

Letters to the Church



MAY '24

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

Ugh, why does that difficult person have to be in my church? Don't you know what they've done to me?

In the new community of Christ's people, we have now and forever found a true family. A church is not a weekly event or a building you attend, but a people to whom you belong. This is because Christ has now become everything to us, and he is also now the "all in all" (**Colossians 3:11**) reality we cherish in one another. Other kinds of fellowships are united by different principles, such as "we are everything," "what we do is everything," or "our legacy is everything." But in the church family, my many fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers are affectionately united to me, and I to them because Christ is everything, and he indwells each and all of us.

When a shepherd calls his sheep to him, they inevitably come nearer to one another. So, as we come near to Christ, we are also drawn nearer to others who have come to him. This intrinsically means both higher potentials for us to edify one another and higher potentials for us to step on each other's toes.

We've all hurt and been hurt by members of our church family. Some were unintentional slights, some were intentional bites. We know the church is the last community in which these things should happen, but they do. Perhaps, that's why the hurts can seem greater. I can understand the barks and bites from a world marked by hate (**John 15:19**), but what a betrayal amongst those who are to be marked by love (**John 13:35**)! If we don't watch out, a single bite mishandled will lead to all-out consuming and wholly devouring one another. (**Galatians 5:15**) When these civil wars arise, the adversary needs to do nothing, we're doing his work for him.

So how do we avoid the escalations? How do we ensure that we don't nurse a grudge? How do we stop embitterment from festering? After all, don't you know what that difficult person has done to me? Well, that right there is part of the key. Remember, it's Christ who is our "all in all." So even if the other party isn't acting like it, you treat them accordingly - this is one for whom Christ died, and he now indwells.

You must have the courage and faith to believe it about them, even if perhaps they don't believe it or don't act like it. Although it may not seem or feel like it, this is always the true heart of the matter. Remember, the substantive thing is not the offense, but Christ is everything. So more than forgive (which alone made the apostles say, "Increase our faith" - Luke 17:5), you must treat them as family in the Lord.

I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

Philippians 4:2

These two sisters, who had labored in the gospel with the Apostle Paul (**Philippians 4:3**), had apparently fallen into such a grudge match that not only did the whole local church, but now even Paul had heard about their falling out. Often, when things escalate to this scale the potentials for reconciliation seem impossible, and indeed, if we found ourselves in any other type of fellowship, it would be. But remember, in the church family, Christ has now become everything to us, and he is also now the "all in all." Does Christ agree with Christ? Or is he divided within himself?

Note, then, Paul's timeless and yet always timely encouragement to these two women he loves: Be of the same mind in the Lord. Paul doesn't even pick a side, though likely many in the local church had. No, he's fundamentally on both of their sides, because he sees Christ as the "all in all". It's not to say that the matters of their disagreement were immaterial, or that apologies and acts of restoration may have been appropriate, but in the Church, who is everything?

Remember, the enemy is never flesh and blood. (Ephesians 6:12) If Christ is your friend, then truly, no man is your enemy. If Christ is everything in the church, then truly, all are your family.

YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,

