

The Silliness of Nitpicking

Two congregations of differing denominations were located only a few blocks from each other in a small community. They thought it might be better if they would merge and become one united body, larger and more effective, rather than two struggling churches.

Good idea – but both were too petty to pull it off. The problem? They couldn't agree on how they would recite the Lord's Prayer.

One group wanted “forgive us our trespasses” while the other demanded “forgive us our debts.” So the newspaper reported that one church went back to its trespasses while the other returned to its debts!

I read recently of two unmarried sisters who lived together. Because of a slight disagreement over an insignificant issue, they stopped speaking to each other. Unable and unwilling to move out of their small house, they continued to use the same rooms, eat at the same table (separately), and sleep in the same bedroom. Without one word.



A chalk line divided the sleeping area into two halves, separating a doorway and fireplace. Each could come and go, cook and eat, sew and read without crossing over into her sister's domain. Through the night, each could hear the breathing of the foe, but because neither was willing to take the first step to reconciliation and forgiveness, they coexisted for years in grinding silence.

Such silly skirmishes would be hilarious if they weren't so prevalent – and damaging. It's one thing to stand firm on major issues that confront us – especially those clearly set forth in Scripture – but it's another thing to pick fights over jots and tittles. It is amazing how petty people – including Christians – can be over things that really don't amount to a hill of beans in the final analysis.

Philipp Melanchthon, a brilliant yet calm theologian, was Martin Luther's chief associate in leading the 16th century Protestant Reformation. In a day of major, far-reaching battles and fiery assaults from one man to another, this gentleman summed it up in a superb axiom: *In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity (or love).*

In non-essentials, liberty. Remember that! Like cosmetics, guitars, kinds of clothing, choice of car, expression of worship, style of music, philosophy of raising kids, Sunday activities, holiday traditions, luxury items and scores of other such. They supply fodder for nitpicking gossips. But in light of eternity – who cares?

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As long as our knowledge is imperfect and our preferences vary and our opinions differ, let's leave a lot of room in areas that don't really matter. Diversity and variety – in our society, in business and in churches – provide people with a beautiful blend of balance. But a squint-eyed, severe spirit is a killer, strangling its victims with a noose of caustic criticism.

Repeat these basic essentials over and over to God's people. Warn them before God against pious nitpicking, which chips away at the faith. It just wears everyone out. Concentrate on doing your best for God, work you won't be ashamed of, laying out the truth plain and simple (2 Timothy 2:14-15 MSG).

– Beecher Hunter