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Cliquishness

Kyle Pope

A common criticism leveled against congregations by visitors, new members, or even those who have become dissatisfied with their identification with a particular local church is the charge that it practices “cliquishness.” A clique is “a small, exclusive group of friends or associates” (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language). The word clique is a French word that can refer to a “set,” a “gang,” or “party,” but it is derived from the Old French verb cliquer meaning “to click, make a noise” (The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology). This word is what grammarians call an onomatopoeia—i.e. a word that sounds like what it means. The clicking and noise of a group of people chattering is imitated in the name of the group—it is a clique. This image is still seen in its modern French usage in the fact that a drum or bugle band can be called a clique.

The reason the charge of “cliquishness” is leveled at churches has less to do with the sound the group makes, than it does its treatment of others. Those outside of a clique can feel as if they are excluded or unwelcomed into a group that isolates itself. When there are a number of cliques, competition may develop between people who don’t get along with each other to secure the loyalty of others to their clique before another group “gets them.” This kind of social tug-of-war happens regularly among school children, but sadly far too many congregations of God’s people have fallen victim to the same pettiness demonstrated on an elementary school playground.

Scripture doesn’t use any equivalent of the word clique, but it does address the problem of cliquishness. In rebuking the Corinthians for their divisiveness as one group among them would say “I am of Paul,” while another said, “I am of Apollos” (1 Cor. 1:12), Paul asked “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:13). The relationship of those in Christ is to be a unique bond. In the Lord’s church age, race, social class, nationality, or any of the other things that normally divide people should disappear. In Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The Holy Spirit commands Christians not to show “partiality” (NKJV), “personal favoritism” (NASB), or “respect of persons” (James 2:1, KJV), even offering an example of how this could be done toward one who visits an assembly (James 2:2-3). To act with favoritism is to act as “judges with evil thoughts” (James 2:4) and to “commit sin” (James 2:9). Instead, in the church, “there should be no schism in the body,” instead “the members should have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25).

How can brethren avoid the perception of cliquishness?

1. Reach Out to Others. All of us are naturally drawn to those with whom it is easy for us to talk or to those who share our interests and personalities. In the church, however, our bond must transcend these mere material concerns. Are there those who don’t seem to fit in? Have you spoken to a visitor or new member? What about that older person? What about the young? Break those generational barriers and go talk to them! Are there those who don’t have someone talking to them? Don’t just take the easy course and talk to the same people you always talk to—reach out and let someone you haven’t spoken to as often know you are interested in them.

2. Don’t be Exclusive. I know of a congregation who once had some members request that the elders offer a class in a particular way. The elders did so, but did it a little different than had been requested. Dissatisfied with this, the members chose to host their own exclusive study (by invitation only) but did not invite any of the elders or their family. This not only showed a lack of respect for the eldership, but it contributed to the perception that the congregation was cliquish. Certainly, few members have homes large enough to host all members of a congregation, but parties, social

functions, or even Bible studies that involve some members while excluding others are naturally prone to make some people feel isolated and unwelcomed.

3. Be Friendly. Solomon admonished, “A man who has friends must himself be friendly” (Prov. 18:24, NKJV).* As a preacher, I have tried over the years to avoid any perception that I am cliquish. I usually try to visit with everyone a little bit, and avoid talking for long periods of time with any one person or group. If I am not careful, however, this has in the past left the unintended impression that I am distant or unapproachable. That’s not what I want to communicate either! When people feel isolated it may be because others have been cliquish, or it may be because they have been unwilling to be friendly to others. If we act unwilling to talk to others, if we leave the building as soon as the closing prayer is over, if we show no interest in the lives of others we might well isolate ourselves. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we must be “kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love” (Rom. 12:10). If there are ways we have failed to do this in the past, let’s commit ourselves demonstrate this loving spirit from this day forward.

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Neither Protestant nor Catholic

- by Robert Hines

It’s pretty easy to see that this congregation or church is not Catholic. There is no Roman priest in charge of the parish or nuns to serve, no Vatican connection or leader status for the Pope, and no incense or infant baptisms in our worship and work. Since it is obvious we are not Catholics most will say we must be Protestants.

The assumption made is that Christians are either Catholic or Protestant. If you are not one you must be the other. But we are not Protestants either. We are not of the Protestant Reformation that protested the excesses of the Catholic Church and sought to reform it. Beyond Catholic tradition and Protestant theology we are, simply, Christians.

We understand that this sounds strange in a religious world complicated with so many denominations. If you ask a man today what he is religiously he doesn’t say “I am a Christian.” He says he is a Baptist or a Methodist or a Presbyterian or a Pentecostal. In the New Testament followers of Jesus were content to be, simply, Christians (Acts 11:26).

Christ’s people were described by God in several ways in the Scripture, long before Catholics and Protestants existed. To God they were His children (1 John 1:1-3). To Christ they were His disciples (John 8: 31-32). To each other they were brothers (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). And to the world they were, simply, Christians (1 Peter 4:16).

We are not claiming to be the first denomination, the best denomination, the most conservative denomination, the non-denominational denomination, or a denomination at all! We simply follow the New Testament to be Christians, in the unity Christ called for (John 17:21) as an invitation to the world, there for all to see. The Electronic Beacon 4/2/24