

Tuesday, August 23, 2018 – Are You Cliquish?

Once in a while I will receive an e-mail from someone who asks how to integrate himself or herself in the church they are a member of when they are new or don't seem to "fit in." In other words, their congregation has cliques.

Church cliques are a sad reality for many congregations, small or large. What is a clique? A **clique** (pronounced like click) is considered *a small group of people with shared interests or other features in common who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them*. You may have heard this term also be used as the inner circle, the in-crowd, the cool kids, the popular table, etc.

While seemingly innocent in nature, they can become a malignancy by marginalizing many members of the body, and in the worst case, will force members out. Cliques are formed either knowingly or unknowingly and tend to ignore those who are looking for a place to call home. There is a huge difference between failing to include people and purposely excluding people, but each can have the same harmful effect!

Church cliques have a huge impact as these exclusive groups weaken the kingdom of God. It is a common malady among:

- 1) Visitors
- 2) New members – They are welcomed with open arms but then kept at arm's length.

Cliques can be formed in many ways, separating those deemed important from the people designated as less important. Unfortunately, those who feel, or are actually, marginalized by cliques will use it as an excuse to leave the Lord's church. The Bible, however, teaches us how we are to treat everyone who comes into our presence.

Romans 12:16 – Be of the same mind one toward another. Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly. Be not wise in your own conceits.

To be of the same mind is to love and respect one another, and there is no discord. The problem that divides is pride and snobbishness. There must be none of this in the church. Christians are the family of God. They are holy people. Holiness has nothing to do with rank, wealth or birth. There is to be no aristocracy in the church, no cliques of the wealthy that would discriminate against the poor. Do not set your eyes on high things, be content with every member. "Be not wise in your own conceits" is from Proverbs 3:7. This refers to the attitude where one is opinionated and has no regard for anyone else's judgment. This is a problem of pride.

1 Corinthians 1:10 – Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in same judgment.

The Greek word translated **beseech** has a consoling and a warning sense. The warning sense is most prominent in this verse. Paul speaks to them on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ and by his authority. He urges them to speak the same thing so they will think the same thing. If they speak the same thing, there will be no divisions among them. Christ wants his people to be one (John 17:20-21). He does not want his people divided.

Perfected together is a medical phrase that is used of knitting together bones which have been fractured or by joining together a joint that has been dislocated. **To speak the same thing** means to speak only that which comes from the word of God. If each Christian has the mind of Christ, all will have the same mind (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5). Judgment refers to opinion. It is **human** opinions which divide churches and Christians most of the time.

James 2:1-6 – My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing; and ye have regard to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool; do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him? But ye have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the judgment-seats?

My brethren means my brothers in Christ. James addresses a serious problem among Christians at this time. The problem is the showing of partiality to certain ones. **The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ** should read “the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” James is writing about the Christian’s faith in Jesus Christ. James uses the same three names for Jesus, which Paul likes to use. For the meaning of these terms see chapter one, verse one. The **Lord of glory** means Jesus is the full manifestation of the presence and majesty of God (John 1:1, 14; 14:9; 2 Peter 1:14-17). James the brother of Jesus who was an unbeliever during the lifetime of Jesus understands the deity of Jesus. **To hold Jesus as Lord** means to have the right attitude toward their brothers in Christ. All Christians are equal in the sight of God. Christians are servants of God (Matthew 20:26; James 1:1; Galatians 3:26-28). Christians are to hold all of their brothers in equal esteem. They are not to defer to some and look down on others (Acts 10:34).

Synagogue means meeting place. James is referring to a Christian meeting place, not a Jewish meeting place. Two strangers come into the assembly of Christians. One is well dressed and is obviously rich. The other is dressed shabby and is obviously poor. The rich man is greeted warmly and given an excellent seat. The poor man is greeted coldly and told to stand against the wall or sit on the floor. The two men were judged on outward appearance, not upon their hearts. The Christians sinned in making this judgment. Evil thoughts arise from the heart (Matthew 15:19). Christians should treat every person in a loving and considerate way.

James speaks as a brother who loved his fellow Christians. The Jews of the first century looked on prosperity as a mark of divine favor and poverty as a sign of God's disfavor (Psalm 73). The gospel is for all men; however, the poor are more receptive to the gospel. When poor people obey the gospel, they are **rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom**. When men love Jesus, they obey him (John 14:15). Christians should not dishonor poor Christians.

They dishonored the poor man when they treated him with contempt. Christians need to remember it was the rich and powerful who persecuted them. Rich people can and did become Christians; however, they were much fewer in number than the poor.

The church of the Lord must not conform to the ways of the world! Have we forgotten 1 Cor. 1:26? "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." Most great people of the world will not listen to the gospel, and most poor people feel unwelcome. No wonder growth in the Lord's church has waned!

Colossians 3:11 – where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all.

In Christ everyone is on equal footing. All racial, social, and economic lines are melted, allowing all to blend and bond together in Christ. Jews were "the circumcision"; Greeks, barbarians, and Scythians were "the uncircumcision." Romans and Greeks, by their own estimate, were top level; they considered others as barbarians. Scythians were at the bottom of the barrel. Those in bonds were slaves. Those free had no shackles binding them in slavery to others. All these groups, as they obeyed the gospel, found common ground at Calvary. Each had a soul, and no one was of any lesser value than any other. No one had an advantage. gospel obedience meant that "Christ is all, and in all." He was/is the great leveling agent among divided humanity.

There are barriers today that must be broken down when one becomes a Christian. Christians are all one in Christ. We, as His followers, MUST honor and heed His teachings!