

United We Stand, Divided We Fall pt 3: “Bound Together in Love”

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- We are in an interesting position right now in America. Statistics are showing an alarming increase of polarization that is affecting the very soul of our country:
 - One political analyst says that recent studies show that, as a nation, we are the most divided we've been since the Civil War.
 - Background checks for handguns are up 80%. This statistic is nearly split down the middle by both republicans and democrats. The same research this statistic was pulled from shows an upswing in the number of Americans who say they think violence would be acceptable if their side loses.
 - One study I read recently stated that, “now one in three voters, both republican and democrat, believe that violence would be justifiable to progress their parties' political goals.”
 - 60% of voters believe that members of other parties constitute a threat to America, more than 40% believe they are evil, while 20% would say they are animals.
 - Another academic study said that, “hostility to other party's constituents and candidates have reached a level where loathing now motivates voters more than loyalty.”
 - While these numbers used to be underwhelming and isolated to small groups of extremists this is increasingly no longer the case. One terrorism expert has been cited saying that since April our nation has seen a 60% increase in groups, from both right and left ideologies, that believe violence, riots, and even civil war are not only possibilities, but necessities for achieving their desired outcomes.
 - We as Americans should be stunned by these numbers, but what should really sober us as followers of Jesus is the fact that this magnitude of division has made its way into the church.
- What isn't surprising about the condition of the church in our nation right now is that Jesus told us in Matthew 24:10-12 that in the last days:

- **“... many of you shall fall back into sin and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and lead many astray. Sin will be rampant everywhere and will cool the love of many.” - Matthew 24:10-12 (TLB)**
- In this prophecy Jesus is speaking directly to believers. He tells us that his very children will walk away from the faith and as a result betray and hate one another. When prophesying the future condition of our love Jesus uses the Greek word, “AGAPE”, which is love that only comes from God. He is addressing the love that is only available to those who are in His family. He warns us that in the last days sin will be so widespread that even those who have been infused with his love will stop loving and start betraying and hating one another.
- Jesus says that the agape love will “psycho” which in the Greek means it will become cold. This isn’t a rapid affect. It isn’t an abrupt ceasing of love. This word connotes a process that takes time to cause that which was once hot to become cold. I believe this “psycho” affect is something we have been witnessing in our churches for many years, but that we are now beginning to feel the weight and validity of Jesus’ prophecy. The question is, “will I, will you, will we be a part of the many whose love grows cold, or the few who will endure in God’s love until the end?”
- What I have been praying through and pouring over in the scriptures recently are the practical ways for our Covenant Love family to be the few whose love doesn’t grow cold.
- **“So, as God’s own chosen people, who are holy [set apart, sanctified for His purpose] and well-beloved [by God Himself], put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience [which has the power to endure whatever injustice or unpleasantness comes, with good temper]; bearing graciously with one another, and willingly forgiving each other if one has a cause for complaint against another; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so should you forgive. Beyond all these things put on *and* wrap yourselves in [unselfish] love, which is the perfect bond of unity [for everything is bound together in agreement when each one seeks the best for others]. Let the peace of Christ [the inner calm of one who walks daily with Him] be the controlling factor in your hearts [deciding and settling questions that arise]. To this *peace* indeed you were called as members in one body [of believers]. And be thankful [to God always].” - Colossians 3:12-15 (AMP)**
- These four scriptures are loaded with life, but I want us to focus on a key aspect of this passage found in verse 14: Beyond all these things put on *and* wrap

yourselves in [unselfish] love, which is the perfect bond of unity [for everything is bound together in agreement when each one seeks the best for others].

- This text presents to us the idea that it is possible for the body of Christ to be perfectly bound together in unity.
 - This can seem like an incredibly daunting task when we approach it from all the things that make us different. Whether that be our upbringing, our ethnicity, our culture, or, as we are experiencing in our current societal moment, our political preference.
 - As you can see from the studies and statistics above political preference is not only ripping us apart but is revealing the shallow roots of what we thought unified us only years ago.
 - I'm not communicating this to seem all doom and gloom, not at all. I think we have been experiencing an incredible miscommunication in the church.
 - As a pastor I have had the opportunity to listen to hundreds of different perspectives and viewpoints over the course of this year. And, what I have heard is God's heart in all of them.
 - I've listened to people speak passionately about their love for immigrants and refugees quoting scriptures like Leviticus 19:33 which says to, "love immigrants as a native born." Or Deut. 10:18 which says that, "God loves the foreigner living among you, giving them food and clothing."
 - I've heard others in tears as they communicate their passion for protecting the unborn. They take their stand on scriptures like Genesis 1:27 which tells us we are all created in the image of God, and Psalm 139 that clearly states God has written the story of our lives even before conception.
 - I've sat down with many as they express their hearts for racial reconciliation. They point to texts like Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15 which show the population of heaven being every tribe, language, people, and nation unified as they worship a king that values them all equally.
 - I've discussed with others their desire to see biblical marriage upheld and honored as God's original plan and design. They seek to protect the family unit acknowledging it as God's birthplace for revival.
 - I've talked with still more whose hearts break for the impoverished and homeless. They believe that they have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to

not only proclaim good news to the poor, but to care of them as Jesus did also.

- All of these things are important to God's heart. There are innumerable amounts scripture we can use to support our views on these individual areas. So, why then is it that these just so happen to be some of the most polarizing points in the church?
 - I think it is because we have failed to put on and wrap ourselves in love as we communicate the varied parts of God's heart that we as individuals are passionate about pursuing. Think about it this way:
 - This wire is made up of three elements: the cable jacket, the conductors and the insulator. The cable jacket keeps everything together, the conductors carry current from the power source to what needs to be powered, and the insulator allows the conductors to be bound together without shorting out.
 - All of these wires go to different parts of an outlet. They are all necessary for powering the outlet. But, without the insulator they would short one another out.
 - I believe this is a premium example of what is dividing the church right now.
 - We are all carrying passion from the same power source. Our individual passions are absolutely necessary for powering the church, but without the insulator of love we short circuit our unity with one another.
 - As we have communicated about our individual hearts, we become angry with those who don't see our passions as the most important factors.
 - This is where being bond together in love comes into play, and I think one of the most practical ways to do this is through loving conversations.
- Loving conversations.**
- **“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” - Ephesians 4:14-16 (NIV)**

- There are two principles for loving conversations I want to draw out of this scripture:
 - **Don't let other voices tell you how to think about people with different perspectives than your own.**
 - We must refuse to be tossed back and forth by the winds of news media, Facebook, Instagram, Parler and Twitter. Instead, we must engage in actual conversations with one another and seek to understand.
 - The reason Jesus can communicate with us so lovingly and so affectively is because he understands our perspective and point of view.
 - **“We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, he experienced it all.” - Hebrews 4:15 (MSG)**
 - Jesus stooped down from his throne to fully understand and empathize with us.
 - He put on our flesh. He saw through our eyes. He experienced our frailty, not so that he could win an argument. But, so that he could know where we are coming from, and extend unconditional love toward us.
 - We like Jesus must step off our self-established thrones of rightness and moral superiority and seek to see the passions of others that come from the heart of God.
 - This means going out for a cup of coffee, making a phone call, or entering a private conversation instead of attempting to hash out a hard talk in a comment section.
 - This will help us with the second principle which is:
 - **Speak the truth in love.**
 - This is probably one of the most abused scriptures in the church. Instead of being used as a standard for healthy conversation, it has been manipulated as a justifier for harsh personalities.
 - We must use this text as a measuring stick for our motives.
 - Do we want to win an argument? Or, do we genuinely love and care for the person with whom we are engaging?

- The answer to these questions has to be one of the most important indicators of whether or not we will short circuit our unity or maintain it.