

## DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

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I hate divisions in the church. It pains me to see brothers and sisters in the Lord attacking and discrediting each other about Biblical matters. In, I this day and age, I believe we are way, way past the point where we can afford to be divided, if indeed we ever could.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (Amplified Classic) says: “But I urge and entreat you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in perfect harmony and full agreement in what you say, and that there be no dissensions or factions or divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in your common understanding and in your opinions and judgements.

For it has been made clear to me, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions and wrangling and factions among you.

What I mean is this, that each one of you [either] says, I belong to Paul (Or Catholicism, or Evangelical Free, or Seventh Day Adventist, or the Charismatic Church-my addition) or I belong to Apollos (Christian and Missionary Alliance, Lutheran, Greek Orthodox-again, my addition) or I belong to Cephas (Peter) (how about The Prosperity Gospel, the Name it and Claim it bunch, Conservative Christianity, maybe Calvinism or ‘God’s in Control’ -my additions.) or I belong to Christ.

Is Christ (the Messiah) divided into parts? Was Paul (or Baptists, or Presbyterians my addition) crucified on behalf of you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? “(or Anglicans, Episcopalians, or Methodists-my addition).

How have we come to this? Have we become so isolated from the world that we’ve lost touch with real human need to the extent that we have nothing to gripe about but how another Christian lives out his or her faith?

1 Corinthians 11:19 NIV goes on to say; ‘No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.’ Granted this verse was put in the context of the abuse of the Lord’s supper, but do any of us even attempt to really listen to what another ‘denomination’ believes without being defensive or judgmental? What are you so afraid of? Are your convictions so weak you’re afraid you might get converted on the spot? Do we even consider setting aside our preconceived notions and labels, and just listening to another human being? Is it ok to just let someone be, let God correct them & you just love them where they are? Jesus is called our Advocate. Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. If we’re busy accusing someone who are we emulating? Whose children do we look like?

I was raised Catholic. Baptized as a baby & went through Catechism classes. I quit going to church as a young man, but re-dedicated my life to the Lord at a Charismatic church. I then attended a Baptist church, an independent Evangelical Free Church where I was baptized as an adult, another Charismatic church, another Baptist church, an old Christian and Missionary Alliance church and now a Pentecostal church. I don’t think most people expose themselves to that level of dichotomy in church doctrines. I found God in all of them. And I’ve found error in all of them. I’ve found true believers and carnal Christians in all of them. People mature at different levels. They even mature differently in different areas: they may handle money well but have bad relationships. The church is flawed but remains God’s instrument on earth to communicate his love to his children and unbelievers alike.

I am shocked and appalled at the level of vitriol Christian use on each other. As if God himself elected them ‘Defender of the Faith’! I highly doubt that the people that throw mud have actually sought the guidance of the Lord in their attacks- or would even know his leading if He showed it to them.

John 13:35 'By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'" That's Jesus.

Jesus again in John 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word: that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.'

These verses make me cry. I hear Jesus' heart loud & clear. If we're ever going to be one, we must start by loving each other and not judging each other. True, false doctrine needs to be confronted. There's an old saying; 'People don't care to know until they know you care.' If your lead off is bashing someone's faith you're wasting your breath, time, and bringing shame to the name of Jesus, not help.

**Step 1.** Quit think that you, or your church, or your little group has Christianity all figured out. You don't know the breadth, depth & height of the Lord's thoughts. The maturing we all have to do will not end until we are dead. Until then, try accepting people where they are. Show some tolerance. And when in doubt, shut your mouth. You have two ears & one mouth for a reason.

**Step 2.** Focus on your stuff, what you can control in your own life not someone else's. Your problems aren't 'out there', they are right between your ears. 1 Peter 5:6-7 'Be humbled, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you at the right time, casting all your cares upon Him because He cares for you.'

**Step 3.** Try advocating instead of accusing. Don't we see enough accusing in politics and social media? Do you really think your accusations are going to pull someone up short & change their mind or are they more likely to further entrench them in their beliefs? How many times does the Apostle Paul start out a letter 'Grace & peace be unto you from God the father...'? Try showing a little grace and aim to become a peace maker. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' Jesus, Matthew 5:9.

**Step 4.** Major on the majors and minor on the minors. I heard a pastor say once that there are only three 'hills to die on' in Christianity, meaning non-negotiable beliefs:

1. Jesus is the only way to salvation. We are saved by faith in Christ through grace alone.
2. Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit are equal.
3. The Bible is inspired by God and is without error.

If someone doesn't believe these you aren't going to 'argue' them into salvation, you lovingly persuade. If someone wants to argue some point other than these, and that point doesn't impinge their salvation, offer your opinion if you have a relationship with that person in a non-judgmental way. The goal is to establish relationship.

**Step five.** Remember: it's the Holy Spirit's job to convict men of sin. We are called to be witness', and a witness only tells what they've seen. No one can argue with your personal testimony. You know what you were & how you thought before God got a hold of you, tell that story. It is the kindness of God that leads people to repentance. Romans 2:4.

We reap what we sow. Sow kindness.