

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 7/26/2024

Churches Creating Division in America

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

A couple of days ago, Mary Apurong wrote an article titled [Unholy Divide: How Churches Are Tearing America Apart](#). She begins by describing how churches used to bring people together but are now pushing them apart. Apurong talks about increasingly, what you believe about GOD and your faith is directly connected to your political beliefs. Religious leaders are forcing people to choose sides in moral and political issues as though one side (their side whichever it is) is the only truly Christian side. And political beliefs are the source of division within families, towns, states, our nation, and our church homes.

When church leaders tell their members how to vote and base it on religious beliefs, it causes anger and confusion. Many people are choosing to stay away from church because they don't wish first, to be told how to vote by their church, and second, to be told that there is only one way to believe on certain political issues. Too often, it creates an "us vs. them" feeling with "them" being those whose views differ from what your church tells you. This creates greater personal crises when your beliefs diverge from what your church says. Apurong says that "the spirit of 'love thy neighbor' is being replaced with 'agree with me or else.'"

The divide is damaging towns and cities. People who used to join together to accomplish certain goals now avoid each other because of division in other areas. Businesses are losing customers because of their religious views. Though it was once a unifying institution, the church is now a source of division.

I know a pastor who is very outspoken on social media about her political views. It's quite clear what she believes about specific issues of the day and which candidates she supports. It leads me to wonder how the members of the church she serves who believe differently feel about this divergence. Do they feel wrong because their pastor takes an alternative view? Do they question what the church teaches or what JESUS says when there is disagreement about issues that have become political? At the very least, I think this is problematic when views are presented in a forum that limits or does not allow conversation on the matter.

Fixing this divide requires some intentional steps. Church leaders need to recognize that you can differ in your political views even within the same church and then stop pushing one particular view. Churches should seek to teach how to disagree nicely and provide opportunities for discussion that value all opinions. Churches need to focus on bringing people together rather than pushing them apart.

Teaching what JESUS said and did should be done in ways that allow people to discover how that information will determine the course they follow. There are few political issues today that JESUS spoke about directly. JESUS did challenge HIS followers to show love to all people and to show concern for those who are displaced or harmed by societal practices, but how individuals do that is up to their understanding of scripture and conscience. As churches, we need to recognize that GOD didn't give us specifics on who is good or who is bad, about which position to take on specific issues, or what is "the Christian" position. Perhaps some will tell you GOD did. But the testimony of scripture, especially shown in the life of JESUS, is that GOD loves everyone equally and gives us the free will to make our own choices. The godliest action we can take is to accept one another within our differences and acknowledge that all are loved equally by GOD. Beyond that, the church really doesn't have a say.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey