

# **DIVISION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

## **A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE**

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## Introduction

Some years ago, I had a divine encounter while driving to Tulsa late one Sunday afternoon. Here is the story. I had been very busy the previous week, overseeing a Bible camp, located 90 minutes outside of Tulsa. I had returned to Tulsa Saturday afternoon, preached at the Sunday morning worship service, then left immediately after the service to transport a carload of young people back to the camp. After registering the young people for the coming week of camp, I drove back to Tulsa to preach in the Sunday evening service. Because of the very busy schedule, I had not had time to prepare a sermon for the service, which would take place almost immediately upon my arrival.

I had no idea what God wanted presented to the church. While driving, I prayed for God to give me His word for the evening. Suddenly, my prayer was interrupted by a very strong, horrible odor. “Skunk,” was my immediate reaction. There is no mistaking the origin of that distinctive odor. I declared for the second time, “Skunk,” and resumed my prayer. Then, I realized that God had answered my prayer and revelation began to develop.

Just like a skunk, Satan has a very distinctive odor. Any time that odor is present, there is no mistaking the source of the stink. The peculiar odor of Satan is division, or separation. That was my sermon for the evening.

Satan first manifested his distinctive odor when he led angels in rebellion against God, and caused division in heaven, prior to the creation of Man. He first smeared that odor on man in the Garden of Eden, causing separation between God and man and between Adam and Eve. Sin always produces separation and sin is Satan’s product. When there is the slightest alienation, separation, division, or loss of intimacy, in the Kingdom of God, it is because Satan has passed through. Some expression of man’s sinful flesh has been enlivened. Satan’s distinctive odor of division has filled the air. Every relationship could be perfect, loving, and in full agreement, except for the fact that Satan has left his odor upon us and refragrances us at every opportunity. This is true of all human relationships, as well as the relationship between individuals and God.

In this paper we explore division as it relates to the New Testament Church. In order to have the subject of division in proper perspective, we first must be aware of the sacredness of unity.

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# SECTION ONE: UNITY

## PART ONE

### The Sacredness of Unity

When Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane, he began a twelve hour ordeal that would culminate in his crucifixion the next morning. The last thing that Jesus did before leaving the upper room to begin that ordeal, was to pray the magnificent High Priestly Prayer recorded in John 17. In this prayer, our High Priest first prayed for Himself, then for his eleven disciples, then for all of those who in future generations would believe and trust in Him as a result of hearing the Gospel. We begin this paper by listening reverently to the words that Jesus prayed for those of us who never saw Him, nor heard His voice, but came to believe in Him through the preaching of the Word:

*I do not ask in behalf of these alone [the eleven],  
but for those also who believe in Me through their word;*

*that they may all be one;  
even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee,  
that they also may be in Us;  
that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.*

*And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them;  
that they may be one, just as We are one;  
I in them, and Thou in Me,*

*that they may be perfected in unity,  
that the world may know that Thou didst send Me,  
and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.  
(John 17:20-23)*

This is a prayer. Jesus asked something of the Father in behalf of His disciples. He was not prescribing something for us to do or to act upon, but He was asking the Father for something in our behalf.

These verses in the Greek text contain six *hina* clauses. A *hina* clause is a clause that begins with the Greek word, ἵνα (*hina*), followed by a verb in the subjunctive mood. The idea conveyed by the *hina* clauses in this passage is purpose or intent, i.e., *in order that something potentially may occur or exist*. Observe the flow of thought in the six clauses:

- Jesus interceded in **order that** *they may all be one*;
- That they all may be one **in order that** *that they also may be in Us*; (in the same way that Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee)
- That they may be one **in order that** *the world may believe that Thou didst send Me*.
- The Son imparted His glory to His disciples **in order that** *they may be one, just as We are one; (I in them, and Thou in Me)*
- I in them and Thou in Me **in order that** *they may be perfected in unity*,
- They may be perfected in unity **in order that** *the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me*.

This prayer takes a very interesting turn.

- First Jesus prayed that His followers might be one, so that they may be united in the Father and Son, in the same way that the Father and Son are united in one another. Thus stated, unity among believers is not the result of being in union with the Father and Son, but rather, unity among believers is a condition required for believers to be in unity with the Father and Son.
- The prayer concludes by stating the opposite, that perfect unity among believers is the result of being in union with the Father and Son.
- In between these opening and closing statements is the declaration that the Son has given to His disciples the same glory that the Father had given to Him, and this enabled His followers to be one.

Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? To debate this question is not within the purview of our discussion here, except to note that believers' unity with the Father and Son, and unity among believers themselves, are co-existing conditions. One does not exist without the other.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Our Lord has provided the element that makes unity possible – His glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Only one thing in the passage is causative as regards unity; it is the fact that the Son has given the same glory to believers that the Father has given to the Son. What did Jesus mean, when He said, *And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one* ? Why are believers not one, today, if the source of that complete oneness is the glory that the Son has given? Has the Son withdrawn that glory? The Greek verb translated *may be* (**wsin**) is in the subjunctive mood, preceded by **ifia**, which implies purpose. Thus the focus in this clause is the motivation in the heart of the Son, why He gave the glory, rather than on the guaranteed result. The subjunctive mood can be understood as expressing potential. Such an understanding seems to fit this verse, i.e. Our Lord longed for oneness among His disciples. He has given “glory” to them so that such unity might be possible. Complete unity is not possible through human effort alone.

Shortly before praying the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus told His disciples,

*"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*  
(John 13:35)

Because unity and love among believers would be persuasive evidence that God the Father sent His Son as an expression of His love for humanity, lack of unity among believers is a tool of Satan. The enemy has great opportunity to mock the Church because of disunity, animosity, division, and in-fighting among believers. This gives the world an excuse to discount the message of those who claim loyalty to Christ.

Any true disciple of Jesus, cannot avoid sorrow and consternation when he hears the heart of Our Lord in this prayer, and then takes note of the huge canyons of various sorts that separate believers from one another.

Love for one another, expressed through unity, is the normal assumed state of the Christian community. Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* (Ephesians 4:2-3)

Paul viewed unity as a given, something that was assumed to exist. The task of the believer is not to create unity, but to preserve it. Paul's statement also asserts that maintaining unity is not just the responsibility of leadership, but the responsibility of every church member. Sadly, unity has not been the trademark of Christianity. The plethora of denominations, movements, sects, and independent churches that have become the kingdom of a dominant leader, all are expressions of a huge "NO," in response to Jesus High Priestly Prayer. At the local level, the record has been no better. Division and church splits have become the norm, rather than the exception.

Our concern in this paper is unity and division at the local level. The topic of unity beyond the local church must remain the topic for another paper.

## **PART TWO**

### **An Exhortation to Total Unity**

What is the unity described? Many of the New Testament exhortations to unity concern unity in doctrine. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*  
(1 Corinthians 1:10)

This is strong language. Paul urged conformity to a particular understanding and opinion. Here is the final phrase in the three most popular English versions:

KJV *but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

NIV *and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

NAS *but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

The final term of the verse, *gnome* (ἡ γνώμη) translated, *judgment*, in the NAS and KJV, *thought* in the NIV, implies that one has looked into something and formed an opinion. A more literal rendering of the verse would be,

*That you all say the same thing... you be harmonized<sup>2</sup> in the same mind and the same opinion.*

Paul's exhortation is a tall order in our pluralistic society, but it does demonstrate that the apostle considered unity in doctrine to be important.

The importance of unity resulting from sound doctrine is emphasized in the Ephesian Epistle's purpose statement for church leadership:

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;*

*until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

*As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, (Ephesians 4:11-15)*

God-given church leadership is responsible for equipping and bringing to maturity the saints under their care. As a result of such maturity, saints will not be swayed by false doctrine, but will have the truth (true doctrine) on their lips, spoken with love. Note that the expression, *until we all come to the unity of the faith*, indicates a process – not all are there.

All efforts toward unity have expressed some sort of attitude toward doctrine. Some have said that it is not important (certainly not Paul's view). Their theme song could be

*Come on people now  
Smile on your brother  
Everybody get together  
Try to love one another right now.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> In attempting to find an English word that accurately conveys the sense of *kathrtismenoi* in this passage, I can think of no other term other than "harmonized" or perhaps, "orchestrated" that communicates the idea. The term carries the idea of putting something in place, organizing, or restoring something.

<sup>3</sup> **Get Together** Jesse Colin Young Recorded by the Youngbloods in 1967, re-released in 1969 after the National Council of Christians and Jews used it in a commercial

Love, which the 1960's defined as "feel good unconditional acceptance," seems to be the attitude of a growing number of contemporary churches, especially liberals and Charismatics. Since doctrine has divided Christians, then doctrine must be bad. "Love," defined as unconditional acceptance and affection, is the only thing that counts. True followers of Christ cannot accept such a view of unity, because Scripture declares truth to be essential and false doctrine to be damning.

Truth does not depend on collective opinion, tradition, or perspective. Scripture presents truth as a matter of conforming to fact. That which God reveals is knowable and should be defended rationally.

In contrast to feel-good unconditional acceptance, some have insisted that narrow and specific agreement in every doctrinal detail is necessary for unity. Paul, the great advocate of sound doctrine, acknowledged that there will be different opinions, based on people's different consciences and that these should not divide us. That's the message of Romans 14. This section begins with, *Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions*(Romans 14:1) and closes with *Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.* (Romans 15:7).

Even so, those doctrines that have to do with the identity of God and those things that involve salvation, these must not be compromised in order for us to "just get along."

## **PART THREE**

### **The Gravity of Division**

In a pluralistic, voluntary, individualistic society, such as we have in America, most people do not understand that threatening the life of a local church can threaten their eternal salvation. Few things are more serious than being responsible for splitting a church (assuming that the split was for the wrong reasons).

Corinth was a local church with a lot of internal problems. The church was divided in many ways and for many reasons. One of the ways that they were expressing their propensity for division was through their preferences for one leader or another. Some said that they were "of Paul," and some said that they were "of Apollos," some said that they were "of Cephas," and some said that they were "of Christ." Paul challenged them with the question, *Has Christ been divided?*<sup>4</sup> In Chapter Three of I Corinthians, Paul chastised them for this conduct and then declared,

*Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.* (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

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<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 1:13

Three Temples of God are described in the New Testament:

- The believer's body (I Corinthians 6:19)
- The World Wide Church (Ephesians 2:14-22)
- The local church, described in I Corinthians 3.

There are two Greek terms translated *temple*.

- The first is **ἱερόν** (*hieron*). This term refers to the building, often including the entire temple complex.
- The other word is **ναός** (*naos*), referring to the innermost chamber wherein dwells the Spirit of God.

The Holy of Holies in the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple was the **ναός**. The **ναός** is the holiest place on earth. In Latin, the term is *Sanctum Sanctorum*, from which we obtain the English term, *sanctuary*. The Holy Spirit used the term, **ναός**, in all three of the above passages. The local church, the body of the believer, the world-wide Church, these are the **ναός**, the Holy of Holies, the *Sanctum Sanctorum*. For this reason, it seems blasphemous to call any part of a church building *the Sanctuary*. In the New Covenant, God does not dwell in buildings made with hands (Act 17:24), but in the innermost being of His People.

Since the local church is a **ναός**, a Holy of Holies, anyone who causes its destruction has committed a terrible sin. Paul said that *if any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are*. I would hate to face God in The Judgment, if I had been responsible for deliberate action that destroyed a local fellowship.

Let it be noted that leaders, by the manner in which they handle disputes and disagreements, can be responsible for the destruction of a local church. Prayer and self-examination must be a prelude to any deliberate response. Pride and other motivations can cause a leader to be more interested in his own ministry or position than he is in the Body of Christ.

Some years ago, I was involved in a situation in which there was sin and deception on the part of a pastor. Problems were seething below the surface of the congregation. It was a powder keg ready to explode. We attempted to persuade the pastor to step down for a season, to get his life in order, and to allow the situation to be resolved. He refused, because it was "my church." I was greatly troubled and spent much time in anguished prayer, crying out for guidance. In one of those moments of anguish, I experienced a very troubling yet transforming vision. I saw a beautiful bride, adorned in a brilliant white dress. I could not see the bride's face, the brilliance of the dress held my attention. Then, hands and forearms began to appear in the vision. Some of the hands began to handle the beautiful dress, leaving dirty stains upon it. After a few moments, the hands began to pull at the dress, some one way and some another, and they began to tear it apart. Quickly, some of the hands began to grab the arms and shoulders of the bride and they began to dismember the bride, violently pulling her apart. The scene was horrible to behold. Then God spoke to my spirit, "This is what men do to My Bride, when they are more concerned about their ministries than they are about the Bride of Christ."

I cannot put into words the impact that the vision had on me. From that time onward, my attitude toward any local church has been that of reverential awe. When I am involved in helping a local church, I do so with trepidation and godly fear. The last thing that I want is for my finger prints to be found on any church. The local church is more than just a group of people gathered at their own pleasure, it is a representation of the Bride of Christ.

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## SECTION TWO: ACCEPTABLE DIVISION

### PART ONE A Misunderstood Passage

The King James Version's rendering of Amos 3:3 frequently has been cited as justification for division between Christian groups and individuals.

*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?* (KJV Amos 3:3)

Three facts rule against using this verse to justify separation because of a disagreement:

- The context of the verse rules against using the verse to justify separation..
- The language of the King James Version does not correctly communicate the idea contained in the Hebrew text.
- The inappropriateness of using an illustration to establish truth.

#### *The Context*

Taken in context, even in the KJV, it is apparent that the verse is not saying that people cannot walk together unless they agree with one another. Here is the entire passage in the KJV.

*1 Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,*

*2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*

*3 Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*

*4 Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey?*

*will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?*

*5 Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him?*

*shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?*

*6 Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?*

*shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?*

7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

8 The lion hath roared, who will not fear?  
the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?  
(KJV Amos 3:1-8)

This is a cause and effect passage, which declares the origin of prophecy and the inability of the prophet to remain silent when God has spoken. The chain of cause and effect statements culminates in verse 8... *the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?*

In order to shore up the argument, a series of cause and effect examples are given. Verse 3, declares that two could not walk together unless they have agreed to do so.

### ***The Hebrew Text***

The Hebrew word that the KJV renders as “agreed,” is *ya’ad* in the *Niph’al* voice (*no’ad*)<sup>5</sup>, meaning:

- *to meet*
- *to meet by appointment*
- *to gather or to assemble by appointment*

The idea in the Hebrew text is that two people take a walk together because they have agreed to meet and walk together. This has nothing to do with their being in agreement on any issue. They walk together because they have agreed to walk together.

The NIV and the NAS render the verse more in keeping with the Hebrew terms:

NIV *Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?*

NAS *Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?*

### ***Inappropriate Use of Illustration to Establish Truth***

Those who use this verse as a basis for separation, commit a basic error of Scriptural exegesis. The underlying error is the failure to recognize the nature of the verse within the passage. This verse is not a doctrinal statement. It is a part of a passage illustrating cause and effect. It is a statement of a common life experience, not a statement of truth. Furthermore, it is improper exegesis to base a doctrine on an illustration. **However, if it were appropriate to build a doctrine from this verse, the application would be, *men can decide to walk together, even if they don’t agree.* This is just the opposite of the separatist doctrine frequently based upon this verse.**<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Niph'al* is the form of the verb in either the passive or reflexive voice

<sup>6</sup> The underlying error committed by those who would base a separatist doctrine on this verse is the failure to recognize the nature of the verse within the passage. This verse is not a doctrinal statement. It is a part of a passage

## PART TWO

### Paul and Barnabas

When discussing division, the subject of Paul and Barnabas invariably arises. Here is the situation, as it is described Acts.

*And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."*

*And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.*

*And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.*

*But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*  
(Acts 15:36-41)

It is painful to read this record. Luke's style is to be totally honest, present facts and to omit editorial content. Luke does not fix blame. In order to understand the episode, we must examine its background and the details of the disagreement. Initially, Barnabas was in agreement with Paul about the trip. He wanted to take along his nephew, John Mark, who had begun the first trip with them, but had left the apostolic team when they entered hard territory (Acts 13:13). We are not told why John Mark turned back.

Paul's attitude is displayed in the Greek of Acts 15:37-38. Barnabas simply said that he wanted to take John Mark with them (*sumparalabein* - **sumparalabein** [aorist infinitive]). Paul responded that did not want to keep taking John Mark on missionary trips (*sumparalambanein* - **sumparalambanein** [present infinitive]). Paul's attitude was that John Mark was not qualified to continue as a member of the missionary team because he was unreliable. The Acts 13:13 account of Mark's turning back uses a neutral term (*apochoresas* - **apocwrhsav**) which simply means, "departing." In the disagreement with Barnabas, Paul used a another term (*apostanta* - **apostanta** [the term from which we get the English word, *apostasy*]) which carries the idea of *disloyalty*.

The disagreement was not just two points of view being expressed. The Greek term is *paroxusmos* (**paroxusmos**), which means a *sharp fit of anger* or an *angry dispute*. The angry dispute resulted in the two friends parting company. Barnabas, the *Son of Consolation* (this is

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illustrating cause and effect. It is a statement of a common life experience, not a statement of truth. Furthermore, it is improper exegesis to base a doctrine on an illustration.

the meaning of his name) took his nephew with him to Cyprus, his native region, where he carried on the work of the Gospel. Barnabas' concern seems to have been for the welfare of his nephew. Paul was concerned about the work.

What was behind this separation? The view has been expressed that Paul came up with the idea for the trip, without the leading of the Spirit; it was a human idea and had human consequences. Advocates of this view point out that on the first missionary journey the Holy Spirit clearly commissioned the apostolic team.

*Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*

*And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

*Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*

(Acts 13:1-4)

There is no record of such a commissioning by the Holy Spirit when Paul suggested to Barnabas that they make a return visit to the churches.

Several things might be said in response to this view. First, the two events are not coequal. The event in Acts 13 was the commissioning to a ministry, a setting aside for what today we label "missionary service," although in many cases we should more properly label it, "apostolic ministry." Such a setting aside occurs only once, unless the Lord changes a person's call, and at the instruction of the Holy Spirit a setting aside to something else takes place.

On the first trip, being sent out by the Holy Spirit into apostolic ministry, the apostles journeyed from place to place and preached the Gospel. During this entire account, there is no mention of being directed by the Holy Spirit. They went from place to place and preached, then returned back to Antioch. Since there is no mention of being directed by the Holy Spirit in their journey, must we conclude that they were not directed by the Holy Spirit and they just used their human judgment as they set their course from place to place? Was the idea to go here and there just a human idea and God blessed their plans?

After returning to Antioch, they encountered problems with Judaizing teachers. Here is the Antioch Church's response

*And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.*

(Acts 15:1-2)

There is no mention of the Holy Spirit in the decision to send a delegation to Jerusalem

*The brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem....*

The result was one of the most important meetings ever held in the history of the Church. This council declared once and for all that there should be no division between Jewish and Gentile believers. Because there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in the decision to send a delegation to Jerusalem, does that mean that the Holy Spirit was not in it?

In the missionary journey that Paul and Silas undertook after the separation with Barnabas, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is mentioned (see Acts 16:7, 9), whereas there is no mention of such guidance on the first journey. This second missionary journey, lasting about three years, was the most productive season of Paul's life, as far as the record goes.

Before Paul and Silas began their journey, the elders of the Church at Antioch blessed them and sent them out, even as they had done on the first missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Note that there is no record that they did this with Barnabas and Mark.

Where did the idea for the journey come from? Was the idea from the Holy Spirit, directly or indirectly, or was it just a good idea that occurred to Paul? Given the results of the journey and the Holy Spirit's leading in it, one could conclude that the Holy Spirit motivated Paul to suggest the journey. To conclude otherwise one has to base his conclusions on an argument from silence (i.e., since the record does not say that the Holy Spirit motivated Paul, then the Holy Spirit did not motivate Paul). It seems to me that these facts indicate that we cannot explain the separation between Paul and Barnabas as being the result of Paul's coming up with a human idea which produced a human result.

There is one element that is in the picture but not mentioned in the Acts 15 account. Sometime before this happened, Peter had visited Antioch. When he arrived in Antioch, Peter found Gentile and Jewish Christians in full fellowship with one another. Peter joined in this fellowship, eating and socializing with Gentile believers. However, when some Judaizing teachers came from Jerusalem, and began to call for the Jewish believers to separate from Gentile believers, Peter, Barnabas, and the Jewish Christians withdrew from the Gentiles. This was not because the Jewish believers felt that practicing the Law had anything to do with their salvation. The separation was because they *feared them that were of the circumcision* (Galatians 2:12). Anyone who grew up in the midst of racial segregation can easily understand the action of Peter and Barnabas.<sup>7</sup> Paul, the advocate of grace and Gentile inclusion, publicly rebuked Peter to his face; Barnabas would have been included in the rebuke (Galatians 2:14ff).

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<sup>7</sup> Having grown up in a very prejudiced, racially segregated environment, the action of Peter and Barnabas recalls many scenes to my mind. For example, among laborers, if a black man and white man were on a project together, they might take a lunch break, and although not sitting side by side, they would eat in one another's presence, perhaps even sharing small talk. However, if in the midst of the meal, another white man would come on the scene, the first white man would quickly step apart from the black man, possibly even entering into disparaging remarks about "niggers." All of this was because of the fear of man – exactly the same thing that is recorded in Galatians 2:11-13.

We cannot avoid considering what this episode must have done to the relationship between Paul and Barnabas. The relationship between the two old friends must have been impacted by the entire scenario. As one writer put it, “After that, it is doubtful if Paul and Barnabas ever could be so happy in their association as they had once been. The old mutual confidence had been damaged and could not be restored.”<sup>8</sup> The relationship was restored to some degree in later years, as is seen in Paul’s friendly remarks in I Corinthians 9:6 and Colossians 4:10. Paul made similar positive remarks about Mark, even wanting him, along with Timothy, to be with him during the closing days of his life (Colossians 4:10ff; Philemon 24; II Timothy 4:11).

In this episode, raw human emotion is displayed, for whatever reason. As Paul declared to the crowd at Lystra, *We also are men of like passions with you...* The sharp disagreement/argument between Paul and Barnabas was a display of flesh. Satan had passed through.

How we wish that Paul and Barnabas had written the words to the Jim Krueger song,

*So let's leave it alone 'cause we can't see eye-to-eye  
There ain't no good guys, there ain't no bad guys  
There's only you and me and we just disagree*<sup>9</sup>

Disagreement over routines, techniques, perspective, etc., does not have to result in division. Even going our separate ways to accomplish God’s call on our lives, is not division, as long as we are united in heart and bless one another in our separate endeavors and diverse views on non-essential matters.

## **PART THREE**

### **Division Justified**

Is division ever justified? Is it a sin to separate from a church, then to begin another one in the same community? A direct biblical answer to this question is not forthcoming. The conditions that exist in today’s church setting were unknown in the New Testament. It is clear that there were different “congregations.” For example, in Romans 16 Paul extended greetings to several house-churches in the same city. Even though they met separately and possibly had their own leaders, they were a part of the Church in Rome. There is a sense of unity and fraternity, even though they were separate congregations. They were united in doctrine, identity, and accepted the same apostles as being God’s revelators. One reason that they met separately seems to have been circumstantial.<sup>10</sup> Some were slaves in the same household and apparently had their church on the environs of their master’s dwelling. Others met in this home or that home because that was what was available for meetings places. There is no evidence in Paul’s letter that the entire

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<sup>8</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) page 302

<sup>9</sup> Lyrics and music by Jim Krueger, recorded by Dave Mason, 1977; number 12 on the popularity chart that year.

<sup>10</sup> See our paper presented at the 2001 Conclave, *How New Testament Churches Relate to One Another*, available at our website, [doulospress.org](http://doulospress.org)

Roman Church met in a single assembly. We can picture Paul's letter's being circulated from group to group, perhaps even copied so that each group could have its own copy.

In our day, the situation is far different. Several local churches of several denominations, or independent churches that have no fellowship with one another, exist in the same city or town. The meeting places of these churches quite often are within throwing distance of one another. Expulsion or church discipline is complicated because the church taking the action is not "the only show in town." Dissidents can leave one church and go to the one across the street, often being welcomed without any qualms. Competition, although not admitted, is the name of the game, played under the table.

Given the situation today, with all of the false doctrine and aberrant behaviour of some church leaders, clearly one's conscience may force him to leave a church, perhaps to begin another. Even so, it is a very serious matter. It seems to me that the following questions should be asked when one is considering leaving a church. These questions involve not just any specific scripture, but reflect the general tenor of several scriptural principles.

1. Did God call you to be in this church in the first place, and has He released you from it?
2. Have you examined the Scriptures concerning the issues involved and are you certain that the position you are taking is the biblical position?
3. Are the issues involved so serious that if you remained with the church you would be compromising your convictions or you would be giving credence to something to which you are strongly opposed?
4. Have you examined your heart and are you clear about your motive – are you deceiving yourself?
5. Have you made every reasonable effort to communicate your concerns to the church leadership, and have you done so with respect?
6. Have you prayed about this enough to sense the mind of God?
7. Have you consulted with respected brothers who have "no dog in the fight," and who will be honest with you about their perception of your motives, the situation in the church, and God's view of the whole thing?
8. Does leaving necessarily entail the beginning another church; is there another church in the area that you consider to be acceptable and to be God's will for you?
9. Can you take this action without enticing people away from the existing church?

Separating from a church is a serious step. Beginning another church is more serious, because not only is one responsible for his leaving, but he also is responsible for the lives of those with whom he begins the new congregation. Yet there are times when one has to choose between

remaining in a church or being faithful to Our Lord. When such a choice becomes apparent, separation is the only God-approved action.

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## SECTION THREE: TYPES OF DIVISION & LEADERSHIP'S RESPONSE

### PART ONE Terms Describing Division

In dealing with division, it is important to determine the nature of the division and its causes. A place to begin is to note the types of division that are reflected in the terms referring to division in the local church. Two important distinctions become evident through a study of the Greek terms referring to division. A list of the Greek terms discussed in this section, including the verses in which the terms occur, is contained in the **Addenda**. At this point, we summarize the significance of the terms.

#### **sci**smā -- *schisma*

The first term is **sci**smā, which literally means, *a tear*, or in the verb form, **sci**zw (*schidzo*), *to tear*. The term is used in its common literal meaning, for example, in Matthew 27:51, describing the tearing of the Temple veil and the rending of the rocks at the moment of Jesus' death.

*And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, (NAS)*

Three times in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians he uses this term to refer to disunity in the local church.

1 Corinthians 1:10 *Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no **divisions** among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

1 Corinthians 11:18 *For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that **divisions** exist among you; and in part, I believe it.*

1 Corinthians 12:25 *that there should be no **division** in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

This term does not refer to parties or sects that form within the body. It refers simply to the fact that there is disunity, or rending of relationships within the local church.

## dicostasia - *dichostasia*

Two verbs, **dicotomew** (*dichotomeo*) and **dicazw**, (*dichadzo*) are related to **dicostasia**. The first of these, **dicotomew**, means *to cut in two*. An example of its use is Matthew 24:51

*and shall **cut** him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.*

**dicazw**, the other verb form implies separating. An example of its use is Matthew 10:35

*"For I came to **set** a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*

Paul uses the noun form of the word, **dicostasia**, two or three times (depending upon which Greek manuscript one uses) in his epistles to describe disharmony in a local church.

Romans 16:17 *Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause **dissensions** and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.*

1 Corinthians 3:3 *for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife [KJV adds, and **divisions**] among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*

Galatians 5:19-20 *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, **dissensions**, factions,*

## apodiorizw – *apodioridzo*

The verb, **apodiorizw**, occurs once in the New Testament, in Jude 19. The term means, literally, *to separate*. In its participial form, which is the form in Jude, the term means *the separating ones*. The difficulty in understanding Jude 18-19 is that the participle can mean either that these individuals separate themselves from the body, or that they cause others to separate from the body<sup>11</sup>. Notice that the KJV renders the term with one understanding, whereas the NAS and NIV choose the other understanding.

KJV Jude 18-19 *How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be **they who separate themselves**, sensual, having not the Spirit.*

NIV Jude 1:18-19 *They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are **the men who divide you**, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*

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<sup>11</sup> The verb is in the middle voice



Titus 3:10 *Reject a **factious** man after a first and second warning,*

### **These words describe two categories of division in the local church:**

- The first category consists of any disunity and disharmony in a local church. This may be general unrest, distrust, or disunity or controversy over specific issues.
- The second category is a group, a sect, a party, that sets itself apart from the body. Such a group may exist within the local church, gathered around a particular individual, a particular issue, or any other group identity that results in separation. This category also includes those who, as a group, leave the local church and form a separate body.

The first category may or may not be deliberate. The second category is deliberate, it involves a choice – an **ai[esiv**.

## **PART TWO**

### **General Disharmony**

Even though the first category may or may not be deliberate, and probably is not organized, it can be very destructive. Many of those who are involved in this sort of disunity are not bad people. Here are some examples of the first category – disunity, disharmony, tearing apart of relationships, but not an organized sect.

- Some people seem to have been born dissatisfied and, short of a miracle, they will be that way until they die. Anyone who has much experience in church leadership has had to contend with chronically dissatisfied people. Such people are unhappy, and regardless of how much we hurt for them and long to see them full of joy, any honest elder would have to admit that he has not had much success in bringing permanent change to very many (if any) of these folks.

It is not unusual for unhappy people to complain and criticize the church, the leaders, the teachers, etc. in such a manner as to spread their disease among the body. The result is a general griping, complaining, and vague unrest. Love, transparency, and harmony, cannot flourish in this setting. Especially unfortunate and unhealthy is a situation in which an elder or some other dominant leader is chronically dissatisfied.

- For one reason or another, there are those who have a need to criticize leaders. They criticize the President, the Governor, Congress, the school principal, and the leaders of their church. Usually, this attitude is the result of wounds or experiences from the past (perhaps it was the attitude modeled by a parent). Sometimes, these are reactions to wounds received in forgotten episodes but the individual still functions in the programming that has come from that circumstance. It is not unusual for critical people to be unable to present, logically, their complaints. Unfortunately, a critical person begets a critical spirit in the church.

- Gossip (in its more extreme form, slander) is another source of disharmony. Unfortunately, gossip seems to be inherent in the human race. The inescapable fruit of gossip is separation and distance between believers. If I gossip about someone, I am not bonded to him, but I view him as a being separated from me. Gossip breeds distrust and defamation. Gossip probably has destroyed more fellowships than any other sin.
- Hidden sin in the life of a member or members produces alienation. Those who hide their sins keep their distance. They do not want to be a part of a church in which intimacy and openness prevail, so they will frustrate efforts to produce true body life. It is not unusual for someone who has a hidden sin to begin to stir trouble in the body, pointing the finger at this, that, or the other, in an effort to keep attention away from himself. Also, those with hidden sin often harbor a multitude of negative emotions and attitudes that spill over into the body.
- Sin that is not hidden is another force of division. That's what Jude addressed in Jude 18-19. Sexual sin among leaders; dishonesty among leaders; financial shenanigans among leaders; the list could become quite lengthy, but we will use Paul's term, "and such things,"<sup>12</sup> to cover the list. Who among us has not seen a church torn apart by the sinful behaviour of those in places of leadership!
- An individual who is obsessed with a particular form of piety, a certain doctrine, a form of church government, etc., that is contrary to the church of which he is a member (or attending), frequently is a disruptive presence in the church. It is not unusual for such an individual to have an agenda, i.e., to change the church to make it become what he thinks it should be. He does not reason with the elders, because he thinks that he would be unable to win them to his position. He does not attempt open political action (gathering a group who will agree with him and thus, put pressure on leadership), but he seeks to achieve his agenda by working his way into places of responsibility and trust, all the while looking for opportunities to achieve his goal. He achieves his ends unseen, like termites in the woodwork. One day the elders discover that the seditious individual has brought about changes that put the elders at odds with much of the church. Division has taken place.

Recently, we have learned of two churches that had to deal with an advocate of a particular doctrine who wrote letters, passed out brochures, etc., trying to change the doctrinal stance of the church – all behind the elders back. In one church, the elders were able to deal with the individual. In the second of these churches, the church was almost destroyed. It exists today as a shadow of its former self.

- The passages of life often bring a tearing of relationships in the church. Both men and women go through passages – changes of life. For men, the changes are not as hormonal as much as they are psychological. Sometime in their thirties, most men enter into a season in which they look at life and feel like a runner who has run the same oval track

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<sup>12</sup> Galatians 5:21

ten times and thinks, “here I go again.” A mood develops that cries out for something different. A Christian man cannot trade wives, he cannot trade off his children, he cannot afford to change jobs, he may not be able to afford to sell his house and buy another, but he can change one thing – he can change his church membership. However, his conscience won’t let him just change churches, he has to have a reason to justify the change. So, he has to find something wrong with the church. I have seen this pattern repeated so many times that I can almost predict it. When this happens in a church in which the bulk of the congregation is of the same generation, the church is greatly impacted. In such a situation, as the fabric of the church begins to tear apart, elders tend to shake their heads and ask, “What’s going on?”

- An independent attitude and fear of commitment, although two different things, achieve the same result. These individuals will not commit to the local church, “sink or swim.” They refuse to have a covenant mentality with their fellow believers. They may enter into full activity, even participating intensely in some project, perhaps even bringing visitors, but they are a disconnected element. They always reserve the right to walk away, usually without any explanation or comment. When there are several of this bent in the local church, or if the local church itself has this attitude, there never can be a sense of “we are in this together.” Relationships at a deep level just aren’t possible. It is not unusual for independent people to move from church to church, describing each new church as the greatest thing that anyone ever has discovered – for a season.
- Of course, jealousy, rivalry, and ambition often are the driving forces that tear apart relationships and destroy a church. There is no need to speak much about this, because it has happened so frequently that every person has his own anecdotes.
- Chuck Eastman and Dave Culver listed causes of division that they had experienced in churches. Making no claim to being a complete list, here is what they had on their list when we visited with them in January:
  1. Dogmatism – my doctrine is right and yours is false
  2. Manipulation – I’m going to change you and make you believe what I believe or we don’t have a relationship
  3. Ridicule – What you believe is stupid – Mockery
  4. Name Calling – You are a legalist, you are Pharisee, etc.
  5. Heartless – no love in the relationship
  6. Arrogance – the attitude, “I alone know the whole counsel of God.”

We could list many more. What are we to do about division that is of this category? In order to respond, to these situations, the heart of the individual must be recognized.

Paul set an example for us in his handling of division among the Corinthians. The First Corinthian Epistle reveals a catalogue of ten points of controversy in the Corinthian Church:

1. Sects developing around the name of one leader or another (Chapter 1:10-4:13)
2. Moral standards in the church (Chapter 5; 6:12-20)

3. Lawsuits over various matters (Chapter 6:1-11)
4. Celibacy, marriage, and sexual abstinence (Chapter 7)
5. Eating food dedicated to idols (Chapters 8 & 10)
6. Financial support for apostolic ministry (Chapter 9)
7. Women's attire while praying or prophesying (Chapter 11:1-16)
8. Misconduct at the Lord's Table (Chapter 11:17-34)
9. Spiritual manifestations in the public meeting (Chapters 12 – 14)
10. The resurrection of the physical body (Chapter 15)

Our initial response to learning about the Corinthian Church may be, "What a messed up bunch of people." Paul's response was otherwise. Paul's opening and closing of the letter impress upon us the great affection that he had for the Corinthians. Chapter One, verses 1-9, and the entire Sixteenth Chapter reflect a tone that implies a relationship.

How did Paul respond to these ten points of division – he presented the truth, somewhat aggressively, yet constantly assuring them of his love. He sent Timothy to them to help them through these times. He also told them that if they didn't shape up, he would pay them a visit and not be so gentle.

*I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.*

*I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*

*Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?*  
( 1 Corinthians 4:14)

If we follow Paul's example in I Corinthians, what would be our procedure with division that is not driven by a party mentality?

Often, the best thing to do is to just leave things alone. If the conduct is not producing serious consequences in the church, but is more of an individual condition, wisdom is needed as to whether the person should be left alone, or whether efforts should be made to help the individual overcome his propensities. In such a situation, the matter should be treated as a personal problem, not a church problem. However, if the person has spread his dissatisfaction among the flock, something must be done.

Although not an exact overlay, the principles of Matthew 5:23ff and Matthew 18:15ff should be considered in every situation. Effort should be made to talk things over and to resolve the problem. If that cannot be done, then action must be taken.

No action should be taken without serious prayer on the part of leaders. The local church is God's church and the elders are but stewards. So, prayer for guidance and preparation of hearts must be a priority before anything is done.

Of first importance is leadership's willingness to sit and talk with those who are perpetrators of unstructured division. We recall Jehovah's calling Judah to a conference. After a stinging indictment, he invited His People to reason with Him.

*"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD,  
"Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow;  
Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.*

*"If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land;  
"But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword."  
Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.  
(Isaiah 1:18-20)*

These are strong words, but before any action is taken, *Come now, and let us reason together.*

Paul instructed Timothy,

*And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.  
(2 Timothy 2:24-26)*

Does this passage refer to those who are in opposition to leadership, in opposition to sound doctrine, or in opposition to something else? The answer is uncertain. The statement is in the context of those who are obsessed with quarreling over speculative matters. There is a similar statement in Titus 1:6, which uses a different but similar verb. In Titus, the context makes clear that the opposition is to sound doctrine. Here, however, there is no object. The Greek term which the NAS translates as, *those who are in opposition*, presents an intriguing question as to what Paul meant. The verb itself is in the middle voice, which means that these could be opposing themselves (by their behaviour, they became their own worst enemies). The KJV translates the term, *oppose themselves*. This idea is compatible with the final phrase of the passage, *escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

Be that as it may, church leaders should not approach troublesome individuals in an argumentative spirit, but with kindness and a non-defensive attitude, hoping for a positive outcome. However, they are not to be passive patsies. They are to teach and gently correct those in opposition, but they must be firm. Paul indicates that the result of this effort is up to God, *who may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses...* The elders' part is gentle teaching and correcting. God's part is to grant repentance, if He so chooses.

The elders must remember that Paul described these individuals as being in *the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will*. The battle is with Satan, but the battleground is the character of the individual being used by the enemy. Satan has a foothold in the life of a believer whose character has not been transformed, as Paul described in Romans 12:1-2.

There always is the possibility that the elders unknowingly have done or said something, or perhaps displayed an attitude, for which they should repent. If in the meeting with the individual this becomes apparent (all of us, even elders, are prone to mistakes, flaws, and less than honorable attitudes), the elders should be quick to repent. If the matter involved something done in public, or if it affected the congregation as a whole, the elders should ask the congregation's forgiveness. Such an humble attitude on the part of the elders will rob Satan of an opportunity.

What is to be done when gentle, but firm, conversation does not bring about a change? What if after the meeting, the perpetrator continues his seditious activity, perhaps even informing others of the refusal of the elders to measure up to his expectations? If such is the case, the elders have no choice but to take the next step, but not before an honest evaluation of their own hearts. If the elders want to act in order to defend their reputations, or to get personal justice, they are off base and should not make a move. Paul said that leaders are to be *patient when wronged*. Peter spoke a stronger word,

*For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?*

*But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.*

*For you have been called for this purpose,  
since Christ also suffered for you,  
leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,*

*Who committed no sin,  
nor was any deceit found in His mouth;*

*and while being reviled, He did not revile in return;  
while suffering, He uttered no threats,  
but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;  
(1 Peter 2:20-23)*

The model that Our Lord set before us is absolutely no compromise in defending the things of God. This is the example that He modeled in dealing with the money changers in the Temple and in His verbal attacks on the Pharisees. However, when it came to a defense of His reputation or of Himself, as Peter stated, He did not utter a word. This, Peter wrote, is the model that we are to follow.

I often have equated being in church leadership to being in a ball game. If one is going to play ball, he will get dirty. That's just a part of the game. Sooner or later, any church leader will experience his reputation's being stained. That's just a part of the game. Elders rarely deal with a divisive individual, without some damage to their reputations. Leaders must learn to live with this and to leave their reputations in the hands of the God whom they serve. However, never must they have the attitude of superiority or of self-righteousness. They must have the spirit of being humble slaves of Christ and stewards of His people, accepting the consequences of that responsibility.

Again, we listen to Paul's words concerning his response to character attacks,

*when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.* (1 Corinthians 4:12-13)

After an examination of the heart, and personal repentance if required, the elders must proceed to a confrontation with the individual who is spreading discord. This must be done for the welfare of the perpetrator and the well being of the church. Again, the elders must conduct themselves with kindness, but firmness, the tone of the meeting being determined by the nature of the infraction. In this meeting, the elders must present objective facts, irrefutable examples of divisive behaviour or words; this is not the time for an "he said, she said," meeting. This is a confrontation and the elders must hold all of the cards.

The elders must be clear about their expectations. Perhaps they will ask the perpetrator to repent, confess dishonesty, if lying has been one of the activities, and, if public actions have taken place, perhaps public repentance will be called for. In extreme cases, public disfellowshipping might be appropriate (see the paper presented at the 1993 conclave, *Dealing with Sin in the Lives of Christians*).

A special situation might exist if the discordant member is one who is obsessed with a particular form of piety, a certain doctrine, a form of church government, some movement, etc., that is contrary to the church of which he is a member (or attending). In this situation, it usually is best to tell the individual that the elders will bless his leaving (perhaps even pray for him) in order that he might join a local church with which he agrees.

If distrust has developed between the leaders and the congregation, it may be appropriate to request the help of esteemed brothers from another fellowship or from those who move in trans-local ministry. Although one hopes that the need for such arbitration never will take place, it is wise for leaders in the local church to prepare for such a contingency. The congregation must know and trust those called in to oversee the process, if these brothers are going to be most effective. For that reason, before any problems result, it is wise to invite trans-local brothers to minister in the local church often enough to develop trust between them and the congregation.

## PART THREE

### Organized Division – Dealing with a Sect

The formation of a sect or party, an heresy (αἵρεσις), presents a different challenge. When a segment of the congregation has jelled into a group, uniting around some individual, ministry, or emphasis, a true heresy exists. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that both from without and within men would arise who would develop a following through the teaching false doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

*I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*

*and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

*Therefore be on the alert...*  
(Acts 20:28-31a)

Jesus used the same terminology to describe false prophets.

*Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*  
(Matthew 7:15)

Peter warned, *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.* ( 2 Peter 2:1)

A wolf can be detected because he uses the flock for personal gain, rather than caring for the flock. Although Paul does not use the term wolf, he describes a wolf in Titus 1:9-11, and states that one of the qualifications for being elder is being able to defeat such trouble makers.

*holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

*For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain.*

It takes faith and courage to face a wolf. Spiritual wolves can be very intimidating. Hireling elders do not have what it takes to deal with wolves. More concerned about themselves, they

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<sup>13</sup> Paul's letters to Timothy infer that such heretics did arise in Ephesus .I Timothy 1:19-20; 4:1-3; II Timothy 2:17-18; II Timothy 3:1-9

avoid, perhaps flee, the confrontation. Jesus warned about hirelings in the Parable of the Good Shepherd.

*He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep.*

(John 10:12-13)

In his letters to Timothy, Paul named three men whose teaching was creating heresy in the Ephesian church, Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus.

*...keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.*

(1 Timothy 1:19-20)

*...and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some.* (2 Timothy 2:17-18)

Notice that in both of these passages, the perpetrators are described as, *among them*, indicating that there was a contingent of folks in Ephesus who had put aside the apostolic doctrine. Because they are named, we assume that Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus were ringleaders. This groups' aberrant teaching was shipwrecking people's faith.

Do we have any clue in this situation, as to how elders should handle an *ai[tesiv*? Indeed we do. Paul was not gentle, protecting the feelings of the seditious teachers. He called them by name, labeled them for what they were, and *delivered them over to Satan that they may be taught not to blaspheme*.

Paul's action in I Corinthians 5, concerning the man who was guilty of incest, makes it clear that at least one element of delivering someone to Satan is excommunication and shunning. It has been speculated that more than this is implied, pointing to the experience of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and Elymas (Acts 13:11). However, neither of these episodes fit what Paul stated as being the goal of delivering someone to Satan. The hoped for result is that they *may be taught not to blaspheme*. Significant is the term rendered, *taught*, *paideuw* (*paideuo*), which usually carries the idea of chastising to mold character,<sup>14</sup> although it can refer to punishment for a crime.<sup>15</sup> So, whatever else Paul did, he openly named these rebels and declared them *persona non grata* in the church, hoping that the result would be repentance and salvation.

Paul's statements to Timothy agree with Paul's instructions to Titus, who wrestled with church problems in Crete.

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<sup>14</sup> In Hebrews 12:7, the reference is to a father's chastening a son. In II Timothy 2:25, the term conveys the concept of chastising with words or correcting.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 23:16, 22

*But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man (Greek – αἱρετικὸν- a heretic) after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*

(Titus 3:9-11)

A sect-former, a heretic, is to be warned twice. If he does not desist, he is to be rejected. The word translated, *reject*, is the term, *paraitēomai* (*paraiteomai*), rendered elsewhere, *shun* or *avoid*.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in Ephesus and Crete we have two situations in which Paul instructed his delegates to shun anyone who persisted in causing division by the formation of a sect or a party. When someone is shunned, the congregation should be instructed to abstain from fellowshiping with the heretic.

Each eldership must decide on how to implement the spirit of Paul's instructions and how exact we should be in following his instructions to Timothy and Titus. For example, in our pluralistic, litigious, society, public exposure is not always the best action,. However, the general pattern displayed in these passages must be considered as apostolic instruction to all leaders.

An individual who is causing a sect to form within the local congregation must be confronted. The elders need to point out to him the results of his activity. Perhaps he has not been willing to admit to himself the results of his actions. Pointing this out may cause him to repent.

If the first confrontation does not result in a change of behaviour, then a warning must be given that if it doesn't stop, expulsion or some similar action will be taken. It usually is wise to set a date when the elders will meet with the perpetrator and review what he has done since the warning. When the elders give this warning, they must be prepared for the consequences that they will incur if expulsion becomes necessary. The consequences include not only the loss of members (an almost guaranteed result) but also a damaging of the elders' reputation (already addressed above).

Elders tend to deal with heretics in one of two extremes:

- Stern, severe, judgmental, and quick on the trigger, with little grace
- Compassionate, merciful, and not given to confrontation.

Both of these are wrong. If strong action must be taken, a true elder undertakes the action with a broken heart. However, to take the position, "Who are we to judge," or, "He is such nice guy and I really like him," or "I just can't bring myself to hurt him," or, "What will the congregation think," is also an incorrect stance. Both those who are eager to judge and those who want to stroke everyone will produce an ungodly result.

In my own experience, going the second, third, and fourth mile with heretics, results in more damage than would have been experienced if the action had been swift, certain, and early.

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<sup>16</sup> I Timothy 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:23, are examples of the term with this meaning. Timothy was told to "avoid" or "shun" worldly fables, etc.

Needless to say, all of the confrontations and the final expulsion must be couched in prayer (sometimes prayer and fasting).

Elders should not hesitate to invite trans-local brothers, functioning as an apostolic team, to come and resolve issues with a divisive sect in the local church. This especially is appropriate when a divisive sect consists of esteemed individuals and their group brings charges against the elders. When the sect is led by one of the elders (as Paul warned the Ephesians would happen) inviting in an apostolic team is not just an option; it is necessary. When an apostolic team is called into such a situation, it becomes the responsibility of the apostolic team to listen to all sides and act according to truth. There are times in which the elders must be confronted with various failures of leadership (false teaching, inappropriate conduct, harshness, etc.). If the schismatic group refuses to put an end to divisive conduct, it is the responsibility of the apostolic team to expel the perpetrators. That was the role of Timothy and Titus in Ephesus and Crete.

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## CONCLUSION

- Unity is sacred
- We should put forth every legitimate effort to maintain unity
- Causing division in a local church can put one's eternal destiny in jeopardy
- There are times when division is justified, perhaps even necessary
- Church leaders must display courage, compassion, and firmness when dealing with division.
- Church leaders must remember that ultimately they must answer to God for how they have dealt with division.

Here are two truths that must remain in balance:

### **Matthew 5:9**

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

### **Proverbs 6:16-19**

*There are six things which the LORD hates,  
Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:*

*Haughty eyes,*

*A lying tongue,*

*Hands that shed innocent blood,*

*A heart that devises wicked plans,*

*Feet that run rapidly to evil,*

*A false witness who utters lies,*

*One who spreads strife among brothers.*

## ADDENDA

### 1. sciꝥw – to tear (verb)

*NAS Matthew 27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple **was torn** in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks **were split**,*

*GNT Kai. idou. to. katapetasma tou/naou/escisqh apl' anwqen elwj katw eij dup kai. h' gh/eseisqh kai. ai' petrai escisqhsan(*

*NAS Mark 1:10 And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens **opening**, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him;*

*GNT kai. euqj anabainwn ek tou/ufatoj eiden scizomenouj touj ouranouj kai. to. pneuma wj peristeran katabaihon eij auton\*

*NAS Mark 15:38 And the veil of the temple **was torn** in two from top to bottom.*

*GNT Kai. to. katapetasma tou/naou/escisqh eij dup apl' anwqen elwj katw\*

*NAS Luke 5:36 And He was also telling them a parable: "No one **tears** a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both **tear** the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.*

*GNT 36 : Elegen de. kai. parabolhn proj autouj oti Oudeij epiblhma apo. imatiou kainou/ scisaj epibal' lei epi. imation palaion\ eivde. mh, ge( kai. to. kainon scisei kai. tw/ palaiw/ our sumfwnhsei to. epiblhma to. apo. tou/ kainou\*

*NAS Luke 23:45 the sun being obscured; and the veil of the temple was **torn** in two.*

*GNT tou/hliou eklipontoj( escisqh de. to. katapetasma tou/naou/meson\*

*NAS John 19:24 They said therefore to one another, "Let us not **tear** it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be"; that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "They divided my outer garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."*

*GNT eipan oua proj al' h' louj( Mh. sciswmen auton( al' la. lacwmen peri. autou/ tinoj estai\ iha h' grafh. plhrwqh/ ih' legousa\ Diemerisanto ta. imatia, mou eautoij kai. epi. ton imatismou mou ebalon klhron\ Oi' men oua stratiwtai tauta epoihsan\*

*NAS John 21:11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not **torn**.*

*GNT anebh oua Simwn Petroj kai. eij kusen to. diktuon eij thn gh' meston icquwn megalwn ekaton penthkonta triw\ kai. tosoutwn ontwn ouk escisqh to. diktuon\*

*NAS Acts 14:4 But the multitude of the city was **divided**; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.*

*GNT **escisqh** de. to. pl hqoj thj polwj( kai. oi` men hsan sun toij Vloudaiopij( oi` de. sun toij aposto,oijA*

*NAS Acts 23:7 And as he said this, there arose a **dissension** between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.*

*GNT touto de. autou/eipontoj egeneto stasij twh Farisaiwn kai. Saddoukaiwn kai. **escisqh** to. pl hqojA*

## 2. **scisma** – a tear (noun)

*NAS Matthew 9:16 "But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse **tear** results.*

*GNT oudeij de. epibal,lei epiblhma rakouj agna,fou epi. imatiw| palaiw| airei gar to. pl hrwma autou/ apo. tou/ imatiou kai. ceiron **scisma** ginetaiA*

*NAS Mark 2:21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse **tear** results.*

*GNT oudeij epiblhma rakouj agna,fou epiraptei epi. imation palaion\ eivde. mh( airei to. pl hrwma apl autou/ to. kainon tou/ palaiou/ kai. ceiron **scisma** ginetaiA*

*NAS John 7:43 So there arose a **division** in the multitude because of Him.*

*GNT **scisma** oua egeneto en tw| oclw| diV auton\*

*NAS John 9:16 Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a **division** among them.*

*GNT e,legon oua ek twh Farisaiwn tinej( Ouk estin outoj para. qeou/o` anqrwpoj( o,ti to. sabbaton ouv threiA a|loi ide, e,legon( Pw| dunatai anqrwpoj amartwloj toiauta shmeiA poiei hē kai. **scisma** ha en autoijA*

*NAS John 10:19 There arose a **division** again among the Jews because of these words.*

*GNT **Scisma** pa,in egeneto en toij Vloudaiopij dia. touj logouj toutoujA*

*NAS 1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no **divisions** among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

*GNT* Parakalw/de. umaj( adel foi( dia. tou/onomatou tou/kuripou hmwh Ihsou/Cristou( iha to. auto. Ieghte pantej kai. mh. hfen umih **scismata**( hte de. kathrtismenoi en tw/ autw/ noi>kai. en th/ auth/ gnwmh

*NAS 1 Corinthians 11:18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that **divisions** exist among you; and in part, I believe it.*

*GNT* prwton men gar sunercomenwn umwh en ekkhhsia| akouw **scismata** en umih uparcein kai. meroj ti pisteuwa

*NAS 1 Corinthians 12:25 that there should be no **division** in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

*GNT* iha mh. hscisma en tw/swmati alla. to. auto. uper allh|wn merimnwsin ta. mel|ha

### 3. **dicotomew** - to cut in two (verb)

*NAS Matthew 24:51 and shall **cut** him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.*

*GNT* kai. **dicotomhsei** auton kai. to. meroj autou/meta. twh upokritwh qhsei\ ekei/ estai o' klauqmoj kai. o' brugmoj twh odontwn

*NAS Luke 12:46 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him, and at an hour he does not know, and will **cut** him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.*

*GNT* hkei o' kurioj tou/doulou ekeinou en hmera| h| ouw prosdoka| kai. en wra| h| ouw ginwskei( kai. **dicotomhsei** auton kai. to. meroj autou/meta. twh apistwn qhsei

### 4. **dicazw** – to divide or separate (verb)

*NAS Matthew 10:35 "For I came to **Set a man against** his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*

*GNT* hqon gar **dicaasai** anqrwpon kata. tou/patroj autou/ kai. qugatera kata. thj mhtrwj authj kai. numfhn kata. thj penqeraj authj(

## 5. **dicostasia** – a division (noun)

*NAS Romans 16:17* Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause **dissensions** and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

*GNT* Parakalw/de. umaj( adel foi( skopeih touj taj **dicostasiaj** kai. ta. skandala para. thn didachn hñ umeij emaqete poiouhtaj( kai. ekkl inete apv autwh\

*NAS 1 Corinthians 3:3* for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife [**and division**- KJV] among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

*GNT* eti gar sarkikoi, este\ opou gar en umih zh\oj kai. erij( [kai' ". **dicostasiaj**]<sup>17</sup> ouci. sarkikoi, este kai. kata. anqrwpon peripateitef

*NAS Galatians 5:20* idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, **dissensions**, factions,

*GNT* eidwlolatria( farmakeia( ecqrai( erij( zh\oj( qumoi( eriqeiai( **dicostasiai**( aireseij(

## 6. **apodiorizw** – separate (verb) [from **diorussw** meaning “to break”]

*NAS Jude 1:18* that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." 19 These are the ones who cause **divisions**, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.

*GNT* 18 oti elegon umih\ lofti\ VEpl escatou itou\ cronou esontai empaiktai kata. taj eautwh epiqumijaj poreuomenoi twh asebeiw\ 19 Outoi, eisin oi **apodiorizontej**( yucikoi( pneuma mh. econtej\

NOTE: The term in verse 18, **asebeia**, translated “ungodly,” is the noun form of the term that occurs in verse 15 as a noun **asebeia**, a verb, **asebew**, and an adjective, **asebhv**. The idea conveyed by these terms is, *devoid of reverential awe*. To gain a full understanding of verse 19, the entire passage, verses 14-19 should be considered.

<sup>17</sup> The reading in brackets occurs in many early manuscripts, but not in others. The Byzantine text, upon which is based the King James Version, has this reading. The committee that set the text for the Greek New Testament on which newer translations are based, ruled that the evidence was stronger in favor of the omission. [for textual commentary on this reading, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, 1971, page 548].

## 7. **aiĵeomai** – to Choose (verb)

*NAS Philippians 1:22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.*

*GNT* eiv de. to. zhh en sarki( touto, moi karpoj ergou( kai. ti, **airhsomai** ouw gnwriZW

*NAS 2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*

*GNT* -Hmeij de. oifei, lomen eucaristeih tw/ qew/ pantote peri. umwh( adel foi. hgaphmenoi upo. kuriou( oti **eiĵato**<sup>18</sup> umaj o qeoj aparchn eij swthrian en agiasmw/ pneumatoj kai. pistei al hqeijaj(

*NAS Hebrews 11:25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;*

*GNT* mal lon **elomenoj**<sup>19</sup> sugkakouceiSqai tw/ law/ tou/ qeou/ h' proskairon ecein amartiaj apol ausin(

## 8. **aiĵetizw** – to Choose (verb)

*NAS Matthew 12:18 "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well-pleased; I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the gentiles.*

*GNT* vldou. o' paij mou oh **hretisa**( o' agaptoj mou eij oh eudokhsen h' yuch, mou\ qhsw to. pneuma, mou epl auton( kai. krisin toij eqnesin apaggeleia

## 9. **aiĵesiv -a** sect or party (noun)

*NAS Acts 5:17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy;*

*GNT* VAnastaj de. o' arciereuj kai. pantej oi` sun autw/ h' ousa **aiĵesij** twh Saddoukaiwn( epl hsqhsan zhlou

<sup>18</sup> Discovering **aiĵeomai** in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and Hebrews 11:25 may be difficult for those unfamiliar with Greek. This is because the verb changes form in the second aorist tense. In 2 Thessalonians, the verb is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, singular, second aorist, middle voice. In Hebrews 11:25, the verb is the nominative singular, masculine, participle, second aorist, middle voice.

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 4.

*NAS Acts 15:5 But certain ones of the **sect** of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."*

*GNT exanesthsan de, tinej twh apo. thj aïresewj twh Farisaiwn pepisteukotej legontej oti dei/peritemnein autouj paraggelein te threih ton nomon MwušewjA*

*NAS Acts 24:5 "For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the **sect** of the Nazarenes.*

*GNT eurontej gar ton andra touton loimon kai. kinouhta staseij pašin toij Vloudaiopij toij kata. thn oikoumenhn prwtostathn te thj twh Nazwraiwn aïresewj(*

*NAS Acts 24:14 "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call **a sect** I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets;*

*GNT omologw/ de. touto, soi oti kata. thn odon hj legousin aïresin( outwj latreuw tw/ patrw/w/ qew/ pisteuwn paši toij kata. ton nomon kai. toij en toij profhtaij gegrammenoij(*

*NAS Acts 26:5 since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest **sect** of our religion.*

*GNT proginwskontej me anwqen( ean qelwsi martureih( oti kata. thn akribestathn aïresin thj hmeteraj qrhskelaj ezhsa FarisaiobjA*

*NAS Acts 28:22 "But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this **sect**, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere."*

*GNT axioumen de. para. sou/ akousai a/ froneij( peri. men gar thj aïresewj tauthj gnwston hmih estin oti pantacou/ antilegetaiA*

*NAS 1 Corinthians 11:19 For there must also be **factious** among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you.*

*GNT dei/gar kai. aïreseij en umih eimai( iha ikaið oi dokimoi faneroi. genwntai en umihA*

*NAS Galatians 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, **factious**,*

*GNT eidwlolatria( farmakeia( ecqrai( erij( zhloj( qumoi( eriqeiai( dicostasiai( aïreseij(*

*NAS 2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive **heresies**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.*

*GNT* Ἐγενοντο δε. και. yeudoprofhtai en tw/law/ wj kai. en umi/h esontai yeudodidaskaloi( oi/tinej pareisaxousin **aireseij** apw/leiaj kai. ton agorasanta autouj despothn arnoumenoi/ epagontej eautoij tacinhn apw/leian(

10. **airetikov** – one who causes sects (noun)

*NAS Titus 3:10* *Reject a **factionous man** after a first and second warning.*

*GNT* **airetikon anqrwpon** meta. mian kai. deuteran nouqesia/n paraitou/

**We Just Disagree**

Dave Mason

# 12 in 1977

Words and Music by Jim Krueger

Been away, haven't seen you in a while  
 How've you been? have you changed your style?  
 And do you think that we've grown up differently?  
 Don't seem the same, seems you've lost your feel for me

**CHORUS**

So let's leave it alone 'cause we can't see eye-to-eye  
 There ain't no good guys, there ain't no bad guys  
 There's only you and me and we just disagree

Ooh, ooh, ooh...

I'm goin' back to a place that's far away, how 'bout you?  
 Have you got a place to stay? Why should I care?  
 When I'm just tryin' to get along, we were friends  
 But now it's "depend upon a love song"

**CHORUS X 2**

Oh-oh, oh-oh, oh-oh-oh...

**Get Together**

Jesse Colin Young

*Recorded by the Youngbloods in 1967, re-released in 1969 after the National Council of  
 Christians and Jews used it in a commercial*

Love is but a song to sing  
 Fear's the way we die  
 You can make the mountains ring  
 Or make the angels cry  
 Though the bird is on the wing  
 And you may not know why.

If you hear the song I sing  
 You will understand (listen!)  
 You hold the key to love and fear  
 All in your trembling hand  
 Just one key unlocks them both  
 It's there at your command.

Some may come and some may go  
 We shall surely pass  
 When the one that left us here  
 Returns for us at last  
 We are but a moment's sunlight  
 Fading in the grass.

(Chorus)  
 Come on people now  
 Smile on your brother  
 Everybody get together  
 Try to love one another right now.