

# The Opinion Virus

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22 years ago, Sue and I were part of a church plant in an African country, with the aim of providing a spiritual home for the European community in the capital city. While a worthy cause, we found out quickly that this goal carried numerous problems. Everyone involved had strong opinions about how the church, the leadership, the Sunday services etc., were to be formed and conducted, resulting in much disunity. After 31 years in Africa, the Lord called us back to the Netherlands to be part of another church plant.

As we reflect on the values of a new church plant, establishing a family of believers and a community of faith, we have to hold the importance of unity in high regard and be careful not to undermine it. One of the ways unity can be eroded is through complaints and holding our opinions too highly.

The question must be asked: how much value do I attach to my opinion?

## **Virus 'Experts'**

When the Coronavirus was at its height, everyone suddenly became an expert on it: the cause, the hidden agenda, the impact, and where it fitted into the eschatological framework. The Internet was overflowing with opinions.

There is, however, another dangerous virus. Opinions can be a virus that infects many with a 'complaining spirit of discontent'. Israel, in the desert, experienced the consequences of this, infecting thousands, and with fatal consequences. The question must be asked: how much value do

I attach to my opinion?

## God's Chosen Leaders

The Bible shows us that the Lord appoints and raises up leaders for His people and His church. God's leadership structure is not based on democracy and people's opinions but on His sovereign choice! The unity God longs for, and for which Jesus was willing to die, is *'that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me'* (John 17:21, ESV).

A Biblical event highlighting the danger of opinion-spouting is found in Numbers 12:1-9: *'Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife... 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?' they asked. 'Hasn't he also spoken through us?' And the Lord heard this. (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, 'Come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you.'* So the three of them went out. Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, he said, *'Listen to my words: 'When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?' The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them.'* (NIV)

### What was happening here?

- Miriam and Aaron used Moses' marriage to Zipporah, a non-Israelite woman, as a pretext to spout their opinion. 'Aren't we just as good as you, Moses? Don't you think we know better than you, after all we went through in Egypt?'
- Moses was their little brother. Raised in the comfort of the Egyptian royal palace, Moses had run away when confronted with the hardship of slavery in Egypt. But Miriam and Aaron had stayed! It is clear that only God's opinion carried weight, not Miriam and Aaron's. Moses was *His* choice. Though not perfect or without fault, the passage tells us that he was a humble leader (quote likely added at a later time).
- Elders are also God's choice to lead His church within each local faith family. Do we trust that the Lord leads the apostolic team to appoint elders under His direction and that He will lead them with His Holy Spirit?
- Miriam and Aaron's opinionated assault on Moses was an assault on God's choice. As a result Miriam, who instigated this assault, got infected with leprosy and had to be isolated from infecting the community for seven days. Sharing your observations or concerns with your elders is welcomed and encouraged, but doing this in an inflexible and opinionated manner is wrong. Always check your motivation. Miriam's was one of jealousy and unbelief. Ultimately, she did not trust God and His choice. We ought to take heed of this event, especially what our Lord feels about opinion-pushers.

# Grumbling and Arguing

Let's also take heed of the following exhortation: *'Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.'* Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life' (Philippians 2:14-15, NIV).

We sure know how to grumble and complain, and some of us are experts in it. We complain about the weather, political leaders and, not to forget, *our church*. If you are doing this, you aren't presenting yourself to the world as a child of God – pure and blameless in a warped and crooked generation. We need to be light-bearers, not hypocrites. Will your elders and community leaders be able to glory in you when Jesus comes back?

*You shall have no other gods before me*

## Has Your Opinion Become an Idol?

Let's carefully contemplate this question in light of the first commandment: *'You shall have no other gods before me'* (Exodus 20:3). We all know this command and our immediate response may be, 'Surely I am not guilty of this? Surely I am not making an idol?' But keep in mind that our opinion can be like a virus – when left to fester, it spreads and brings about much destruction.

### Reflection: What is your honest opinion about the following?

**Test your heart and be honest as you answer:**

- The length of a Sunday service
- The chosen worship songs or leader
- The sermon – too long, too short, too much, too difficult, boring, heard it before
- The children – too busy, too noisy
- The coffee – too little, too weak, too strong, too hot/cold, cups too small
- The leadership/elders of your church
- Your fellow believers
- The community group make-up

### The Antidote

- Be thankful, *'...do everything you do in the name of Jesus, thanking God the Father through Him.'* (Colossians 3:15-17, NIV)
- Be humble. You can share your opinion, but it is your opinion and not necessarily the truth. (Philippians 2:4-9)
- Confess your pride. Repent of idolatry. (1 John 1:8-9)
- Die to yourself and any cherished opinions. (Romans 8:13)
- Be merciful towards one another.

### Ask yourself: does voicing my opinion

- break down or edify?
- build up the church?
- build up my brother or sister?

- build up my leaders (or myself)?

If it is not edifying, if it breaks down, you should rather keep your opinions to yourself. Is it *your* opinion, *your* criticism, or is it based on the truth?

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If we do not decisively settle the urge to push our opinions, the same thing may happen as did to the church plant we were in. Everyone's opinion was given too much attention and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Bible slowly faded away. It became a church community that tolerated and compromised on everything and, eventually, it brought separation.

If the Lord has convicted you of being too strong with your opinions and you want to change, be quick to confess your sins, repent and turn away from this. Let us be careful not to make our opinions an idol.