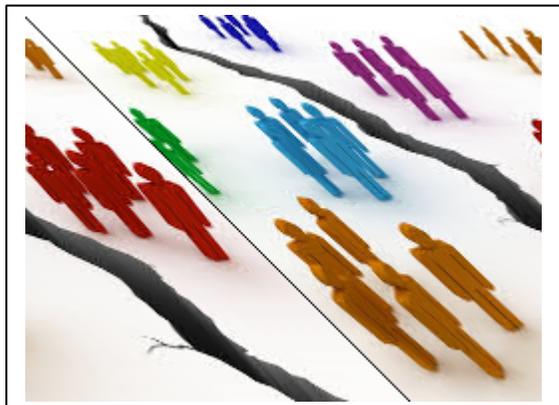


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I heard the story about a man who marooned on an island for several years. When he was finally discovered, those who rescued him asked if he was the only one on the island. He replied, "Yes." Curious, his rescuers asked, "If you are the only one on this island, why are there three huts?" The man replied, "One hut is where I live. The other one is where I go to church." "Okay," his rescuers said, "But what is the third hut?" "Oh," exclaimed the man, "That's where I used to go to church." We may find this factious story to be humorous, but the truth of the matter is it often is true. Some Christians cannot get along with themselves. The harsh reality of divisiveness is often visible among brethren.

Abrasive attitudes, bickering over matters of human judgment and personal opinions have resulted in congregations splintering . Bad attitudes cause most of the turmoil in congregations. Often members will establish themselves, in their own minds at least, as the final word in every discussion. Or, in their own thinking, their opinion of how things should be done, often based upon tradition, must be accepted by everyone else or trouble brews. A warped sense of correctness based on a contemporary concept is often the standard that is expected to be accepted by everyone else.

What is sometimes overlooked is the fact that the only standard we should accept is the word of God. When God speaks, there is no choice on our part but to obey. However, most problems arise in areas where God has not spoken--in matters of human judgment. What color should the carpet be, or the order of worship, or things that pertain to the physical building and its use. Churches have been known to divide because someone didn't like the way a brother led singing or his choice of hymns. A dogmatic, unyielding attitude, accompanied by a factious, bickering spirit produces strife and division among those who are striving to serve God. Splintering is an infectious, soul destroying disease. Often when someone is unhappy in a congregation, they seek out others they can persuade to be unhappy along with them. Some will even leave a fellowship and begin worshipping somewhere else. In most cases, it is not long before they find something in their new place of worship they are unhappy with or disagree with and splintering begins all over again.

Going back to the little story in the beginning, while fictitious, this is often a reality. Some people cannot even get along well with themselves. It doesn't matter where they worship, they will always find something that is being done they do not agree with. Or, some member in the fellowship they disagree with. In all probability, folks like this could not be united if they were the only member of the congregation.

It is not enough to know we follow truth in doctrinal matters and in religious practices. We must also demonstrate the spirit of love for each other and compassion and patience with one another. We are commanded to think more of others than we think of ourselves. While we need to be concerned with divine truth, we must also understand that an absolute principle of divine truth is a love for one another. Having an attitude of compromise in areas where God has not spoken is a principle of truth. May God help us to be united in Jesus Christ as we demonstrate to the world the love by which God loved us.