

Six Ways To Stop Division

Introduction. God has always loved and wanted unity (Isaiah 11:13). Jesus fought and prayed for unity among His followers (John 17:20-21). When the apostles squabbled over preeminence or other personal issues, Jesus intervened and reminded them of their equality. James and John sought promotion from “sons of thunder” to masters of the kingdom, causing the other ten apostles to become indignant. He showed them that selfishness and pride were causing the division (Mark 10:43-45).

It was sin that caused division first upon the earth. It caused Adam to turn against Eve (Genesis 3:12), and it caused Cain to turn against Abel (Genesis 4:8). Division is truly a “work of the flesh,” and for the sake of this congregation working together in peace this year, I want to show you six ways to stop it.

I. ***Don't Side With The Cliques***

- A. A clique is a small group of people, with some feature in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them. When it is evident that there are warring cliques in the church, a Christian should be careful not to take sides.
- B. We should oppose sects, parties, and factions in the church (Galatians 5:20; 1 Corinthians 3:3), and should teach against gossip, backbiting, and evil speaking (2 Corinthians 12:20; Ephesians 4:31). If this teaching is believed and obeyed, it will dissolve the cliques.

II. ***Don't Judge Another's Heart***

- A. Christians should be careful not to assign evil motives to the words and actions of others (Matthew 7:1; 1 Timothy 6:4).
- B. No one can truly know the heart, saving the process of telling what is within it, except God and Christ (1 Kings 8:39; John 2:25; 1 Corinthians 2:11).
- C. If we hear or witness something unseemly done by a Christian, instead of being quick and harsh in our judgment, we should give him the benefit of the doubt and find out about the situation first (1 Corinthians 13:5).

III. ***Don't Bind Your Convictions On Another***

- A. The weak brother in Romans 14 believed that he should eat only herbs; it was a strong matter of personal conscience to him (Romans 14:2; 1 Corinthians 8:7), even though he was wrong (Romans 14:14; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 8).
- B. Paul showed that in such matters, one should never bind his personal convictions on others (Romans 14:3; 1 Corinthians 8:9-12).

- C. Congregations sometimes face decisions based on judgment. Brethren who push their judgment without regard to the rest of the members will eventually cause division. We must not seek our own profit, but the profit of many (1 Corinthians 10:33).

IV. ***Don't Build Up A Faction***

- A. On any given controversy or issue in the local church, as you have opportunity, state your conviction, but please refrain from trying to build up your side by going from house to house or by calling on the telephone. Working in secrecy is the tactic of the evil man (Psalm 101:5; 2 Peter 2:1). It puts those who differ at an unfair disadvantage because it does not give equal time and opportunity (cf. Matthew 7:12).
- B. The word "strife" originally meant the work of a hired laborer. It later meant canvassing for political or public office.
 - 1. In New Testament times, it denoted an ambitious, self-seeking, self-willed, party-making, factious spirit (Philippians 1:17; James 3:16). Strife is a product of hatred, pride, and perversity (Proverbs 10:12; 13:10; 16:28).
 - 2. It is the attitude of Diotrephes who bent an entire congregation to his will because he wanted to lord himself over the church and silence any threat to his authority (3 John 9-10).

V. ***Try To Hold It Together***

- A. All Christians should try to keep the church together and not pull it apart. Instead of leaving and pulling off a group, members of the church should try to stay together and reconcile their differences (Romans 14:19).
- B. There will be times when division is necessary to hold fast to the truth (1 Corinthians 11:18-19). However, the unity of believers is not predicated solely upon doctrinal agreement, but also upon personal harmony, forbearance, and selflessness.
- C. A perfect church will never exist and the Lord expects Christians to stay together and work out their problems. We endeavor to speak the same in matters of the faith (1 Corinthians 1:10), and be longsuffering and open-minded when it comes to matters of personality, opinion, and liberty (Colossians 3:12-14).

VI. ***Withdraw From The Factious***

- A. When they do not listen to the above words, troublemakers must be withdrawn from; otherwise, they will eventually divide the church, taking many souls with them (Proverbs 22:10; Titus 3:10-11).

B. The term "reject" means to purposely avoid association with someone (Romans 16:17; Acts 5:38; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 2 Timothy 2:23; 3:5; Hebrews 12:25).

Conclusion. Division is so easy! Jesus wanted His followers to enjoy what Paul called "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Can we be like Abraham when he told Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren" (Genesis 13:8)? Unity rests upon a sanctifying standard of truth and an attitude of mutual forbearance when personal differences arise.

Paul taught the church in Corinth a valuable lesson in unity, both doctrinal and personal, by comparing the church to a human body (1 Corinthians 12:25-27). Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile objects, but just look at what they can do when they stick together. May the Lord help us to be selfless and have a willingness to serve and sacrifice (Romans 15:5-6; Galatians 5:14-15). This will produce the kind of unity which the Lord wants.