

Division

By Scott Huckaby
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For Discussion: Unity through Division –
Sean Gooding (raptureready.com; Sept 17, 2024)

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Has there ever been a time when we have seen so much division in our country?

Some say the division we see today surely can't be as bad as it was during the Civil War. That may be true, but you can't deny that the division we are seeing has never been worse in our life-times. And some of us here have been around for a pretty good chunk of history.

What are people divided over?

- Ideology/Worldview – Conservative/Progressive, Constitutionalist/Statist, American Way/Marxism, Oppressed/Oppressor, Nationalist/Globalist, Capitalist/Socialist, Sceptic/Conformist
 - War – Israel/Iran, Ukraine/Russia, Taiwan/China
 - Politics – Republican/Democrat
 - Religion – Christian/Unbeliever
- Ultimately, the division is spiritual

Is division a good or a bad thing?

It depends what the division is over. Certainly, division is inevitable as Jesus told us...

Luke 12:51-53 – *Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.*

One of the hardest things to come to grips with as a Christian is that our following Jesus will often cause us to lose some of the people that we hold close.

- Often, it is not us leaving them, but them leaving us.

How could the coming of the Prince of Peace bring division?

The peace that Jesus brought was the opportunity to have a cessation of hostilities between God and people. This title also points to the Millennial Kingdom when there will be peace among the nations.

How is division an essential characteristic of a Christian?

Matthew 16:24 – *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

There must be division to deny self...

- The natural humanist thinking is to affirm self, to love ourselves more than anyone or anything else.
- But, to be a follower of Jesus, one must separate their identity from self and identify with Jesus.
- To be in unity with Jesus often requires division between self and others.

Jesus once had a multitude of followers, but when He began to teach hard things about living for God, many left (John 6:66-68).

What do people divide over when it comes to Jesus?

People divide over His Lordship, His person, about His call to obedience, and maybe even if He is real or not.

- There is division over doctrine that adds to or takes away from the Gospel: works, wokeism, universalism, etc.
- They hate the freedoms we have in Jesus; they hate the simplicity of the Gospel, 'believe in the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved.'

What issues have divided the church?

- The authority of Scripture
- Gay Marriage
- Lockdowns / Medical authoritarianism
- Wokeism / Critical Race Theory
- Israel post-Oct 2023
- 2024 Election

How can the church be united?

By sticking to the essentials directly related to salvation: who Jesus is, how are we saved, His resurrection, etc.

- Not break fellowship over disputable matters (non-essential, non-salvation matters of conviction).
- We can meet people from all over the world with a unity in Jesus that transcends every other division.

Are non-essential doctrines not important?

Yes... while they don't have a direct influence on salvation, believing bad (unbiblical) doctrine will snowball and eventually lead to heretical beliefs.

When should we divide with someone over doctrine?

We shouldn't... if there is to be division, make sure that the division is based on adherence to Biblical truths that you know and can cite.

- Make sure that the division is one-sided – them from you and not you from them.

Make sure that our lives are not filled with pride and self-righteousness but rather a humble appreciation for Jesus' saving grace and loving-kindness.

1 John 2:19 – *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*

What trend should we expect concerning division as we get closer to the end of the Church Age?

As we get closer and closer to the return of Jesus, these divisions will become more and more pronounced. It will become more and more important to have a secure and safe place to be unified around Jesus...

Hebrews 10:24-25 – *let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

We draw strength from each other as we learn how God is working in the lives of our fellow Christians.

Proverbs 27:17 – *As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.*

There is mutual benefit in the rubbing of two iron blades together; the edges become sharper, making the knives more efficient in their task to cut and slice. Likewise, the Word of God is a "double-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12), and it is with this that we are to sharpen one another—in times of meeting, fellowship, or any other interaction.

What is the prophetic significance of the growing division we are seeing in our society?

The wheat and tares are maturing together as the harvest draws near...

Matthew 13:30 – *Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.*

The spiritual divisions between Christians and non-Christians are becoming more obvious as we get closer to the end of the Church Age.

To what will the growing division in our day lead?

Persecution, which we are already seeing in many places but it will be pretty much universal during the Tribulation...

Matthew 24:9-10 – *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.*

The Marxist strategy to divide and conquer people by pitting one group against another will culminate in intense persecution during the Tribulation.

- Marxism is a doctrine of demons

How do we prepare for the coming persecution?

Be well grounded in your relationship with the Lord and get to better know His Word to be better able to remember His promises to us.

How should a Christian respond to persecution?

Remember that Christian persecution is to be expected:

2 Timothy 3:12 – *everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

Jesus said that, if they persecuted Him, they will also persecute His followers (John 15:20).

- Jesus made it clear that those of the world will hate Christians because the world hates Christ.
- If Christians were like the world—vain, earthly, sensual, and given to pleasure, wealth, and ambition—the world would not oppose us.
- But Christians do not belong to the world, which is why the world persecutes us (see John 15:18–19).

Even in the face of Christian persecution, we can press on thanking God for His blessings...

- We can thank God for those whom we love in the Lord and who stand with us in times of distress.
- And we can pray for those who would accuse, misuse, or abuse us (2 Cor 11:24; Romans 10:1).

Is there any value in persecution?

Yes, persecution has great spiritual value...

- It allows us to share in a unique fellowship with the Lord (Philippians 3:8-10)
 - It is good for us... trials test the Christian's faith, develop endurance in his life, and help develop maturity (James 1:2–4)
 - It enables believers to better value the support of true friends.
 - God can use our response to it to help others see the genuineness of our faith attracting them to Him
- Conflict can bring faithful children of God together in an encouraging and supportive way they might not have known otherwise.

What is the importance of Christian unity?

Jesus considered it to be important...

John 17:11 – *Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one*

Jesus also gave reasons Christian unity is important: He asked that all believers may be in the Father and the Son, “*the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*” (John 17:23).

- When Christians are united in Christ, the world sees two things clearly: Jesus was sent by the Father, and Jesus loves His church.
- Another, more general reason is that God’s people should be speaking with one voice in glorifying God (Romans 15:5–6).

How do we come by Christian unity?

Christian unity comes with Christian maturity and exercising our gifts...

Ephesians 4:11-13 – *He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*

To promote Christian unity, God presents the church in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 as a living body. The body has many members, each with specialized work to do, but all the parts are united in the Head of the Body, which is Christ (see Ephesians 4:15).

- We probably won’t fully realize Christian unity in this world. But we strive for it...

Are there things that should limit Christian unity?

Yes... We don’t pursue unity simply for the sake of unity; it is Christ and His truth that unite us.

- We are to separate from professed brothers and sisters in Christ who live in persistent, unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–2)
- And from those who teach false doctrine (Romans 16:17, Revelation 2:14–15).

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- Division is an essential part of the Christian life.
- Increasing division is a sign of the times.
- Unity within the Body of Christ is important.