

## **A Badly Divided Nation**

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We live in a world badly divided, even as Jesus said in the Olivet Prophecy that nation will rise against nation, and this, of course, will lead to war. War and division are partners. Those who comment regarding the current state of the United States of America say that it is probably more divided at this time than any other time in our history since the Civil War. It does not seem to matter what the issue is, whether it is political, civil, cultural, environmental or academic, opinions are shattered from one extreme to the other and real harmony is non-existent. People are on edge. They cannot seem to accept another who holds a different opinion than theirs because their pride convinces them theirs is the only opinion that really matters.

There is a student distribution issue in the wealthy county immediately adjacent to the county Charlotte is located in, and that division went on and on and on. The county experienced explosive population growth in the past decade, so the county school supervisors were attempting to reassign students in order to make more efficient use of schools that were only partially filled. Seems like a good idea, doesn't it? The major issue, though, was social in nature. The kids did not want to leave their friends to go to another school and have to make new friends. The parents' issue was, in many cases, work related. In many cases, both parents work, and moving their children to another school created a disturbance in their work. The supervisors said the county doesn't have the money or the time to do as all the parents ask. But the issues were so contentious, the supervisors apparently threw up their hands in disgust this past week and made a decision that pleased almost nobody. And now the parents are preparing to sue the supervisors.

But now back to an issue that is far more serious: abortion. A recent Barna survey asked 1001 adults if they believe abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases—take your pick. Remember that this is a survey in a nation that, though it is not truly

Christian, is nonetheless a nation that has a historic reputation for being religious, and the major religions draw their doctrines largely from the Bible and thus the teachings of Jesus. What do you think Jesus would say about abortion? Well, this survey showed 49% of these Americans surveyed said, "Keep it legal in most situations." 42% would like to make it illegal in all or most cases, 15% wanted it to be legal in every situation, 19% prefer the practice to be illegal in all cases.

Here comes a shocking statistic to me: Amongst evangelicals (these were people who are, we'll say, pretty religious), only 78% believe the practice should be illegal in all or most cases. The summary statement on the survey stated that abortion continues to divide Americans, but the debate—this is the summary saying this—over the subject seems to be changing. Do you know which way the change is moving? Abortion is becoming less relevant compared to other issues that seem to be more important to them than murder. Abortion, it seems to me, is a subject that no Americans who say they are Christian, or at least attend church fairly often, should have any doubt regarding what is right and wrong. That we should be divided over this issue of the continuous murder of the weakest in our midst, rather than totally unified against it, reveals how incredibly callous our attitudes have become.

How many people cringe inwardly when they read in the Bible about children being offered to an idol by being cast into a fire, or a newborn in ancient Rome or ancient Greece being put to death because it was the wrong sex or seemed to the parents to have some kind of a defect?

Now let's turn this disgusting subject in another direction. Beginning about 1989-1990, the Church of God began to fracture openly, even though the fissures had begun to show long before that time. By the time 1995 was history, the divisions were so open it was rapidly becoming apparent that it would never survive as it was then. Those who scattered have never come back together, and I, for one, never expect it, at least in my lifetime. Though there are some doctrinal differences between the groups that formed from the scattering, I do not believe it is a doctrinal issue that is keeping it scattered as it is. Those differences (the doctrinal things), I believe, are really just on-the-surface issues.

I believed, almost from the beginning of the splitting, that God scattered the church. The Bible tells us that God scattered Israel, and I saw no reason why He shouldn't also scatter the church to suit His purposes. Lamentations 2 clearly states such an occurrence. It is in the historical record in the Bible, and what He did in the past to Israel He can clearly do to His church. After all, it's His creation and His purpose that He is working out.

Can you accept this? Are we, like the parents in Union County, going to sue God because of the decision He made?

Ecclesiastes 3 plainly teaches us that "to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose"—even God's purposes. "A time to plant and a time to pluck up; a time to build and a time to break down; a time of war and a time of peace." If God did not want the church scattered at this time, it never would have happened. Who can stand against God and prevent Him from doing His will? Doesn't Romans 8:28 assure you that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose?

Brethren, don't despair what has happened (the scattering). God did it and it's for our good. Do you not understand that now is a time for great growth, growth within an environment that is designed for our good and for God's glorification? It is a time for exulting in what God is bringing about for His glory through His children.

In John 17:2, did not Jesus ask God to glorify Himself—and Jesus to—right on the eve, as He was about to undergo His crucifixion? Yes, He did. And even though Jesus was beaten to a pulp and died, God was glorified in His resurrection.

In addition to that, because of what Jesus accomplished in the events of His crucifixion, many tens of thousands have had their sins forgiven as the fruit of those acts, and those forgiven ones have been put into a position to bring further glorification to the Father as a result.

Our time is now. The Tribulation and the Day of the Lord lie just beyond this scattering, and God has created the environment that we need to grow and to prove our loyalties to Him and His purpose. Our responsibility right now is to remain steadfast despite the uncertainties surrounding the church.

I understand that these are not fun times to experience because of what is going on all around us. But on the other hand, we need to quit complaining about the times because God is, after all, the Creator of these contentious times to work out His purpose within. Are we going to argue with what He has done, and complain about it? We need to quit complaining about what God is doing, and use the times to draw ever closer to Him. Is God saying, "Look at what I am doing for their good, and they are murmuring just like Israel of old"? Let it not be said of us, brethren.