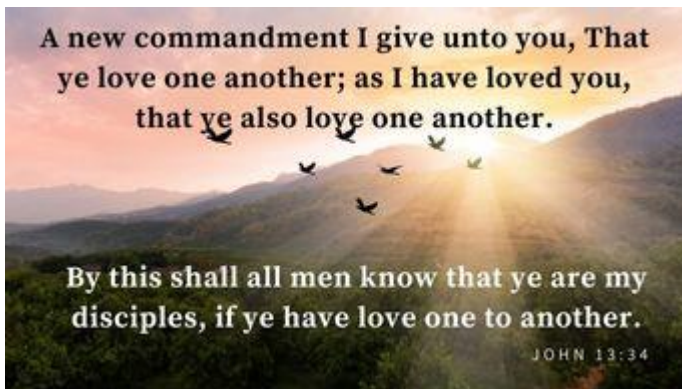


How to care for others through ecclesial difficulties

I am writing this as a sister who has grown up in ecclesial life. I was born into a Christadelphian family and was baptised at the age of 16 years, so I have experienced ecclesial ups and downs, including going through an ecclesial split.

Unfortunately, every ecclesia will go through problems as ecclesial conflict is part of ecclesial life this side of the kingdom due to our fleshly nature. But it is preparing us for the Kingdom, where we can all live as one with our Lord.

We are given these trials for a reason, we need to remember that God has a purpose for allowing things to happen, and we may never understand His wisdom, but we simply must trust His will (Psalms 37:5). Remember, God doesn't tempt us above what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).



We are commanded to love one another, as Jesus has loved us, so when we are going through hard ecclesial times, we need to care for each other. This is done by how we treat and act towards each other as we need to care for each other's emotional and physical wellbeing. We should be showing kindness, helpfulness, forgiveness, and reconciliation, making sure we are being Christ like, in everything we do. John

records the question, that he or she who loves not a brother or sister, how can he love God? (1 John 4:20). Remember our brothers and sisters are God's chosen ones and His children. In 1 Corinthians 12 v 25-27 Paul records that we are Christ's body and individual members of it. We are instructed that we should care for one another. We need to love and care for each ecclesial member, even though each member will have different personalities, characteristics, and will have a different understanding and reaction to different things than us, which also will result in different opinions to ourselves.

We are told in James 1:12 that those that persevere under trial and stand the test will receive the crown of life that our Lord has promised to those who love Him. Remember it's not normally one issue, or the issues at hand that is causing the problem. It normally has been an accumulation of issues over a period and these may be issues that have not been previously addressed (or even unfinished business). The issue at hand is the one that has broken the camel's back, so to speak.

God is moulding us, by trying and testing us, and God is more concerned with how we go about it, than the result – He's very patient. He could have wiped out Jericho the 1st day (Josh 6). He can bring about the result He wants for a specific problem and time – He's in control. These problems give us an opportunity to practice living by faith. Remember God can fix it on the day of prayer, but he wants us to learn and grow from it.

Troubles with brothers and sisters give us a chance to be a better person, and are given to us to teach us patience, a chance to exercise forgiveness, and to show compassion to each other. Ecclesial issues also require us to study the bible in more depth, to find the answer to our problems, pray and trust in our Lord's help and guidance, and remember His promise to strengthen

and help us, as He will uphold us with His righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10). We need to try and do all the good we can, by all the means and ways we can, in every situation to help our brothers and sisters.

Ecclesial problems are not a new thing and there are many examples for us to refer to in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 1-2, we read believers in Corinth had split up into groups. Each group thought they alone had preserved the important aspects of the Truth, each group thought they were better than the other one and didn't want to be associated with each other; they were very divided. There was arguing and boasting, jealousy and striving amongst the groups. Paul appealed to both groups to look at the big picture and remember the little humble part we play, and remember wisdom is from God. The ecclesia is God's field and His temple, and it was bought by the blood of our Lord, we also need to remember it's not OUR ecclesia, but God's, and our brothers and sisters are God's chosen ones and his disciples, so we need to care for them, like God cares for us.

Be Kind to one another - Ephesians 4:32

In Colossians 3:12, we are told also to show kindness, and to show mercy, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering. In Zechariah 7:9 we are told to show compassion to our brothers and sisters. We need to listen to one another, be kind and tender hearted to one another, forgiving one another, and be non-judgemental, but accepting of one another. John 13:34-35 tells us if we love one another, we are God's disciples.



In Hebrews 10:24-25 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 we are told to encourage one another and build each other up and be there for one another. Encouraging and inspiring our brothers and sisters is an important part of loving and caring for them. The apostle Paul encourages us to follow Jesus' example by showing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Galatians 5:15 NIV, warns us that if we bite and devour each other, we should watch out or we will be destroyed by each other. If we always want things 'our way' or we will not listen to other

individuals' opinions, or turn aside from the needs of others, or trample on other's needs, these actions are not caring for one another as we are instructed to do.

Pray for one another - James 5:16

We are told to always pray to have eyes that see the best in our brothers and sisters, a heart that forgives each other, a mind that forgets the worst, and a soul that NEVER loses faith in God's forgiveness. In Psalm 103 David says as far as the east is from the west, is how far He has removed our wrong doings from us, which is saying an infinite amount, so we need to consider how we treat and care for others.

Speak often one to another - Malachi 3:16-18.

Communication is very important in any kind of relationship - with our God, our husband or wives, our children, our friends and family, and this also includes our ecclesial members. We need always to communicate with each other in a Christ-like manner, to the glory of God.

We are to speak and exhort each other, and the words are to be kind, encouraging and sweet like honey to one another (Hebrews 3:13 and Proverbs 16:24). We need to talk to others in the way we would like to be talked to. We are told in Matthew 18:15 we need to go and talk to our brothers and sisters, which seems so simple, but normally so difficult when going through ecclesial issues. When going to talk to a brother or sister about any problems, we must pray to our Heavenly Father for us to find the correct words, and for both parties to come to an understanding. This also helps us remember that we are speaking to one of God's chosen so we need to make sure our words are kind and true.

We must be careful of our speech, as it can linger on and inflict deep wounds on each other that may not heal. So, we should make sure we do not say things in anger as anger will go away but our words won't. We should not type our feelings or concerns by text or email as they are forever and can be used against us. Also, there is no emotion or context in it and every individual will read it differently. If we do need to send it, pray about it and sleep on it, to make sure it isn't done when your emotions are stirred up. Next day read it and think about how our sister or brother is going to feel when they get our letter. We want to be wise that we bring calm in the end, rather than the fools that give full vent to their rage (Proverbs 29:11). We also need to remember a soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. We are also told, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

When someone complains about someone, rather than adding fuel to the spark and making it a bush fire of gossip (e.g., "Did you hear what so and so this week did?"; "How dare she, yes and I heard that this also happened"; "Really, what did you expect") which is what our nature will want us to do, we should make a positive comment about the person. (This does not have to be much, only a comment or a few words). We all have a bad side and a good side – even YOU.

We need to remember too: speak the truth, render true and sound thoughts, and do not plot evil against each other (Zechariah 8:16-17 – NIV).

Listen to one another.

We must make sure we listen to one another, hearing each one's point of view and get an understanding of where each is coming from before we respond. Jesus tells us in Revelation that "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear". We must listen with understanding.

We see the lesson for us in Leviticus 10:16 & 20 when Aaron and his sons burned the goat for the sin offering. Moses became angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, as he believed they should have eaten it, but when Aaron talked and explained why it would have been inappropriate to eat the goat that day, Moses listened, learnt, and was then content.



Then those who feared
the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD
listened and heard.

Malachi 3:16

We need to talk to each other and listen to understand why people do and say what they do, and don't assume things, as we don't normally know the full story. We need to look for a solution that satisfies the needs of everyone and this involves asking God for the solutions. This may be that some people may need to compromise. We also need to remember there are no winners or losers when going through ecclesial problems.

A Bible example of this is in Joshua 22, where a misunderstanding was reconciled. Here it is recorded that when the eastern two and half tribes built an altar, there were lots of assumptions about their motives made by the other tribes when they heard of the altar. They then gathered their troops to attack. The western tribes had misunderstood the meaning of the altar. Phinehas then confronted the leaders of the eastern tribes, and they explained their true reason for building the altar, which was built as a memorial, and not as a place of sacrifice. When this explanation was listened to and was accepted by the western tribes, this resulted in the matter being resolved.

Emotions and feelings toward one another

Everyone, brothers, sisters, and young people become very emotional, and we can take it to heart, get upset or overreact to other people's words or comments, which can escalate situations. We then might dangerously respond in anger; this can become damaging. In Ephesians 4:26-32 we are instructed to put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving, even as Christ has forgiven us.

Each one of us will be thinking that we are the ones suffering from the ecclesial issues and turmoil the most, and it is our human nature to think of ourselves first and how it affects us, rather than others. But we need to think of others, as there is always someone else that is finding it harder. We need to think of those in the ecclesia when it's in conflict, especially those who don't

have family in the Truth to share their feelings and what they are going through, the widows who can't go home and talk about what is happening, the those who are young in the Truth, or are not steadfast with their faith. We are instructed to care for these brothers and sisters.

We should never engage in disagreements at our place of worship. This is for fellowship with one another. This can be uncomfortable to others, and it potentially can get worse if more people become involved. There are families and people who have come to be uplifted and find peace away from their busy and hectic lives. When disagreements are brought into the meeting place this can cause a scene and even if you cannot be heard by others your body language can say more than words. Studies have shown that communication can be 80% of body language so we need to think and care for others and their feelings, and be mindful of their state of mind, and remember what we have come to our meeting place to do and be part of.

Be sure to thank God when it works out.

We must be thankful when it works out and give God the thanks. We are told in Psalm 106 to give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever, and in Psalm 100:4 we are instructed to give thanks to our Lord and praise His name. Also, in 1 Thessalonians we are instructed to give thanks in all circumstances. We need to be thankful for everything, as we all have blessings in our lives.

Conclusion

If we attend Sunday school, a memorial meeting, lecture, and a class, the time we spend at the hall adds up to approximately 6 hours and for only 6 hours of the week we need not get involved in conflict. We have another 162 hours in the week to deal with conflict. There are our brothers and sisters who have come to be uplifted and encouraged. By various types of communication and hearing or seeing these issues it doesn't let them do this, but tends to drive people away from the meeting place.

We also need to be mindful that at times we get so wrapped up with discussing issues with others it can consume our spare time. Then we can leave out, or not check in on, or spend time with the members who aren't directly involved with the issues. They are still affected by the atmosphere that the issues are causing in the ecclesia. We need to care for those by making a phone call, or visiting, or meeting with them. A handy way to make sure everyone is being cared for is to go through your ecclesial program regularly and make sure you have checked on those you may think may be suffering or who have been missing from ecclesial activities.

We shouldn't bring up past problems; they need to be left in the past. Just deal with the problems at hand and move on. We need to be looking forward not to the past. Only when we are working on the future can the brothers and sisters grow and work together in the truth and so be able to build a stronger unity in the ecclesia. Going over and over the same problem doesn't get anyone anywhere.

We need to be mindful that there may be consequences to the way we act and treat one another, so we need to remember and be mindful of how we treat our brothers and sisters. There will be in the future a camp, or a wedding, a funeral, a family gathering, or an ecclesial activity you may wish to attend when they will be there, and it is so sad when both parties won't attend together, and one chooses to stay at home. We need to remember one day we will stand with our brothers and sisters, side by side with them, wanting the same outcome, to be welcomed into the Kingdom, and

we should be praying and hoping that day is tomorrow, when we can worship together at Christ's feet. Even so come Lord Jesus.

If the ecclesial issues cannot be resolved, and you need to move on from one another, we need to remember to do it in a Christ like manner. We need to then forgive and move on for our ecclesia to grow and mend the relationships and the broken hearted. We need our experiences and lessons we learn to make us a better brother or sister in Christ, and not to become bitter. This way we can help others and strengthen the ecclesia, so it will grow.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV.

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