

Division in the Body of Christ

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Jesus destroyed the division between Jew and Gentile. But today, many of us are rebuilding a dividing wall of hostility, brick by brick. In levying new regulations on one another, we sacrifice peace, unity, and wisdom from above. What's a better way?



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In Ephesians 2, Paul reminds the Ephesians of what Christ did for the Gentiles, who were once bitterly divided from the Jews—

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of**

hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.** (v. 13-18, emphasis added)

Today, we aren't arguing about circumcision. We don't question whether we all have access to the Father through Christ. We accept and give thanks that that wall has been destroyed!

But within the body of Christ, many of us—even without realizing—are rebuilding a wall of division and hostility, brick by brick. Instead of “he himself” being our peace among Christians, [we're levying new commands and regulations on one another](#), and the price is unity and peace.

Current Events Over Eternal Ones

There's no shortage of opinions around us on everything from vaccines to masks to race relations, sexual ethics, technology use, immigration, politics, education—the list goes on. We find opinions online, at the dinner table, in the church lobby, and in the conference room. But there *is* a shortage of fruitful conversation and listening to understand. And people are walking away from the church because of it.

Consider the past 18 months in your own life. Have you or someone you love left a friendship, small group, or a church over a different view on a current event? Or have you distanced yourself to avoid the issue altogether?

Christians aren't going to agree on everything, nor should we have to. We come from a variety of experiences, backgrounds, personalities, and circumstances.

The question is *not*: How can we all agree? The question is: What's different about Jesus followers than the rest of the world? If the conversation goes—*Oh, we disagree? You're wrong. Bye.*—then there isn't any distinguishing

feature about us. If a tone of hostility, sarcasm, and contempt marks our interactions online and in person, then we look just like the world. Jesus' death on the cross to bring us together in Him is obscured.

Part of our challenge is to adjust our focus. When we focus more on current events than eternal ones, it becomes difficult—if not impossible—to overcome our differences under the umbrella of Jesus Christ.

If, however, we let Christ be not just *a* common denominator, but *the* defining, common denominator of our lives and identity, then there's room for all of us under that umbrella, as the lesser things get washed away.

Adjusting Our Focus

How can we recognize that we're letting lesser things become a dividing wall of hostility? There's no one symptom that looks the same in all of us, but there are some common side effects. Are you experiencing an uptick in anxiety, anger, indignation, offense, or hopelessness? Are any of your relationships suffering?

If you're feeling divided from others in the body of Christ over current events, it may be time to do an audit of how you're spending your time. Multiple studies have shown correlations between mental health and screen time, specifically with social media platforms. As our amount of screen time goes up, so do our feelings of anxiety, depression, and isolation—made worse by algorithms that drive us further and further apart.

Is there a late-night news show that you could replace with seeking wisdom and truth from the scriptures? A social media list of friends that you could pray for instead of scrolling past? A podcast that you could sub out for hanging out with a friend?

Of course, we should concern ourselves with the current realities that others are facing. [But we weren't created to carry the whole world's burdens day in and day out, with new ones coming in by the minute.](#) The load is too heavy.

What we *can* carry, from a place of love, is the burden of a sick neighbor, or a grieving coworker, or a buddy who's struggling in his marriage. The more you can zoom out on current events and zoom in on the events in the lives of those around you, the better.

Show up for the real people God has placed in your path.

The Pursuit of Peace

You've decided on some needed adjustments and made them. Unity in Christ is your focus. You're engaging with real people and caring for them. You're feeding yourself with scripture and not just news.

Now how do you overcome some very real differences to pursue peace with others?

One man we know locally shared this story about how he's fighting a desire to pull back from church:

"My wife is on immunosuppressants to treat a disease that causes lung damage so when COVID cases skyrocketed in our area, we started wearing masks again to church," he said. "Recently, I saw a social media post from a guy at our church saying that parents sending their kids places in masks should be arrested for child abuse. I didn't respond online, but it stayed with me for a few days, bothering me. That Sunday when I dropped my son off, wearing his mask to help protect his mom, guess who was the volunteer in his Sunday School classroom that day? Same guy. It was uncomfortable. When the next Sunday rolled around, I admit I just didn't feel like dealing with it. So for the first time in months, we stayed home instead of going to church."

In this scenario, both men serve in the same local church. They see each other on a weekly basis and have mutual friends and a shared love for Christ. And yet, through one's careless words and another's passive silence, a dividing wall is erected. What's the alternative?

Confrontation—while much harder than gossip, passive aggression, or avoidance—is the prescription given to us in Scripture ([Matthew 5](#) and [18](#)). When done right, it’s also the least likely to lead to a lasting rupture.

As Christians, we all have a role to play in making the church a space where open dialogue is promoted about the issues that threaten to divide us. When the church isn’t a space for it, then the hairline cracks become devastating fractures.

Pastor Kyle in Arkansas shared:

“We’ve had some real division in our church, people leaving on both sides of the political issue, and so much of it could have been headed off if they were **willing to have a conversation and listen to other perspectives** as opposed to brooding for 12 months and then leaving.”

Confrontation—and how we do it—is the component that makes us *peacemakers* and not just *peacekeepers*. It’s our responsibility to go to each other, face to face, and share our concerns or hurts when they arise, and it’s our responsibility to respond in a way that is considerate and gracious when confronted.

When we disagree or take a stance on something, what should mark our discussions as Christians isn’t having better putdowns, cleverer comebacks, or smarter solutions. It shouldn’t be digging in our heels and refusing to hear other viewpoints.

Instead, [James 3:17-18](#) describes the kind of wisdom that should mark us:

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Antidotes to Division

Who do you know that embodies wisdom from above? Who around you is known for being pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and

good fruits, impartial, and sincere? Does someone come immediately to mind?

These qualities aren't valued by our culture—or even, if we're honest, always valued by us. No, we're often drawn to the loudest, smartest, and most dominant voice.

But there are two things that we can start cultivating *now* that not only build wisdom, but also serve as antidotes to division: humility and relationship.

It's a cycle of sorts—in humility, you form relationships with those who think differently than you, and in turn, you are humbled. The same is true in our relationship with God; it doesn't take long before we realize that what we thought we knew and understood was incomplete. We grow because of that discrepancy, not in spite of it.

THE BIG IDEA: *Humility and relationship are the antidotes to division in the body of Christ.*

Here are some questions to consider and practical steps you can take this week to build humility and relationship.

For Reflection:

- Are you willing to admit to someone else that you're not sure about something?
- Are you able to acknowledge truths in what others are saying and experiencing?
- Do you believe that other perspectives and experiences can ultimately enrich your life and even your faith?
- Do you trust that God is in control?

Action Steps:

- Invite someone who feels differently than you about a current event to lunch or dinner. Ask them about their experiences. Practice listening for the purpose of understanding, not to change their mind.

- Set some limits this week on screen time and online discourse; replace it with something that feeds you spiritually—worship, journaling, prayer, or reading.
- Think about someone in the body of Christ with whom you disagree. Are you building the dividing wall higher or working to tear it down? What's your right next step in that relationship?

God's People

When Christ destroyed the dividing wall between believing Gentiles and Jews, there was a powerful ripple effect.

In [Ephesians 2:19-22](#), Paul continues:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

As God's people, we must choose. Will we tear down or contribute to a dividing wall of hostility? Will we keep others out or invite them in?

Let's join together and rise—not because we have no disagreement among us, but because in Christ, we are being built together as a dwelling place for Him.

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