as Titus chapter 3 verses 8 and 9 read;

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

9 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.

Therefore, let us examine ourselves and let the peace of God rule in our hearts and let that peace extend to others in our lives, in our surroundings and in our conversations.