

The Formation Of Cliques Within A Congregation

I. Introduction:

A. We know that the local body is to have no divisions (**I Corinthians 1:10**).

1. We know we are to be likeminded through walking by the same rule (**Philippians 2:2-3** and **Philippians 3:16**).

2. At the same time, there are diversities that exist [more on that later], such as did in the N.T. though being in the same body (**Galatians 3:26-29**).

3. Sometimes those differences led to divisions as people sought to be among those they were carnally similar to (**Galatians 2:11-14**).

B. A clique: "A small group of people, with shared interests or other features in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them" (Oxford New World Dictionary).

1. The concept of "heresies" ["a party... sect... body of men following their own tenets, dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims" (Strong's # 139)] which is a work of the flesh (**Galatians 5:19-21**).

2. Such happened in Corinth (**I Corinthians 11:16-19**).

3. There are Scriptural reasons brethren might do things apart from the congregation as a whole (**Matthew 18:15-16**, **Acts 18:24-28**, **Acts 20:17-18**, **Romans 16:23**, **Titus 2:3-5**, **I Peter 4:8-9**, etc.).

4. We have to focus on how not to become cliquish.

II. Body: How can we protect the body from clique based divisions (**Romans 12:16**, **Romans 15:5**, and **I Corinthians 12:25-27**)?

A. There are possibly natural separations within congregations...

1. Physical age (**I Timothy 5:1-2**).

2. Spiritual maturity (**Hebrews 5:12-14**).

3. Variations of consciences based on spiritual maturity (**Romans 14:1-15:9**).

4. Levels of abilities (**Matthew 25:14-30**).

5. Income variances (**James 2:1-13**).

6. Different levels of strengths for various reasons (**I Corinthians 12:12-24**).

7. Sexes, age, and responsibility differences (**Titus 2:1-6**).

8. Interests; likemindedness (**Philippians 2:19-24**).

9. Spouses and family members in the same congregation that you're naturally closer with (**Romans 16:3-5**).

B. With all of those things that can be, and many likely are to be, separations in the local congregation; how do we keep from being respecters of persons (**James 2:1; 2:9**)?

1. What can arise from such (**Proverbs 28:21**)?

2. What dangers arise when brethren are physically related or certain friendships are closer than others? Following Jesus' example prevents this (**Mark 3:31-35**).

3. We need to care. If we treat one another wrongly, that is as though we treated Jesus wrongly (**Matthew 25:34-40, Acts 9:1-4, and I Corinthians 8:12**).

C. How does a small group of people, apart from the whole congregation, become an easy target for false doctrine and/or division (**Jude 1:4**)?

1. What lessons can be learned from **II Timothy 3:1-9**?

2. As referenced earlier, what happened to Barnabas (**Galatians 2:13**)?

3. Without impugning intentions, what can happen in studies with incapable people (**I Timothy 1:3-7**; cf. **Matthew 15:14**)?

4. Think about how false teachers bring in heresies [defined above] (**II Peter 2:1**) and what happens as a result (**II Peter 2:2**).

5. We are wrong if we are only concerned about what is taught in the public assembly (**Titus 1:10-14**).

6. The fact that we know sects formed with specific beliefs that differed tells us to be on guard (**Acts 23:8**).

7. Can being open prevent the formation of cliques (**John 18:20 and Acts 26:22-26**)? How about always???

a. It is not always good to be open (again; i.e. **Matthew 18:15**).

b. Some affairs are not open to respect the weak conscience of another (**Romans 14:15**).

D. The answer is to be aware (**II Peter 3:17**).

1. The opportunities will arise for brethren to be cliquish, you have to guard yourself from doing so (**Proverbs 16:17**).

2. Think about your actions, how they appear, and what the long-term effect will be before you take those actions. That is the principle of counting the cost we should have all done before obeying the Gospel (**Luke 14:25-33**).

3. Look out for each other, without making accusations, to help each other not fall into this easy trap (**I Thessalonians 5:14**).

4. Remember that Jesus died to bring all saints together in one body, not into separate bodies within the body (**Colossians 3:15**).

III. Conclusion: Jesus didn't die for there to be cliques of brethren, but rather for us all to be one (**Ephesians 2:15-16**).