



Handling Disagreements

by Mick Wells

Disagreements within the body of Christ are nothing new. A scant chapter in the book of Acts separates "All the believers were one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32) from "... the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food." (Acts 6:1). Another example -- Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp disagreement over the role of Mark in their ministry that they parted company (Acts 15:39).

My father related the story of a local church that split because its members could not agree on where to position a stovepipe in the ceiling! Is it any wonder that Jesus prayed for unity among believers (John 17:20-23)? Or that Paul stressed the preeminence of love in all facets of ministry (I Corinthians 13)? Jesus knows that behavior of His followers is on public display to a world of lost souls who need Him. He prayed, "...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that: you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23, emphasis added).

What kind of message do we send to the world -- what kind of Christ do we reflect, through senseless mishandling of disagreements within the body of Jesus Christ? Just as our unity testifies of Christ, discord, bitterness and open quarreling give Him a black eye in the eyes of the world. Perhaps we're so preoccupied with the enemy in the world at large that we can't readily recognize or deal effectively with his destructive activities within the body. I suspect the latter is far more lethal to the cause of Christ. It's certainly more painful. I've encountered incredibly intense, vicious public attacks on fellow Christians seeking to serve God in the pro-life movement. Unfortunately, the attacks came at the hands of others who identify with Christ. Surprising? Not really. The most severe persecution of Jesus Christ came at the hands of the religious community — from those leaders ostensibly serving God.

Disagreements within the Christian community today are probably inevitable. They'll cover a wide range of doctrinal, administrative and procedural issues. Yet, I am convinced that how we handle them is far more significant than "Who's right" or "Who's wrong". Can we disagree and still co-labor for Jesus Christ? Can we do so in Christian love? Can we do so without harboring hatred, anger or bitterness? Can we do so without being condescending, gossipy, arrogant or judgmental? Can we, through spiritual unity, let the world see Christ and His love in us? If we can't, let's think long and hard on whose cause we are serving.