



“They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

There is an old song written by Peter Scholtes during a period of social and racial upheaval in the United States. Reflecting John 13:35, the song repeats the refrain: “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord; they will know we are Christians by our love, by our love...”

Can that be said about ourselves, our churches, and our denominations? Bullying, gossip, and slander: three words that should not be a part of the Christian’s vocabulary yet are often strategies in our discourse with those who hold different beliefs from us. While egalitarian theology is CBE’s focus, we may find ourselves divided on any number of issues, from theology and doctrine to politics and beyond. How we navigate these moments reveals the condition of our hearts.

The Bible gives clear instruction on how to treat those with whom we disagree (2 Tim. 2:24–25, 1 Pet. 3:14–16). Jesus consistently challenged expectations, calling us to love even our enemies (Matt. 5:43–44). Whatever their positions, our brothers and sisters in Christ are not our enemies; a house divided against itself cannot stand (Mark 3:25). Over and over, we are called to unity and harmony as one body; the phrase “of one accord” appears more than twenty times in the Bible to describe the followers of God.

As seen in previous issues of *Mutuality*, being in unity does not mean we will agree on everything. It is the variety of perspectives, callings, and gifts working together that make the body of Christ healthy. Raising suspicion about someone’s beliefs or character under the guise of concern—without speaking with them directly and giving them a chance to clear up misunderstanding—is gossip. Getting caught up in a single narrative without room for others, consideration for context, or the other side of the story is a fatal flaw that can lead to blanket generalizations and misrepresentations. Perpetuating a single narrative without humbly checking the facts is destructive, as is remaining silent while others go on the attack.

We must be intentional not only about what we believe but also how we engage. This can be a challenge; when faced with someone who opposes us, the inclination to react or retaliate can be strong. We can lose sight of the person behind their argument, forgetting they too are made in the image of God. Character assassination, mockery, marginalization, and intimidation can seem like effective means of silencing

those with whom we disagree. As we will see in the pages of this issue, participating in gossip, bullying, and slander is a mortal sin, regardless of our intentions. The ends do not justify the means. The fruit of the Spirit is described as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). Outrage does not make the list. There is a place for righteous anger, but we must communicate it constructively, with love, as we seek reconciliation and peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ.¹

It is not easy, particularly when we ourselves have been the victims of slander. When we feel hurt, and especially when we are certain we are in the right, it is easy to respond with attacks of our own. But we are called in no uncertain terms to “not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing” (1 Pet. 3:9). Turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:38–40) and responding in love and mercy in the face of pain are examples given to us by Jesus himself. Even when we are called to speak the truth in love or protect ourselves by stepping away or turning to legal assistance, the Lord can give us a spirit of grace and forgiveness.

Some key questions can help us monitor our hearts when being drawn into conflict. Why are we so riled by a particular statement or belief? Do we seek to defend the Lord or our own ego, to retaliate or to understand? Three further questions can then help guide our response: “Is it true? Is it kind? Is it helpful?” In other words, are we adding light or just heat? Humble self-analysis in prayer will help us to respond in grace instead of reacting or falling silent. When we find that a brother or sister genuinely needs correction and exhortation, we are called to do so, first in private, with gentleness and humility, being characterized by love and peace (Matt. 18:15–17, 1 Thess. 5:11–18, Eph. 4:2–3).

In a world torn apart, unity and love are not easy, even in the body of Christ. Yet that is our radical call as Christians who are to be known by our **love**.

Notes

1. While some may cite Jesus’s turning of the tables in the temple, it is worth remembering that Jesus is God and, as such, is the rightful knower and final judge of our hearts—something none of us can claim.

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