



"I am quite sure that the best way to promote union is to promote truth. It will not do for us to be all united together by yielding to one another's mistakes."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

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## Unity and Division (Part One)

As mere men, we find it easy to limit [God](#). While all of His attributes are in perfect, harmonious balance, we invariably emphasize one of His traits or qualities over another. Without divine intervention in the form of a calling, everyone essentially creates a god in his own image, crudely patching together anecdotes and selected scriptures that reinforce his idea of the divine.

This selective emphasis is evident in the Protestant concept of God on the subjects of [peace](#) and unity. Truly, God desires peace, and He wants that His children have peace. Yet, His own words bear out that, in His sovereignty, He also creates calamity ([Isaiah 45:7](#)). As strange as it may seem—even though He ultimately desires for all of mankind to live in harmony with Him and for brethren to dwell in unity—when necessary, He is also a God of division.

Our Savior's words in [Matthew 10:34](#) are undeniable: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. *I did not come to bring peace but a sword.*" The wording in Luke's account is different, but the potent core remains: "Do

you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather *division*" ([Luke 12:51](#)). In these contexts, Jesus elaborates that even the family—that basic building block of society that He instituted and endorses—is not immune when He requires a separation for the sake of true worship. God even allows division of a marriage—divorce—for the sake of godly peace, because the fruit of righteousness is sown in an environment of peace ([I Corinthians 7:15](#); [James 3:18](#)). While peace and unity are indeed good—they are, in fact, aspects of God's perfect character—they must be on God's terms.

In the [parables](#), God separates—divides—the sheep from the goats ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)) and the wheat from the tares ([Matthew 13:24-30](#)). Even though God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" ([I Timothy 2:4](#)), He will do this in His own time and in His own way. While unity within the God Family is what He is ultimately working toward, He has no compunction about using division in the process, and even permanently separating those who would not fit within His Family.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians provides an insightful study into the causes of and reasons for division. Right at the beginning, Paul "pleads" that "there be no divisions among [them]," desiring that they all have the same mind and judgment ([I Corinthians 1:10-11](#)). A couple of chapters later, he instructs that "where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you," it is a result of being "carnal and behaving like mere men" ([I Corinthians 3:3](#)). The basic cause of division among men is carnality—just as the cause of division from God is [sin](#) ([Isaiah 59:2](#)). This is the plight of humanity—even among those whom God calls, though to a lesser degree—until the resurrection.

However, God can use this proclivity so that it ultimately serves His purpose. Later in his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "I hear that there are *divisions* among you, and in part I believe it. For *there must also be factions among you*, that those who are approved may be recognized among you" ([I Corinthians 11:18-19](#)). As troubling as it may sound, Scripture states that factions—divisions—*must* exist within the church. As illustrated in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats and the [Parable of the Wheat and the Tares](#), those who are presently being transformed into the [image of God](#) will

be disunited with those who are not. If there were not divisions like these, it would mean that the firstfruits were still in agreement with those under the sway of [Satan](#), and thus no spiritual growth would be taking place.

Paul clarifies this principle and expands on it in other epistles. To the church at Rome, he writes:

Now I urge you, brethren, *note those who cause divisions and [offenses](#)*, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, *and avoid them*. For those who are such do not serve our Lord [Jesus Christ](#), but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. ([Romans 16:17-18](#))

"Belly" here is a figurative reference to the heart, a person's core. Those who are causing division are doing so because they are serving their own hearts, that is, their own interests, ideals, and perspectives. Paul admonishes the brethren simply to *avoid* them because their words are dangerous. His language is even stronger when he writes to Titus: "*Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned*" ([Titus 3:10-11](#)).

In Jude's admonition to "contend [struggle or fight] earnestly for *the [faith](#)* which was once for all delivered to the saints" (verse 3), he goes to great lengths in describing apostates:

Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. . . . These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. . . . These are sensual persons [that is, natural, concerned with the physical senses], *who cause divisions*, not having the Spirit. ([Jude 8](#), 16, 19)

Division, then, is a function of carnality, and there will always be a measure of it while we are mortal human beings. The Father and the Son are working to bring us to the place where we can live as they do—in peace and perfect unity, without any division—yet, until that time, we will experience division

and separation. Some of it will be because of our own misalignment with God, and some will be a reaction—required, at times—to the division others are causing.

When God causes division, He does so for the sake of salvation. He separated Israel from Egypt in the process of saving them physically. He fractured His own church during the present age to arrest the complacency of those whom He had called. He requires us to distinguish between the holy and the profane, for in rightly dividing good from evil, we are taking on His image. The Protestant world champions peace and unity, and these are without question godly attributes. However, for there to be true peace and unity in God's Kingdom, God is clearly not disdainful of making *good and right* use of division.

- David C. Grabbe

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Unity \(Part 6\): Ephesians 4 \(C\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

'Walking worthy' demands a balance between doctrine and application or between doctrine and conduct. Unity demands both. It is impossible to make a corporate union of all the splinters of the greater church of God because doctrinal, attitudinal, philosophical, and policy differences have grown increasingly disparate. Unity has to come from the inside out with God raising a leader which people, having their minds opened by God's Spirit, will voluntarily submit to. We can prepare for this unity by submitting to God's doctrines and living in accordance with them. Only when we have willingly gone back to our first love can we again attain family identity and spiritual unity.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

**Pride, Contention, and Unity**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The sin of pride underlies many of our other sins, and it is often the reason for the contentions we get into as brethren. John Ritenbaugh looks at the origins of pride and shows how it manifests itself in us.

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