Pulling Down Petty Partitions

t has been noted by more than one observer that 11 a.m. on Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America. The point such comments reveal is that though we, as followers of Christ, are of one family lineage, all too often, we divide ourselves along lines of differences when unifying our community around our common faith would be more pleasing to God and more beneficial to us.

The Egyptians, among whom Joseph lived, practiced a form of separation and division as well. 10 of Joseph's brothers were visiting him after having traveled considerable distance over no doubt difficult terrain. Yet Joseph, according to the Egyptian custom, separated himself from the family he'd not seen in a very long time simply because of an ethnic difference.

In many of our churches, we still practice the art of division today. We divide over race, culture, socioeconomic status, gender, age and even educational background. We divide over church position, social affiliation, geographic birth place, spiritual maturity and sexual orientation. But, division in the church is not all bad. Believe it or not, in some instances, division is actually the will of God for His people. For this reason, it behooves us to take a brief look at division, unity, and God's perspective on both as they affect our experience in our churches today.

It important to note that neither division nor unity is beneficial or harmful, in and of itself. What makes one destructive and the other helpful in any given situation, are the circumstances involved and God's intention for the thing affected. Therefore, there is both positive and negative division, just as there is both positive and negative unity, depending on the specific situation. Consider the chart below:

What God wants to happen	What I choose to do	What this act represents
"Separate yourself from"	I separate myself from	Positive Division — <i>i.e. Lot and</i> Abram
"Join yourself to"	I separate myself from	Negative Division – i.e. Joseph and Mary
"Separate yourself from"	I join myself to	Negative Unity – i.e. Solomon and his wives
"Join yourself to"	I join myself to	Positive Unity – i.e. Peter and Paul

³² They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. - Genesis 43:32

Positive Division

In Genesis 13, Abram and Lot were experiencing conflict. Their herds had increased so in size, that they were having trouble cohabitating on the same parcel of land. Even their herdsmen were at odds due to the conditions overcrowding had brought about. The Lord gave Abram wisdom as he encouraged Lot to choose a place to settle at some distance from where Abram and his encampment would be. In so doing, Abram demonstrated the heart of God in this matter and this case of division was therefore of the positive sort. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus revealed the Father's heart when He taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Sometimes, we "make peace" by creating distance, like when we agree to disagree, and in so doing, we capture God's heart by cutting a few of our ties.

Negative Division

After Mary, the mother of Jesus was discovered pregnant by Joseph, her betrothed, his initial reaction was to quietly put her away. But it was not the will of God for Mary to be a single mom, fending for herself as the Messiah grow and developed in her womb. It was also not God's will for her to be shunned and outcast as an adulterer when in fact she was technically a pregnant virgin. Had Joseph followed his initial plan, he would have engaged in a type of division that would have been negative in nature. God's wanted them together! God wanted him to cover and provide for Mary, Jesus and the other children they would later have together. That's why God sent an angel to speak clearly to Joseph regarding this matter, underscoring God's perspective in the matter, that what He has put together, no man should attempt to separate.

Negative Unity

In I Kings 11, we read this, "King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love." This is a clear case of negative unity. As is revealed in 2 Corinthians 6, God's heart regarding our covenant connections with those who reject God is that we "come out from among them and be separate". Therefore, when we join ourselves to what God wants us separated from, we are involved in the act of negative unity.

Positive Unity

The Apostle Paul, prior to his Damascus road conversion was a greatly feared and very well known persecutor of those who named the name of Jesus. He stood by, holding the coats of stoners as they pummeled Stephen to the point of death! Yet, once he was changed and began to travel throughout the region spreading the gospel to the gentiles, Peter and the other apostles acknowledged his conversion and accepted his calling as a true voice of the faith.

Can we all get along?

Proverbs 6: 19 informs us that one of the seven things God finds abominable is "...one who sows discord among brethren" Are you a positive force in your church – separating from what God wants divided and joining to what God wants unified? Or are you dividing what should be one and joining to what God wants you to separate from? The call today is for us to pull down petty partitions and submit to God's agenda for God's people. After all, a house divided against itself cannot stand!