

The Controversy of Exclusivity

Written by Josh Winslett

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If I were to ask you what is the first controversy within the New Testament Church, what would be your answer? Most likely you would run to Acts 15 or Galatians 2. Whereas those are pivotal moments in biblical Church history, they are not the first recorded inner church controversy. Acts 6 actually records the first struggle that existed within the primitive church.

Acts 6:1: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations."

Here you have the first recorded controversy. The murmuring began because the Grecian widows (probably ethnic Hebrews that were national Greeks) were neglected during the daily distribution of both natural and spiritual services. This happened while the Hebrew widows were seemingly given special attention. So you could say that this was a controversy of exclusivity. The specific problem of "cliques" is so grievous that it was the first issue Paul addressed to the sin laden church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11-13).

We naturally break into groups. Some for good and some for bad. We are generally drawn toward those to whom we have more in common. Segregation and division are both a natural human tendency (Jude 19) and a judgment of God against man (Genesis 9:6). Yet this problem should not exist within the church body. The sacrifice of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit destroys all systems of division within the congregation (Ephesians 2:13-22, Galatians 3:27-29). An open show of this was made in Acts chapter 2, when all heard as in their own language through the Holy Ghost. Only with fellow believers can you find a reverse to Genesis 9:6. Only in the church of God can you ever find true unity.

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What is my point? There should never be exclusivity, or cliques in the household of faith. Unfortunately, we still tend toward making cliques. This is a problem that is seemingly rampant throughout American churches. Believers often fellowship with their own social, economic, or specific political group. Sometimes we stay within our own ethnicity. Sometimes we only socialize with our own natural family. In local small town churches you can even see hierarchies formed with long time locals and cliques existing from childhood school friends. Even among welcoming congregations, there can be a lack of inclusiveness. Is this a problem in your own congregation? Ask yourselves a few questions. How often do I make it a point to step out of my pew and talk to people outside of my general circle of friends? Do I always sit with the same people every Sunday during lunch? How much do I know about the people in my own congregation? Do I know the struggles of my fellow believers? Do I even know the names of the people with whom I worship?

In Acts 6 the apostles facilitated this need by ordaining men to the task at hand. While the apostles were given to study and prayer, other men were set over this daily ministrations. So I ask you, how are you individually facilitating this need in your local congregation? This may make you uncomfortable, but God doesn't call us to be comfortable. He calls us to be disciples willing to even wash the feet of our spiritual family (John 13:1-17). The world is full of loneliness, let it not be so in the church of God. As Christ acknowledged in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

"You may value the friendship of youth and of age,

And select for your comrades the noble and sage;

But the friends that most cheer me on life's rugged road

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Are the friends of my Master—the children of God.”

From 'House of the Lord' by William Hunter