

TITUS 3:10, 11

WHAT TO DO ABOUT CRANKS

“As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.”¹

Harry Ironsides is quoted as saying, “The brightest light draws the most moths.” He was referring to cranks, those seemingly ubiquitous individuals who feel themselves compelled to be divisive within a congregation. These individuals are what some, speaking colloquially, have called “gainers”—they are “again” every advance by a congregation, treating every change within the assembly as a threat. Whenever these individuals are presented with a new opportunity or a new idea, without thinking, they reject the idea. They are thoroughly versed in the negative mode; and at every suggestion of change, they squawk out one raspy refrain: “We’ve never done it that way before.” If we are even remotely familiar with the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles, we know that cranks have been a problem among the churches since the earliest days.

It is one thing to hold biblical convictions; it is quite another to cling to personal preferences as though such preferences enjoyed divine sanction. Tragically, it often appears that evangelical church leaders are ignorant of the Faith—they are incapable of stating what they believe. Whether bearing the name “deacon” or “elder,” they are “elected” to the positions they occupy because of popularity, notoriety or personal wealth. Consequently, they resist any return to biblical practise. For the most, political considerations—currying favour with the “electorate,” is of greater importance than is striving to please the Master who calls to service.

I note that in far too many instances, those elevated to leadership positions among the churches are selected by pastors primarily because they are safe—they will not oppose the shepherd. The tragedy of this situation is that in time, these individuals assume a patina of venerability ensuring that the congregation is reluctant to remove them. Though the church recognises that something is wrong, they hesitate to disturb the *status quo*. As I have often stated, “status quo” is Latin for “the rut we are in.”

In other instances, aberrant church polity ensures poor leadership that will inevitably prove to be divisive. Modern evangelicals are convinced that the church is a democracy, and so congregations elect individuals, ignoring the clear instruction of the Word to seek out for appointment those whom God has prepared and equipped. We want to be equitable, so we strive for diversity to prove how tolerant we are. Tolerance, you will recall, is that wonderful virtue commanded in the Book of Accommodations. We don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings, so we censure sound doctrine in favour of niceness.

Stirring up division among God’s people is not a new phenomenon—it is as old as sin itself. Paul was forced to address the matter in a letter to a missionary he had personally selected who was serving at the time on Crete. Titus faced a difficult situation in his service to the Cretans. The difficulties of ministry were sufficiently severe that he weighed resigning his commission. Paul, however, would have none of that.

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“I left you in Crete ... so that you might put what remained in order, and appoint elders in every town” [TITUS 1:5]. Some were advancing their own agenda, and Titus was weary of the fight. He faced “insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers” [TITUS 1:10] in the churches. He would need to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” [TITUS 2:1], reminding those coming into the Faith “to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” [TITUS 3:1, 2].

Planting churches, extending the Kingdom of God, equipping the saints coming into the Faith from pagan backgrounds was a daunting task; and Titus had obviously grown weary. The task was made no easier by people that were determined to push their own agendas, proving divisive in the process. Paul’s instruction was pointed: warn such people no more than twice; then, have no more to do with them.

It is tempting to relegate these instructions to church leaders. However, we do a disservice to the Word of God if we make such an attempt. Clearly, the apostolic instruction is applicable to all professed believers coming into the congregation. Join me in exploring this neglected portion of the Word in order to learn to deal with cranks.

IDENTIFYING CRANKS — “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” I use the term “crank” to describe someone who stirs up division. The word “division” in our text is a strong word. In the original language, it is *hairetikós*—we obtain our English word “heretic” and “heresy” from this word. However, Paul’s focus is not on those introducing doctrinal deviation into the congregation—he is focused on people that are agents of division within the assembly.

This particular word, as used by Paul, certainly carried a negative connotation. However, his use is restricted to dissension that disrupts fellowship. There seems to be no hint in his use of the introduction of false doctrine. Writing the Corinthians, Paul says, “When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognised” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:19]. The word translated “factions” is this Greek word *haíresis*. In the dark list of the works of the flesh listed in GALATIANS 5:19-21, the word translated “division” is this same word, *haíresis*. It is apparent that Paul has no intent of indicating anything other than a divisive spirit.

To be certain, shortly after Paul wrote this letter to Titus, the Apostle Peter used this same word to speak of something even more detrimental to the Faith than a divisive spirit. He warned the believers of the Diaspora, “False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” [2 PETER 2:1-3]. Establish in your mind that Paul is describing a divisive person. He is not referring to someone who is occasionally argumentative, or incidentally combative; he is pointing to an individual who is intentionally abusive in order to gain an advantage. In view is a verbally abusive person—one identified in 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-11 as a “reviler,” someone who is “verbally abusive,”ⁱ or a “slanderer.”ⁱⁱ

In his letter to Roman Christians, Paul warned believers against permitting this same divisive attitude to persist among the saints. He wrote, “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve” [ROMANS 16:17, 18].

He issues a similar warning when he writes the Thessalonian Christians, “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:14].

The principle that must always be held before the church is that every member of the assembly is responsible to labour within the congregation to build up others. The building up that is sought will prove profitable and useful, not only for the one doing the building up, but also for each member of the assembly. Those that stir up controversies are promoting what is unprofitable and worthless [see verse nine].

Unquestionably, pastors have great responsibility to provide sound instruction. Paul has established that a pastor must be “able to teach” [1 TIMOTHY 3:2; 2 TIMOTHY 2:24]. According to the Apostle, the pastor must devote himself to teaching [see 2 TIMOTHY 2:2]. Clearly, teaching is the primary mark of an elder. This becomes especially clear when Paul says, The elder “must hold firm to the trustworthy Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” [TITUS 1:9]. He also enjoins Titus, as is equally true for every faithful elder, that he is responsible to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” [TITUS 2:1].

Here is the difficult part of this instruction: the pastor must teach sound doctrine despite knowing the difficulties that are certain to come! Writing Timothy, Paul charged, “Before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom, I solemnly charge you: proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will accumulate teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. But as for you, keep a clear head about everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].ⁱⁱⁱ As the age progresses toward a climax, church members—professed believers in the Risen Son of God—will deliberately seek out teachers that promote unhealthy doctrine. These superficial Christians will seek out leaders who will speak in such a way to ensure their comfort rather than stating truths that may be seen as unpleasant. As the age progresses, the majority of professed Christians will be so utterly focused on their own contentment that they will resist the preaching of the Word complaining that it is too hard.

Paul also warned, “The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron...” The man of God is responsible to speak of these truths, specifically pointing out in detail the deviation. Then, Paul writes concerning the conscientious, godly pastor, “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1, 2, 6].^{iv}

Cranks within the assembly promote division; godly believers promote spiritual health. Cranks among the saints seek personal ease; godly believers seek God's glory. Cranks are focused on their own interests; godly believers are focused on pleasing God. The greater tragedy surrounding the issue of cranks in the church is that these problem children of the Faith act as they do convinced that they are acting in the will of God! They are so focused on the facilities, on the denominational affiliation or on some other insignificant and inconsequential aspect of the Faith that they are prepared to sacrifice unity and jettison harmony in order to achieve their personal desires.

ADMONISHING CRANKS — “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” In short, our responsibility as followers of the Son of God is to warn cranks twice, after which we are to have nothing to do with them. There is a tendency among the people of God to adhere to that well-known verse that teaches, “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.” You remember the verse, don't you? It is found in the Book of Hesitations. In light of this generally accepted philosophy, pastors are trained to pamper dyspeptic saints, pandering to their infantile tantrums.

We are to warn cranks. The word “warn” translates the Greek word *nouthesia*. The word conveyed the thought of shaping the thinking through instruction or warning. The goal of such admonition is correction, not condemnation. To be certain, in a broad sense, pastors are to warn and admonish the congregation, and undoubtedly, they are to confront cranks boldly, warning them and instructing them to exhibit godly behaviour.

Our text is not the only time the Apostle instructed believers to “warn” divisive people. In his second letter to Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle wrote, “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:14, 15].

In his instruction to Timothy, Paul speaks of a situation that illustrates this truth. “I put this charge before you, Timothy my child, in keeping with the prophecies once spoken about you, in order that with such encouragement you may fight the good fight. To do this you must hold firmly to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck in regard to the faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme” [1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20].^v

Were Hymenaeus and Alexander believers? Based on what Paul has written, it is impossible to say whether they were redeemed or lost. However, it seems certain that they were church members whom the Apostle was compelled to turn over to Satan because of their disruptive attitudes and actions. Do you wonder what they might have been doing that caused the Apostle to act so firmly? With a little sanctified imagination and through appeal to what preceded this statement, we can guess what they were doing. We must assume that Paul warned them; and when they proved recalcitrant and refractive he acted decisively for the glory of God and for the good of the assembly. These two men had likely been spreading errant doctrine and devoting themselves to gnostic speculation. The practical import of their actions is that they no longer demonstrated a pure heart, a good conscience or a sincere faith [see 1 TIMOTHY 1:3-7]. In short, they were cranks. As cranks, Paul was compelled to remove them from the congregation.

There is a perception extant among the churches that pastors are hired to keep cranky church members happy. A significant truth needs to be vigorously advanced: pastors are admonished to teach, but pastors are nowhere encouraged to run after disgruntled believers, pleading with them to be happy. Discontented people who choose to act out their displeasure through leaving the assembly demonstrate a breathtaking infantilism. Chasing such people steals time for service to the people of God, drains pastoral energy and diminishes the effectiveness of his ministry to the congregation. Such infantile people effectively say through their actions that they are the centre of their world, demanding that others accede to their pettiness and pander to their immaturity.

Complaining that the pastor did not chase after you when you were piqued says little about the pastor, but it does say a great deal about you. It says you are self-centred and petty. It says you have little concern for the unity of the fellowship you profess to love because self-love has crowded out all other loves. It says that in your own mind you have exalted yourself above the Master who gave His life for the Body.

In his first letter, John pens a statement that should give pause to anyone who imagines that it is somehow the pastor's job to chase after every discontented, unhappy individual who stomps away from responsibilities as a member of the Body of Christ. The explanation given by the Apostle of Love concerning those who left the assembly is, "They left us, but they were never really with us. If they had been, they would have stuck it out with us, loyal to the end. In leaving, they showed their true colours, showed they never did belong" [1 JOHN 2:19],^{vi}

Listen to that explanation from another recent translation of the Word of God. "You have heard that the enemy of Christ is coming, and now many enemies of Christ are already here. This is how we know that these are the last days. These enemies of Christ were in our fellowship, but they left us. They never really belonged to us; if they had been a part of us, they would have stayed with us. But they left, and this shows that none of them really belonged to us" [1 JOHN 2:18, 19].^{vii}

It is important to note that there is a time and a place when one should leave a fellowship. When errant doctrine is promoted and the people permit it to continue unchecked, the believer has no choice but to acknowledge that the elders have failed to provide the leadership they were appointed to provide and the people have forsaken the Faith. In such circumstances, the believer cannot participate in the wickedness that is endorsed. When wicked actions are tolerated by the congregation and discipline is ignored, you must determine whether you will serve Christ or join in the compromise that is embraced. When a church determines that peace at any price is preferable to scriptural unity, then it is time to admit that the assembly is already contaminated. However, when an individual leaves because she is disgruntled, because he did not get their way on some minor issue, or because she refuses to be reconciled, that person is in error.

I have seen people disrupt a congregation because they complained that the preaching was too hard—it made them feel bad or uncomfortable. At other times, people have forsaken the congregation because they refused to seek reconciliation with a fellow believer in the fellowship. On yet other occasions, I have seen church members cease participating in the life of the Body because they didn't like the music, or because the carpeting chosen was the wrong colour, or because the finish on the walls was not what they wanted—in short, I've witnessed some incredibly infantile attitudes that led to utterly immature actions.

I have witnessed disgruntled people who decided they would leave the fellowship. Questioned about their motivation, such people commonly intimate a desire to hurt the church through withholding their fellowship and by withholding their gifts—both spiritual and financial. The petty pouters perhaps grumbled to one or two people that no one cared about them. They never think that it is impossible to read their mind. Those who absent themselves from these services will likely receive a phone call or a visit asking if there is a problem; however, if they pout and refuse to talk, there is little that can be done to address their discontent. In short, I am not inclined to spend a great deal of time trying to soothe bruised feelings. Chasing after disgruntled church members is a no-win game that only panders to their pettiness. If you choose to quit attending the services without anyone knowing the cause of your discontent, you should not expect others to chase after you begging you to come back.

What is vital to note is that there is no warrant to discuss theology with cranks or to argue with divisive people. We are to warn them, shaping their thinking through instruction in the Word. Too often, we imagine that the church is a democracy and that every idea is equally valid. Nothing could be farther from the truth. We are not to provide a forum for cranks, nor are we to tolerate errant teaching. Underscore in your mind that an aberrant gospel is an errant gospel. Because it is an errant message, there is no good news contained in such a message. There is no good news in bickering or quibbling. If an individual seeks clarification on doctrine, fine, let her ask. If an individual wants to discuss an application of the Word, well and good, let him speak. However, if all she seeks is opportunity to push a point of view without scriptural foundation, there is no warrant to permit her to continue to blather. Rather, warn her.

This situation has been specifically addressed when the Apostle commands, “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies” [2 TIMOTHY 2:23]. Paul has also written concerning such aberrant behaviour, “If someone spreads false teachings and does not agree with sound words (that is, those of our Lord Jesus Christ) and with the teaching that accords with godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in controversies and verbal disputes. This gives rise to envy, dissension, slanders, evil suspicions, and constant bickering by people corrupted in their minds and deprived of the truth” [1 TIMOTHY 6:3-5a].^{viii}

Error that is not confronted is detrimental to congregational health; it will inevitably result in quarrel and ruin. If argumentative, disruptive or divisive behaviour is tolerated, it will ultimately distract the church from her mission and purpose, even “upsetting whole families” [TITUS 1:11]. In light of what has just been said, keep in mind that Paul is not speaking exclusively, nor even particularly, about people who want to be teachers. He is applying his instruction to anyone in the church who is divisive or disruptive. The issues about which these individuals stir up dissension may be trivial, but arguing about the issues is not trivial!

It is impossible to anticipate every controversy that may erupt within a congregation. Wherever there are three Christians, there will likely be four opinions. What is important as a principle for life is to prepare oneself to distinguish between what is crucial and what is contingent. Far too many of the professed saints of God allow themselves to become exercised over issues that should never even receive consideration. We must stay focused on what is “excellent and profitable” [TITUS 3:8] instead of that which is “unprofitable and worthless,” so that we can fulfil the will of the Master.

SENTENCING CRANKS — “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Discipline is absent from modern church life.

Tragically, contemporary Christians have brought so much baggage into the church from their life in the world that few congregations are able to function as the Body of Christ!

Focus on Paul’s assertion that an individual who refuses to accept biblical direction is “twisted by sin and is conscious of it himself” [TITUS 3:11].^{ix} The Apostle’s words stress the serious nature of the divisive attitude. It is not a light thing for an individual to be factious or divisive. It is not only unbecoming for a Christian to be disruptive, it is a slight against the Father. It is a serious sin against God and against the Body of Christ to be divisive. God values unity in the Body. For a brief moment, think of the emphasis on unity or harmony found throughout the writings of the Apostle.

To the Romans, Paul urged, “Live in harmony with one another” [ROMANS 12:16]. Later, in the same letter, Paul penned a prayer for that church which applies equally to us. “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” [ROMANS 15:5-7]. Paul was not saying that there was a problem among the Christians in Rome; however, he was acknowledging that the potential for disrupting the unity of the congregation was always present. Therefore, in writing these instructions, he was proactive. Thus, we must take seriously the matter of working to ensure that we live in harmony as the people of God.

In his second letter to the Church of God in Corinth, Paul asks a serious question: “What harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:15]?^x The word that is translated “harmony” [*sumphònesis*] is a hapax legomenon. It serves as the root for our English word “symphony.” The concept is a blending to achieve a sense of complementation. Thus, we are to recognise that we have nothing in common with Satan; we are not to live in such a way that our lives complement wickedness. In matters of worship and style of life, we share nothing in common with unbelievers beyond our physical existence. Let me emphasise this truth by reminding you that our personal comfort does not take precedence over harmony in the Body of Christ. God values unity, complementarity, harmony. As an aside, egalitarianism is always secondary to complementarity in our relationship to one another—our equality is less important before God than is our willingness to serve others.

Weigh the words of an extended passage, noting in particular the emphasis upon unity as followers of the Master. “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says,

‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.’

“(In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [EPHESIANS 4:1-16].

If we walk in the manner that is worthy of our calling, we will be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!” The reason we will seek unity, labouring to maintain that unity, is that “there is one body and one Spirit.” This reflects the greater truth that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The purpose of God’s gifts to the churches is to build up the Body of Christ, aiming for unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. God values unity. In fact, I will say that unity is an essential mark of the godly congregation.

Paul also urged believers to “put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body” [COLOSSIANS 3:14, 15]. Because we are one body, we are to live in love, which binds us together in harmony.

As one further aside, I note that Peter, after urging an attitude of submission toward human institutions for the Lord’s sake [see 1 PETER 2:13-17], a submissive attitude toward those who are over us in our work [see 1 PETER 2:18-25], a submissive spirit in wives [see 1 PETER 3:1-6] and a spirit of respect from husbands [see 1 PETER 3: 7], provides this summary: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” [1 PETER 3:8]. We endeavour to compel uniformity in the assembly; but God seeks unity. We want to control one another so that there is nothing to discomfort us; God wants us to complement one another so that there is harmony.

That this is the will of God should be obvious, and the more so when we consider Jesus’ request made in His High Priestly prayer. He prayed, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and love them, even as You have loved Me” [JOHN 17:22, 23].^{xi} This is an incredibly important truth: unity within the congregation gives evidence to the world that God sent the Son. The evidence is established because our love for one another complements one another, revealing the presence of Christ among us.

When we are factious and divisive, when we esteem our “rights” rather than valuing the opportunity to build one another, the world rightly says of us that we are just as they are. However, when we live in unity, the world can only marvel, and unbelievers are compelled to confess that the love of God is evident in our attitude and actions toward one another. Thus, we become the evidence that God sent His Son into the world.

Take careful note that Paul does not say that God condemns a divisive person. Rather, an individual who attempts to justify himself by winning an argument (causing “foolish controversies”), by presuming on his own background or family connections (debating “genealogies”), by attempting to stir up trouble for others (promoting “dissensions”) or by trying to make herself look better than she is through legalism (promoting “quarrels about the law”) has cut himself or herself off from the only hope of justification—grace! Thus, that person is “self-condemned.”

Because they refuse admonition, divisive people must be marginalised. Paul does not say that they are to be excommunicated; rather we are to have no more to do with them. One translation says, “After a first and second warning, avoid someone who causes arguments.”^{xii} What is important for us to note is that this command is not given solely for the elders. Without congregational unity, the command has no force. This is church discipline exercised in a way that is loving, remedial, restorative and redemptive. It is conducted in humility as the people of God endeavour to correct these opponents of the Faith with gentleness, hoping that “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” [see **2 TIMOTHY 2:25**]. It is our desire to see these argumentative individuals “come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” [**2 TIMOTHY 2:26**].

Paul sought unity among the churches. One church to whom he wrote that was severely dysfunctional was the Church of God at Corinth. Recall the plea with which he opened his first missive to this divided congregation. “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul” [**1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-13**].

Later, he would remind them of the incongruity of claiming unity in Christ through participation at the Lord’s Table while dividing along social lines. We could caution that we must not introduce division into the congregation along any lines! Paul wrote, “I’m talking to intelligent people. Judge for yourselves what I’m saying. When we bless the cup of blessing aren’t we sharing the blood of Christ? When we break the bread aren’t we sharing the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we are one body, although we are many individuals. All of us share one loaf” [**1 CORINTHIANS 10:15-17**].^{xiii} We cannot be one if we are divided. Jesus warned, “No city or house divided against itself will stand” [**MATTHEW 12:25**]. The Master also warned, “A divided household falls” [**LUKE 11:17**]. Just so, a divided congregation is doomed to fall.

Paul had to remind the Corinthian believers, “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” [**1 CORINTHIANS 12:12**]. In a similar manner, failure to marginalise divisive people ensures that a weakened congregation.

Concluding his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul again addressed his concern about fractured unity in the congregation. He urged them, “Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” [**2 CORINTHIANS 13:11**]. Focus on the admonition to “agree with one another.” The action of a congregation to marginalise divisive people must be a united action.

What is tragic in our day is that too often, warped and sinful people, people that are divisive, argumentative, disruptive, not only are not disciplined, but are actually esteemed. These individuals, because they are long-time members, or because they are well liked, or because they are powerful, are permitted to continue their destructive work.

Let me make a final point to the people of God concerning balance on this issue. We struggle with the teaching to avoid arguments because we know there are issues worth disputing. Moreover, it seems divisive to command marginalising divisive people. Let me respond to such a concern by reminding you that there is a difference between needing to divide and loving to divide. You know very well that there is a difference between people who love peace and people who love to fight.

A divisive person loves to fight—they relish the conflict so they can prove their point. Though a peace-loving individual may be compelled to fight, they never enjoy the fight. A person who loves peace may be forced into division, but it is not his character to fight. When forced to argue, he endeavours to be fair, truthful and loving in his responses. He grieves at being compelled to disagree with a fellow Christian.

A divisive person, on the other hand, eagerly anticipates the conflict and delights in conquering another individual, even when that other person is a fellow believer. For the divisive person, victory means everything. Therefore, in a conflict, they twist words, call names, threaten, manipulate and extend the debate as long as possible and open as many fronts as possible.

Divisive people jump at the chance for debate in the church. Thus, the same voices and personalities tend to appear repeatedly regardless of the issues. There must be balance in the Faith. Yes, we must defend the Faith; but we should never enjoy the conflict. If we love to fight, we are not serving Christ.

The Apostle's commands are forcing us to examine ministry priorities. We need to ask ourselves when we bristle or take umbrage at what may be said whether the argument is about primary or secondary concerns about our service. We must remain focused on what pleases Christ, and not on what makes us feel good about ourselves. Jesus our Saviour and His divine will must always be our priority.

I have spoken to the members of the congregation, though undoubtedly others from outside the congregation will hear my words. However, it may be that you have held back from confessing Christ and uniting with the congregation of the Lord because you have witnessed the conflict and division Christians oft-times seem to promote. Perhaps you have seen the bitter invective, the calumny and maliciousness that sometimes marks church disputes, and you have decided that you want no part of that. No one can blame you for thinking ill of such religious conflict. However, may I say that when Christians act in that manner, they are not serving Christ and they are not acting as He has commanded us to act. Consider that some of those fighting may bear the Name of Christ without belonging to Christ—they may not be Christians, as their actions prove.

Nevertheless, you must be born from above if you would have peace with God. Christ died because of your sin and was raised to declare you right with the Father. For this reason, the Word of God offers life in Christ Jesus the Lord. In full confidence of His mercy to all who will receive it, I cite His promise that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. The promise of God is that "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved" [see **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. I trust that this includes you. Amen.

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- ⁱ **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)
- ⁱⁱ **The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation, 2nd Edition** (American Bible Society, New York 1992)
- ⁱⁱⁱ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003)
- ^{iv} **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** (Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, CA 1995)
- ^v **NET Bible**
- ^{vi} Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)
- ^{vii} **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)
- ^{viii} **NET Bible**
- ^{ix} **NET Bible**
- ^x **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update**
- ^{xi} **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update**
- ^{xii} **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version**
- ^{xiii} **GOD'S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)