

The Christian's Responsibility to the Local Church (5)

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“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls” (Lk 11:17). Discord leads to strife, strife leads to disunity, and disunity destroys enthusiasm and productive effort. As Jesus said, this principle holds true for families, kingdoms – and local congregations.

In any large group of people there are enough natural differences to interfere with unity if allowed. Different ages, personalities, jobs, economic status, education, degrees of spiritual maturity, hobbies, and opinions can be barriers which keep people at a distance. What each Christian must do in a congregation is work to minimize these differences and strengthen what they have in common with others.

We must first appreciate that unity, itself, is crucial to the effectiveness of the gospel. The longest recorded prayer of Jesus, spoken on the eve of the crucifixion, stressed unity. *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one ... that the world may know that You have sent Me ...*” (Jn 17:20-23). Our knowledge of the truth will be wasted if we cannot work together in presenting it to the world.

Secondly, we must remember that, in spite of our natural differences, we have a common faith and a common standing before God. All of God’s children are important to Him, weak and strong (Rom 14:4, 10, 15).

Thirdly, we will be judged in accordance with our own judgment upon others (Mt 7:2). How can we be harshly critical of one another and pray to God for mercy?

In fostering congregational unity, we all need to develop thicker skins. Hard feelings often arise over the pettiest issues. Some need to grow up and let the minor irritations of life pass by.

Support for the elders needs to be vocalized to them and to others. They have an impossible job of making decisions for the good of all while keeping criticism to a minimum. Our respect for them and their divinely appointed function should help us cheerfully submit to their rule even when we disagree with a particular decision they make.

Finally, we just need to love each other as defined in 1 Cor 13. If disunity exists, it is always because someone has violated the principle of love.