

# RIGHT or WRONG? Baptist controversy

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**Baptist congregational and denominational conflict dates back to the 1970s and continues to pop up among institutions, churches and sometimes the connections between them. When and how will peace-makers attempt to end the corrosive fighting, which goes against the grain of Baptist distinctives?**

Last week in Sunday school, I was teaching from Ephesians 4: “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” Anger is natural when we feel wrong is committed. Our anger may reflect pure motives. We want to defend the abused. We believe an injustice must be made right. Anger causes us to jump up in defense of truth and righteousness, whether we are in a church business meeting, a deacon’s meeting, a state or national denominational annual meeting, or in our own homes.

But the Apostle Paul maintained we shouldn’t let anger create a place for evil to take hold and cause destruction. When we hold onto our anger, even if the anger came from our attempts to defend truth, then we allow destruction to creep in.

Baptist conflict has become so predominant and lasted so long in congregations and denominational life that outsiders might wonder if we come out of the baptismal waters with our fists clinched and our jaws set. We often are known more for our disagreeable spirits and angry words than by our love (1 John 3-4). You rightly point out this “Baptist” behavior certainly is not true to those distinctives we claim to hold dear.

Baptists historically have valued freedom—free-dom for congregations to

make decisions as they are led by the Holy Spirit without any coercion from denominational influences, freedom for believers to read and interpret the word of God as the Spirit reveals truth to them.

Yet we also believe strongly in truth, and we value God's word, so we detest instances where God's name, God's word or God's truth are twisted and used in ways we don't believe are right. Sometimes, as a result, we get angry. In our attempts to defend God's truth, we forget that we trust the Spirit to lead believers into all truth (John 14) and begin to believe our responsibility is to vehemently and aggressively get people back on track. And in our anger, sometimes we sin. We hold onto our anger and bitterness, believing we are defending God's way, when in reality, Ephesians tells us that if we really honor Christ's ways, we will speak kind—rather than hateful—words, and we will let go of our anger.

When will Baptist peacemakers rise up and say “enough”? When we choose to live as Paul encouraged us in Ephesians 4, and as we are taught by Christ, not in our old way of life. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

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