“How Do I Treat People After a Church Split?”

Over the past couple years at my church some people had left for various reasons and I found myself really wondering how you’re supposed to react to them after they’ve left and you see them out in town, on the street, etc. I had a close personal relationship with some of those people and on the other hand, I witnessed some ridiculous bouts by some of those people who left. Yet it seems that after they were asked to leave (or left themselves), some of the church members still invited them over and at the same time would invite the pastors, their families, or other members of the church body to the same outings as if nothing ever happened. How do I treat those people now when I see them and not disrespect the Lord in my actions and in my heart?

Bless your heart. This is an incredibly painful experience, isn’t it? I’m so glad you wrote, if for no other reason that to hear from someone outside the situation for whom known personalities don’t complicate things.

I think it’s good to remember the big picture of what the Lord desires for us. The very biggest picture is the second commandment, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Love God, love people—that sums it all up. Secondly, to remember what the Lord Jesus said about our relationship with other believers in John 13:35—”By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Third, consider Philippians 2:1:

> *“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united*

> *in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves."*

So His desire for His body is that we love each other because that's how we bring glory to God and validate our discipleship, that we puruse unity out of humility and service.

Even after a church split, even after people leave churches for fleshly reasons rather than God-ordained ones, even after people still retain unforgiveness and ungodly attitudes toward people with whom they used to worship, the message of the New Testament is that we are ONE BODY regardless of where we attend church.What God desires is that we love one another no matter what has happened.

If I were in your shoes (and I do have some experience with people in the above categories), when I encounter these people I would choose to remember that God wants us to love each other. That means choosing to be cordial and loving and kind even if the feelings aren't there (because if God commands it, He provides the way to obey). Yes, ugly things happened. God knows all about it, and it doesn't change His word that tells us to love one another.

I think it's a good idea to stay forward-focused, remembering that you will spend eternity being connected with these people as part of the Body of Christ, rather than continuing to see life through a rear-view mirror.

I hope this helps.

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