

Letters to the Church



JANUARY '24

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

Ugh, why does that difficult person have to be in my church?

I'm sure that's a question you've asked about someone at one point or another. Likely, someone has even asked this about you. A common tendency of humanity is to love ourselves, and so we naturally want to be around people who look like us, think like us, and act like us. As the old adage goes: "Birds of a feather flock together." But God's new humanity is a melting pot of different kinds of people who otherwise should have no business being together, yet we've all found our true home in Christ. We should be a hodgepodge of variegated individuals who normally wouldn't even like each other, standing united and loving the way he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

We are commanded to be eager to maintain this because, in many cases, it's not false doctrine from false teachers that undermines a local church but simply a failure to love one another and a lack of commitment to maintain our unity in the spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3) Our harmony in the Lord, despite all our various personalities, cultures, and opinions over political matters and social issues, actually indicates that Christ has become so much more meaningful to all of us than all those lesser matters. In fact, when a church is built on Christ alone, unity will often involve building relationships with Christians with whom you don't share much in common other than Christ. This is a glorious thing!

So, instead of seeing our differences as justifications for personal disgruntlement, disassociation, and division, see them as opportunities to display the multifaceted beauties of the Kingdom. We demonstrate that the lamb of God has "ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). This makes for a supernatural community in its breadth, a compelling community in its witness, and a foretaste of the eternal community in its experience.

But you don't get it; it's really challenging for me to be around "those" kinds of people...

Well, consider the challenging issues in the first century for pagan Gentiles and pious Jews to come together in the name of Jesus. I'm sure it was sometimes hard for them to understand each other. I'm sure they kept offending one another. I'm sure there were conscientious disagreements often. However, the solution was not to have two different churches for the two

different groups of people. Christ was worth more to them. They demonstrated that they really did love him, who they'd never seen, by loving one another whom they did see. (1 John 4:20)

This is a powerful witness to a divided humanity that cannot stop being at odds with one another. In fact, before the cross, our Lord prayed for this (John 17:20 - 23), so that a dying world would see his church as the only undivided group of humans and thereby see that God really is love and that he really did send his Son to save. Do you think about that when you feel you are right to disassociate from your challenging sister? Is your distancing from your difficult brother making it harder for a dying world to believe that God sent Jesus to save them?

So, are you telling me I have to love that person who drives me crazy?

Yes, and this is a fundamental part of being a disciple and imitator of Christ! Sure, there are matters of personal conscience that we may need to yield to one another so we don't put a stumbling block in front of family (1 Corinthians 8:9). Sure, maybe there are certain topics of conversation that just aren't going to be the most profitable (Titus 3:9). Sure, we need to express hurt and be conscientious of matters that may offend (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). But yes, we must learn to love the ones who drive us crazy! We live in a culture that increasingly encourages us that we have a right to become embittered and estranged against anyone who offends or triggers us, but as Christians, we need to love bigger and better than that.

This is presently pressing because this is another election year. I trust the vitriol will be a fever pitch across our nation; let's be eager to ensure none of that comes into our assemblies at 700 Market St. Let's make sure we are more loyal to Christ and one another than our personal persuasions. I'm sure we'll see battle lines drawn across the states of our nation as everyone identifies with their political party. Before we identify as any other type of person, let's first be Christians. Let's love difficult people, challenging people, and people who drive us crazy. Christ loved them and died for them, just as much as he loved you and died for you, to teach us to love him and one another more than ourselves. **His gospel makes us one.**

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 15:5 - 6

YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,



SHAWN WEIR