



We Must Stick Together

How Can We Really Get Along?

One of the most disconcerting parts of marriage is the ongoing discovery of just how different we are. It is probably the most shocking part of marriage. One is a keeper of anything once gained, the other wants to throw things away. One likes to stay up late, the other gets up early. One is always joking around; the other is more serious. One likes vegetables, the other hates them. One is impulsive, the other makes decisions slowly. It is non-stop, this growing awareness of just how strange and incomprehensible the other person is. The old saying is not true. Opposites do not attract. They get on each other's nerves. And yet that is just the way it is for all of us. Marriage partners come from different families, backgrounds and even cultures. It is sometimes tough to get along when we are so different! My marriage nearly ended on our honeymoon when I discovered that my new bride did not think it was particularly loving on my part to watch the Monday night football game as we lay in bed together the second night of our honeymoon. I was shocked it would even bother her and she was appalled by my barbaric behavior!

What is amazing about Christianity is that it is intentional about bringing people together who may not be alike or even like each other. Listen to what the Apostle Paul has to say about God's plan for the world. **Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.** (Ephesians 3:2-6 NIV) This was a shocking pairing at the time. Jews teamed up with non-Jews. Jews were not even to step into the homes of non-Jews, let alone hang out together in a Bible study. Gentiles thought Jews were bizarre, eccentric, self-righteous and full of themselves. Jews saw all Gentiles as corrupt, perverse, and filthy.

The Apostle Paul, who was thoroughly Jewish and a stickler for following all the strange and unusual rules the Jews had including practicing circumcision and avoiding the tasty foods the Romans and Greeks liked, discovered when he became Christian that the wall separating Jews and Gentiles could be brought down. Not only was it possible through Jesus Christ for Jews and Gentiles to work together, but they could also love each other, enjoy being with each other and even die for one another. It was amazing to see, the bond of friendship and kinship that Christ fused between these two groups. Disdain, mistrust and genuine dislike fell away as Gentiles and Jews became great friends through the supernatural changes Jesus Christ brought in them.

We see individual examples of this union between two people who it seems unlikely that they could ever be friends. Ruth, who was a Moabite, forged a lasting friendship with her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth

famously said of her, **"Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."** (Ruth 1:16-17 NIV) Ruth willingly gave up her family, friends, and religion to stay with Naomi and build their lives together. How often do daughters-in-law do that? Of course it is possible but rare. David and Jonathon also became tight friends despite the odds being against it. David was hated by Jonathon's father because he was afraid of David's popularity and anointing by God. Somehow word got back to him and his son, the heir to the throne of Israel, that Samuel the prophet had declared that God's next choice to be king was David. Yet, David and Jonathan forged a bond of friendship that became unshakable. Rather than seeing David as a threat to his future, Jonathan loyally remained devoted to David. When David went into hiding to escape King Saul who wanted to kill him, Jonathan, Saul's son went out into the desert to encourage David and reaffirm their friendship. **And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."** (1 Samuel 23:16-17 NIV)

It is true that there are friendships that exist that go against the odds of them surviving. Some marriages are like that too. An age gap that is substantial. There may be significant cultural differences or economic backgrounds. Yet the church is God's way of bringing everyone together in equal standing. There is no pecking order in the church. Everyone is equally born again by the salvation of Christ. The Holy Spirit is how God puts us all together regardless of our personalities, education, economic status, or skin color. Sin separates us and makes us rivals, enemies, disconnected. Christ crucified makes us one, gives us friendship unhindered by our differences. Jesus is the glue that holds us together despite the odds.

Difference does not mean division. Every marriage depends on this axiom. Families do too. So does the church. The first few weeks you are married, all you see are the similarities. After a month or two, the stark differences appear and suddenly husband and wife are confronted with the reality that they are worlds apart in countless numbers of ways. It is then that a decision must be made. Does difference mean division or is the marriage bigger and more sacred than how diverse and oddly unlike we are? In Christ, we are supernaturally held together by the power of God. People we don't even like or respect can be our brothers and sisters when Jesus Christ gets ahold of us. It is beyond reasoning what God can do to put us together in love and oneness.

I recently saw a Facebook post by a pastor who was denouncing the doctrines of several well-known Christian leaders and stating that they were part of the reason why 2020 was so bad. I first of all didn't know what was so terrible about their "doctrines". Beyond that though was a more important issue. Why was he trying to separate the Church and pit one Christian against another? The Apostle Paul makes it clear. **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:3 NIV) How come so many Christians that are good in other ways criticize fellow Christians, judge them, and stay upset with them? It cannot be because they are aligned with Jesus! Are we really loving others as Christ loved the church if we are running them down, holding grudges against them or finding fault with God's people? Unity and the bond of peace is sacred, whether it be in a marriage, a family, or the church. It is hard to have, if it is even possible, the joy of the Lord if we are bent out of shape with each other; hard even to enjoy life if we are not at peace with those closest to us.

The Apostle Paul gives us Godly wisdom. There are three relationship laws that are the best advice you will ever receive for your marriage, your family, and your church. Here they are. They come directly from the book of Philippians. 1. Consider others better than yourselves. This is not self-belittling. It is recognizing that each person has a level of good that you haven't achieved. Assume more than what you see of God is found in each one in your life. 2. Do everything without arguing or complaining. Bite your tongue each time you want to get into a verbal squabble. 3. Seek out the interests of others. Try to figure out ways to help and support those God puts in your life. Be someone's answer to prayer.

Remember that difference does not mean division. Just because you don't agree or your personalities aren't the same doesn't mean you can't be a great marriage, a great family, or a great church. God wants different people together, different ways of thinking and different talents and dreams. Even if you don't see things the same way doesn't mean God and His love can't hold you together. God puts you with specific people for a reason. He wishes the love and strength of Christ to flow from you into them or for what God has done with them to bless you and perfect you in supernatural ways. Always keep in mind that you are how God loves and builds up the parts of the world He lets you touch and influence.