**Belonging was more Important!**

I want to tell you a representative story of when a plan that I had presented to the church and had been tested for six months was different. The plan was one that was devised to increase Sunday School attendance. For many years the church had started Sunday School at 9:30 am, and Morning Worship at 10:45 am. The plan was to reverse the order, and to start worship at 9:30 am, and to have Sunday School at 11:00 am. The idea was that those at worship could invite their friends to stay and go to Sunday School with them after the morning service. The church had a large number of adults who had been invited to come to Sunday School several times, but they always complained that it was too early to come at 9:30 am.

It worked somewhat well, and the morning worship attendance remained just about the same, and the Sunday School attendance increased about 5%. Many who still did not go to Sunday School liked the earlier dismissal time on Sunday, but there were many who did not like the plan. One of the greatest drawbacks was the plan was the diminishing fellowship time. Very few came early for worship, and the time between Sunday School and Worship was hectic with teachers rushing to get their lessons and classes ready, and others not enjoying the constant invitations to stay and choosing to continually decline the offers. The old schedule had the benefit of fellowship after the worship service. Often there would be 75 persons or more who would stay talking and sharing after the service. In the new schedule, the campus was abandoned by almost everyone 5-10 minutes after Sunday School was over since classes dismissed at different times, and people left from different locations on the campus. As we promised the church, after several months of trying this new schedule, we called a church meeting during the worship service to vote on which plan we would use in the days ahead.

After the Sunday School meetings, the church board met to listen to the report and accept or confirm the ballot of the people. “My plan” won the vote—51% to 49% as I recall. While we paused for a moment after the results were read, on of the most loving men I have ever pastored, stood, and said, **“Pastor, I know your side won the vote, but I hate to say good-bye to people I have worshipped with for the past 40 years.”**

It was like a shot of cold water to me. Notice that he did not threaten that he was going to leave, or state that he thought the vote was not accurate or fair, but just spoke truth in the Spirit—and I think we all recognized it. I said, “Well, let’s listen to the Holy Spirit and take another vote.” After a few minutes of silent prayer, I asked, “How many want to go ahead with the plan that won, and how many, if any, want to reverse course?” It was unanimous not to go forward with the plan. Then, to make it official and clear to the church, I said, “Let us take another vote to confirm our decision. I want you to know as your pastor that I am not opposed to what we are doing right now. If you want the plan of the future to be that we return to the old system in the days ahead, vote “yes.” If not, vote “no.” Again, the vote was a unanimous “yes.”

I do not know how you feel about this story. I had one church leader who told me that this was a sign of my weak leadership as pastor. But we remained friends and it was not an issue as far as I could tell. There was an immediate sense of unity in the church when the decision was announced. I think the Church Board and I as the pastor made a statement of sensing that the leadership of the Holy Spirit was more important than whose side won a vote.

I am afraid I know of church fellowships that have been fractured over issues much less important than this one. The only hope we have for our lives, for our families, and for our churches is the leadership of the Spirit. *Romans 8:14 “…those being led by the Spirit of God are the Sons of God.”*